

THE UPPER ROOM,
AND OTHER SERMONS DELIVERED
ON IMPORTANT PUBLIC OCCASIONS

BEING A FEW TRUTHS FOR THE TIMES.

BY THE RIGHT REV.

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AUTHOR OF

“EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS,” “KNOTS UNTIED,” ETC., ETC.

“If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself
to the battle?”—1 Cor. xiv. 8.

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Preface

The volume now in the reader's hands requires little introductory explanation. It contains a very miscellaneous selection of papers which I have sent forth from time to time, in one shape or another, during a forty-five years' ministry. Some of these papers are not known beyond a small circle of kind friends. Not a few of them are the substance of pulpit addresses delivered on important public occasions, and composed with more than ordinary pains. All of them, I venture humbly to think, will be found to contain some useful truths for the times, and words in season.

I have reached an age when I cannot reasonably expect to write much more. There are many thoughts in this volume which I do not wish to leave behind me in the precarious form of separate single sermons, addresses, lectures, and tracts. I have therefore resolved to gather them together in the volume I now send forth, which I heartily pray God to bless, and to make it a permanent blessing to many souls.

J. C. LIVERPOOL

Palace, Liverpool 1st December 1887.

[The substance of these pages was originally preached as a sermon before the University of Oxford, in my turn as Select Preacher at St. Mary's, in the year 1880. It is now published with some omissions and alterations.]

“TO WHOM?”

“Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.”—JOHN VI. 68.

THE chapter containing the text which heads this page, is singularly rich in matter.

It begins, we must remember, with that well-known miracle, the feeding of five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes,—a miracle which some early writers call the greatest which Christ ever worked,—the only miracle which all the four Evangelists alike record,—a miracle which exhibited creative power.

It goes on to show us another miracle of hardly less striking character, the walking of Christ on the waters of the sea of Galilee,—a miracle which exhibited our Lord's power, when He thought fit, to suspend the so-called laws of nature. It was as easy for Him to walk on the water as it had been to create land and sea at the beginning.

The chapter then carries us on to that wonderful discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum, which St. John alone, of all the four Gospel writers, was inspired to give to the world. Christ, the true bread of life,—the privileges of all who come to Him and believe,—the deep mystery of eating Christ's flesh and drinking Christ's blood, and the life which that flesh and blood convey,—what a wealth of precious truth lies here! How great the debt which the Church owes to the fourth Gospel!

And, finally, as the chapter draws to a close, we have the noble outburst of the warm-hearted Apostle St. Peter,—“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.” In this remarkable verse there are three points to which I now propose to invite the attention of all into whose hands his paper may fall.

I. In the first place, *I ask you to observe the occasion of these words being spoken.* What made this fiery, impulsive disciple cry out, “To whom shall we go?” The verses which precede our text supply an answer. “From that time many went back, and walked no more with Him. Then said Jesus to the twelve, Will ye also go away?”

There you have recorded a melancholy and most instructive fact. Even from Christ Himself, who “spake as never man spake,” and did works of matchless power, and lived as no one ever lived, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, even from Christ many, after following Him for a time, went

away. Yes! *many*, not a few,—many in the noontide blaze of miracles and sermons, such as earth had never seen or heard before,—many turned away from Christ, left Him, deserted Him, gave up His blessed service, and went back,—some to Judaism, some to the world, and some, we may fear, to their sins. “If they did these things in a green tree, what may we expect in a dry?” If men could forsake Christ, we have no right to be surprised if His erring, weak ministers are forsaken also in these last days.

But why did these men go back? Some of them, probably, went back because they had not counted the cost, and “when tribulation or persecution arose because of the word” they were offended. Some of them went back because they had totally misunderstood the nature of our Lord’s kingdom, and had dreamed only of temporal advantages and rewards. Most of them, however, it is very clear, went back because they could not receive the deep doctrine which had just been proclaimed,—I mean the doctrine that “eating Christ’s flesh and drinking Christ’s blood” are absolutely necessary to salvation. It is the old story. As it was in the beginning, so it will be to the end. There is nothing which the dark, natural heart of man dislikes so much as the so-called “blood theology.” Cain turned away in his proud ignorance from the idea of vicarious sacrifice, and the Jews who fell away from our Lord, “went back” when they heard that they must “eat the flesh and drink the blood “of the Son of man.

But there is no denying the fact that these Jews who “went back” have never been without followers and imitators. Their succession, at any rate, has never ceased. Millions in every age have been admitted into the Church by baptism, and begun life as professing Christians, and then, on coming to man’s estate, have turned their back altogether on Christ and Christianity. Instead of “continuing Christ’s faithful soldiers and servants,” they have become servants of sin, the world, and unbelief. The defection is continually going on: it is an old disease, and must not surprise us. The heart is always deceitful and desperately wicked; the devil is always busy, and seeking whom he may devour; the world is always ensnaring; the way of life is narrow, the enemies many, the friends few, the difficulties great, the cross heavy, the doctrine of the gospel offensive to the natural man. What thoughtful person need wonder that multitudes in every age go back from Christ? They are brought within the outward fold of the Church in childhood, and then, on coming to manhood, they throw off all religion, and perish miserably in the wilderness.

Yet I am bold to say that the disposition to go back from Christ was never so strong as it is in these days. Never were the objections to vital Christianity so many, so plausible, and so specious. For it is an age of free thought and liberty of action,—an age of scientific inquiry, and determination to question and cross-examine ancient opinions,—an age of greedy pursuit of pleasure and impatience of restraint,—an age of idolatry of intellect, and extravagant admiration of so-called cleverness,—an age of Athenian craving for novelty and constant love of

change,—an age when we see on all sides a bold but ever shifting scepticism, which at one time tells us that man is little better than an ape, and at another that he is little less than a god,—an age when there is a morbid readiness to accept the shallowest arguments in favour of unbelief, and a simultaneous lazy unwillingness to investigate the great fundamental evidences of Divine revelation. And, worst of all, it is an age of spurious liberality, when, under the high-sounding phrases of “No party spirit! no bigotry!” and the like, men live and die without having any distinct opinions at all. In an age like this, can any thinking Christian wonder that departure from Christ is common? Let him cease to wonder, and not waste his time in complaints. Let him rather gird up his loins like a man, and do what he can to stay the plague. Let him set his feet down firmly in “the old paths,” and remember that the defection he sees is only an old complaint in an aggravated form. Let him stand between the dead and living, and try to stop the mischief. Let him “cry aloud, and spare not.” Let him say, “Stand to your colours; the battle of Christianity is not lost: will ye also go away?”

I dare believe that many young persons into whose hands this paper may fall are often sorely tempted to go back from Christ. You launch forth into the world, perhaps, from quiet homes, where the primary truths of Christianity were never called in question for a moment, to hear all sorts of strange theories broached, and strange opinions advanced, which contradict the old principles which you have been taught to believe. You find to your astonishment that free thought and free handling of sacred subjects have reached such a pitch that the very foundations of faith seem shaken. You discover to your amazement that cleverness and religion do not always go together, and that it is possible for the highest intellect to be ready to thrust God out of His own world. Who can wonder if this state of things is a rude shock to the tender faith of many young persons, and that, reeling under it, they are tempted to go back from Christ, and throw away Christianity altogether?

Now, if any one who reads this paper is tempted in this fashion, I entreat him for Christ’s sake to be firm, to play the man, and resist the temptation. Try to realize that there is nothing new in the state of things which now perplexes you. It is nothing but the old disease which has always plagued and tried the Church in every age, even from the day when Satan said to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die.” It is only the sifting process which God permits, in order to separate the wheat from the chaff, through which we must all pass. The world after all, with its pitfalls and snares for the soul, with its competitions and struggles, its failures and successes, its disappointments and its perplexities, its perpetual crop of crude theories and extreme views, its mental conflicts and anxieties, its extravagant free thought, and its equally extravagant superstition,—the world is a fiery furnace and ordeal, through which all believers must make up their minds to pass. The temptation to cast off your first faith and go back from Christ is sure to meet you sooner or later, as it has met millions before, in one form or

another. To realize that in resisting it you are only resisting an old and often beaten enemy of the soul, is one half the battle.

And, as I ask you not to be surprised at the temptation to leave Christ, so also I entreat you not to be shaken by it. What though scores of men you know give way under the assault, cast off their Christian armour, neglect their Bibles, misuse their Sundays, and live practically without God in the world? What though clever men, promising men, the sons of parents who never dreamed of such things, forsake the banner under which they were enrolled, and become mere *nothingarians*, or believers in nothing? Let none of these things move you. Set your face as a flint towards Jerusalem. Set your foot down firmly in the old paths, the good and tried way to the celestial city.

What fruit have the deserters to show compared to the followers of Peter, James, and John? What increase of inward peace and outward usefulness? What rest of conscience? What comfort in trial? No! while many go away from Christ, do you cleave to Him with purpose of heart. Cleave to your old habits of daily prayer and daily Bible reading, and regular attendance on means of grace. Better a thousand times to be on Christ's side with a few, and be laughed at and despised for a season, than to have the praise of the many for a few short years, and then awake too late to find that without Christ you are without peace, or hope, or heaven.

II. In the second place, *let us consider the question which Peter asked in reply to his Master's appeal*, "Will ye also go away?" "Lord," cries the warm-hearted and impulsive Apostle, "Lord, to whom shall we go?" That question, no doubt, like hundreds in the Bible, was equivalent to a strong affirmation. "There is none beside Thee to whom we can go." It is like the saying of David, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee." (Ps. lxxiii. 25.)

When we think of the age when Peter lived, we cannot help feeling that he had abundant cause to ask that question. In his days, at the end of 4000 years, "the world by wisdom knew not God." (1 Cor. i. 21) Egypt, Assyria, Greece, and Rome, the very nations which attained the highest excellence in secular things, in the things of religion were sunk in gross darkness. The fellow-countrymen of matchless historians, tragedians, poets, orators, and architects, worshipped idols, and bowed down to the work of their own hands. The ablest philosophers of Greece and Rome groped after truth like blind men, and wearied themselves in vain to find the door. The whole earth was defiled with spiritual ignorance and immorality, and the wisest men could only confess their need of light, like the Greek philosopher Plato, and groan and sigh for a deliverer. Peter might well cry, "Lord, if we leave Thee, to whom shall we go?"

Where, indeed, could the Apostle have turned for peace of heart, for satisfaction of conscience, for hope in a world to come, if he had gone away from

the synagogue of Capernaum with the deserters, and left Christ 1854 years ago! Would he have found what he wanted among the formal Pharisees, or the sceptical Sadducees, or the worldly Herodians, or the ascetic Essenes, or the philosophical schools of Athens, Alexandria, or Rome? Would Gamaliel, or Caiaphas, or Stoics, or Epicureans, or Platonists, have quenched his spiritual thirst, or fed his soul? It is waste of time to ask such questions. All these pretended fountains of knowledge had long been proved to be man-made cisterns, broken cisterns, which could hold no water. They satisfied no anxious mind. He that drank of these waters soon thirsted again.

But the question which Peter asked is one which true Christians may always ask boldly, when they are tempted to go away from Christ. At this very day, when men tell us that Christianity is an effete and worn-out thing, we may safely challenge them to show us anything better. They may ply us, if they will, with objections to revealed religion, and say many things to which we can offer no reply. But, after all, we may confidently defy them to show us “a more excellent way,” and more solid ground than that which is occupied by the man who simply believes all the Bible, and follows Christ.

Grant for a moment, that in an hour of weakness we listen to the temptation to go away from Christ. Grant that we close our Bibles, reject all dogmas, and with a sublime contempt for the fossilized theology of our forefathers, content ourselves with a polished *nothingarianism*, or a few scraps of cold formality. In what respect shall we find that we have increased our happiness or usefulness? What solid thing shall we get to replace what we have left? Once turn your back on Christ, and where will you find peace for your conscience, strength for duty, power against temptation, comfort in trouble, support in the hour of death, hope in looking forward to the grave? You may well ask. Nothingarianism can give no answer. These things are only found by those who live the life of faith in a crucified and risen Christ.

To whom, indeed, shall we go for help, strength, and comfort, if we turn our backs on Christ? We live in a world of troubles, whether we like it or not. You can no more stave off and prevent them than king Canute could prevent the tide rising and rudely swelling round the royal chair. Our bodies are liable to a thousand ailments, and our hearts to a thousand sorrows. No creature on earth is so vulnerable, and so capable of intense physical as well as mental suffering, as man. Sickness, and death, and funerals, and partings, and separations, and losses, and failures, and disappointments, and private family trials, which no mortal eye sees, will break in upon us from time to time; and human nature imperatively demands help, help, help to meet them! Alas, where will thirsty, wailing human nature find such help if we leave Christ?

The plain truth is, that nothing but an almighty personal Friend will ever meet the legitimate wants of man’s soul. Metaphysical notions, philosophical theories, abstract ideas, vague speculations about “the unseen, the infinite, the

inner light,” and so forth, may satisfy a select few for a time. But the vast majority of mankind, if they have any religion at all, will never be content with a religion which does not supply them with *a Person* to whom they may look and trust. It is just this craving after a person which gives the Mariolatry of Rome its curious power. And this principle once admitted, where will you find one so perfectly fitted to satisfy man as the Christ of the Bible? Look round the world, and point out, if you can, any object of faith fit to be compared with this blessed Son of God, set forth before our eyes in the Gospels. In face of a dying world we want positives and not negatives. “To whom shall we go, if we go away from Christ?”

Men may tell us, if they please, that our old fountain of living waters is drying up, and that the nineteenth century needs a new theology. But I fail to see evidence to confirm this assertion. I see multitudes of men and women all over the world, after 1800 years, continuing to drink at this fountain; and none who honestly stoop to drink, complain that their thirst is not relieved. And all this time, those who profess to despise the good old fountain can show us nothing whatever to take its place. The mental freedom and higher light they promise are as deceptive as the mirage of the African desert, and as unreal as a dream. A substitute for the old fountain exists nowhere but in man’s imagination. He that leaves it will find that he must return, or perish of thirst. Perhaps some of my younger readers may secretly think that the difficulties of revealed religion are inexplicable, and are trying to persuade themselves that they know not “where to go” in these dark and cloudy days. I entreat them to consider that the difficulties of unbelief are far greater than the difficulties of faith. When men have said all they can to depreciate the old paths of the Bible, and draw you away from Christ,—when they have piled up the ancient, stale objections of various readings, doubtful authorship, inconsistent statements, and supposed incredible miracles,—they can still offer no substitute for the Scripture, or answer the question, “To whom shall we go?” There still remains the great, broad fact that the leading evidences of revelation have never been overthrown, that we are weak creatures in a sorrowful world, and need a helping hand, which Christ alone holds out, and which millions for eighteen centuries have found, and are finding, sufficient. The great argument of *probability* is entirely on our side. Surely it is wiser to cling to Christ and Christianity, with all its alleged difficulties, than to launch on an ocean of uncertainties, and travel towards the grave hopeless, comfortless, and professing to know nothing at all about the unseen world.

And, after all, departure from Christ on account of the supposed hardness of certain doctrines will secure no immunity from *mental conflicts*. The problems of Christianity may seem great and deep; but the problems of unbelief are greater and deeper still. And not the least problem is the impossibility of answering the question, “Shall I find elsewhere any real peace or rest of soul, if I

leave Christ? To whom shall I go? Where in all the world shall I find a more excellent way than that of faith in Jesus? Where is the personal friend who will supply His place?" Give me a thousand times rather the old Evangelical Christianity, with all its difficult facts and doctrines, the incarnation, the atonement, the resurrection, the ascension, than the cold, barren creed of the Socinian or the Deist, or the cheerless negations of modern unbelief. Give me the religion of texts and hymns and simple faith, which satisfies thousands, rather than the dreary void of speculative philosophy, which thoroughly satisfies none.

III. Let us consider, lastly, *the noble declaration which Simon Peter makes in our text*. "Thou hast the words of eternal life."

I do not for a moment suppose that the Apostle fully grasped the meaning of the words which he here used. It would be inconsistent with all that we read of his knowledge, before our Lord's resurrection, to suppose that he did. It may well be doubted whether he meant more than this: "Thou art the true Messiah; Thou art the promised Prophet like unto Moses, of whom it is written, I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him." (Deut. xviii. 18.) I believe that well-known text was in Peter's mind, though he did not yet realize its wealth of meaning.

But of one thing we may be very sure. That expression "eternal life" must have been very familiar to him and all the twelve, while Jesus went in and out among them. I suspect that there were few days when they did not hear it fall from His lips, and they caught it up if they did not fully understand it. In the brief record of our Lord's teaching, contained in the four Gospels, you have it twenty-five times. In St. John's Gospel alone it occurs seventeen times. In this very sixth chapter we read it five times over. No doubt it was ringing in Peter's ears when he spoke.

But though Peter "knew not what he said" that day, there came a day when his understanding was opened, after his Lord's resurrection, and he saw heights and depths in the "words of eternal life" which before the crucifixion he only saw "through a glass darkly." And we, in the full light of the Acts and Epistles, need feel no doubt whatever as to the things which this mighty phrase, which our Lord so often used, included.

Christ's words of eternal life were words about the nature of that life which He came into the world to proclaim,—a life begun in the soul by faith while we live, and perfected in glory when we die.—They were words about the way in which this eternal life is provided for sinful man, even the way of His atoning death, as our Substitute, on the cross.—They were words about the terms on which this eternal life is made our own, if we feel our need of it, even the terms of simple faith. As Latimer said, it is but "believe and have."—They were words about the training and discipline on the way to eternal life, which are so much needed by man and so richly provided, even the renewing and sanctifying grace

of the Holy Ghost.—They were words about the comforts and encouragements by the way, laid up for all who believe to life everlasting, even Christ's daily help, sympathy, and watchful care. All this and much more, of which I cannot now speak particularly, is contained in that little phrase, "Words of eternal life." No wonder that our Lord says in a certain place, "I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly;" "I have given them the words that Thou gavest Me." (John x. 10, xvii. 8.)

Let us consider for a moment what vast numbers of men and women, in these last eighteen centuries, have found these "words of eternal life" not merely "words," but solid *realities*. They have been persuaded of them, and embraced them, and found them meat and drink to their souls. We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, who in the faith of these words have lived happy and useful lives, and died glorious deaths. Where is he that will dare to deny this? Where shall we find such lives and deaths without Christ?

It was faith in Christ's "words of eternal life" which made Peter and John stand up boldly before the Jewish council, and confess their Master without fear of consequences, saying, "There is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we can be saved" (Acts iv. 12).

It was faith in Christ's "words of eternal life" which made Paul come out from Judaism, spend his life in preaching the gospel, and say on the brink of the grave, "I know whom I have believed, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." (2 Tim. i. 12.)

It was faith in Christ's "words of eternal life" which made Bishop Hooper go boldly to the stake at Gloucester, after saying, "Life is sweet, and death is bitter; but eternal life is more sweet, and eternal death more bitter."

It was faith in Christ's "words of eternal life" which made Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer endure a fiery death in Broad Street, Oxford, rather than deny the principles of the Reformation.

It was faith in Christ's "words of eternal life" which made Henry Martyn turn his back on ease and distinction at Cambridge, go forth to a tropical climate, and die a solitary death as a missionary.

It was faith in Christ's "words of eternal life" which made that honourable woman, Catherine Tait, as recorded in a most touching biography, resign five children in five weeks to the grave, in the full assurance that Christ would keep His word, take care of them both in body and soul, and bring them with Him to meet her at the last day.

What a fearful contrast to such facts as these appears in the lives and deaths of those who turn their backs on Christ, and seek other masters! What fruits can the advocates of non-Christian theories, and ideas, and principles, point to with all their cleverness? What holy, loving, peaceful quietness of spirit have they exhibited? What victories have they won over darkness, immorality, superstition, and sin? What successful missions have they carried on? What seas have

they crossed? What countries have they civilized or moralized? What neglected home populations have they improved? What self-denying labours have they gone through? What deliverance have they wrought in the earth? You may well ask; you will get no answer. No wonder our Lord said of false prophets, "By their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. vii. 15, 16.) It is only those who can say with Peter, "Thou hast the words of eternal life," who make a mark on mankind while they live, and say, "O death, where is thy sting?" when they die.

(a) In conclusion, I entreat every one who reads this paper to ask himself whether he is going away from Christ, like the Jews, or clinging boldly to Christ, like Peter. You live in dangerous days. There was a time when irreligion was scarcely respectable; but that time has long ceased to be. But even now Christ continues to knock at the door of your hearts, and asks you to ponder your ways and take heed what you do. "Will ye go away?" Dare to set up an assize in your heart of hearts, and look within. Resist the lazy Epicurean feeling which bids you never scrutinize your inward character. Depend on it, an hour will come when you will feel the need of a great Friend in heaven. Without Him you may live tolerably: without Him you will never comfortably die.

You may tell me, perhaps, that you do not really mean to forsake Christ, although you are not at present all that you ought to be. But there are some things in religion about which you cannot make up your mind, and are waiting for more light. Or you are working hard for some special object, and have not time just now, and hope, like Felix, for "a convenient season." But, oh ! waiting, lingering soul, what is neglect of Christ's word, and ordinances, and day, but "going away from Christ"? Awake to see that you are on an inclined plane, and are gradually going downward. You are drifting, drifting daily—further, further away from God. Awake, and resolve, by God's help, to drift no more.

(b) But, next to having no religion at all, I entreat every reader of this paper to beware of a religion in which Christ has not His rightful place. Let us never try to satisfy ourselves with a little cheap, formal Christianity, taken up carelessly on Sunday morning, and laid aside at night, but not influencing us during the week. Such Christianity will neither give us peace in life, nor hope in death, nor power to resist temptation, nor comfort in trouble. Christ only has "the words of eternal life," and His words must be received, believed, embraced, and made the meat and drink of our souls. A Christianity without living, felt communion with Him, without grasp of the benefits of His blood and intercession, a Christianity without Christ's sacrifice and Christ's Priesthood, is a powerless, wearisome form.

(c) Let us, finally, "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," if we have reason to hope we are Christ's true servants. Let men laugh at us, and try to turn us away as much as they please. Let us calmly and humbly say to ourselves at such times: "'After all, to whom can I go if I leave Christ?' I feel within that He has 'words of eternal life.' I see that thousands find them meat

and drink to their souls. Where He goes, I will go; and where He lodges, I will lodge. In a dying world, I can see nothing better. I will cling to Christ and His words. They never failed any one who trusted them, and I believe they will not fail me.”