

OCTOBER

Day 1

A BLIND MAN CURED

J. C. Ryle

"And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to him and entreated him to touch him. And taking the blind man by the hand, he brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying his hands upon him, he asked him, Do you see anything? And he looked up and said, I see men as trees, walking. Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored and began to see everything clearly." (Mark 8:22-25)

We do not know the reason of the peculiar means employed by our Lord Jesus Christ in working the miracle recorded in these verses. We see a blind man miraculously healed. We know that a word from our Lord's mouth or a touch of his hand would have been sufficient to effect a cure. But we see Jesus taking this blind man by the hand, leading him out of the town, spitting on his eyes, putting his hands on him, and then, and not till then, restoring his sight. And the meaning of all these actions, the passage before us leaves entirely unexplained.

But it is well to remember, in reading passages of this kind, that the Lord is not tied to the use of any one means. In the conversion of men's souls, there are diversities of operation, but it is the same Spirit which converts. So also in the healing of men's bodies there were varieties of agency employed by our Lord, but it was the same divine power that effected the cure. In all his works, God is a sovereign. He gives not account of any of his matters.

One thing in the passage demands our special observation. That thing is the gradual nature of the cure which our Lord performed on this blind man. He did not deliver him from his blindness at once, but by degrees. He might have done it in a moment, but he chose to do it step by step. First the blind man said that he only saw "men as trees walking." Afterward his eyesight was restored completely, and he "saw every man clearly." In this respect the miracle stands entirely alone.

We need hardly doubt that this gradual cure was meant to be an emblem of spiritual things. We may be sure that there was a deep meaning in every word and work of our Lord's earthly ministry, and here, as in other places, we shall find a useful lesson.

Let us see then in this gradual restoration to sight a vivid illustration of the manner in which the Spirit frequently works in the conversion of souls. We are all naturally blind and ignorant in the matters which concern our souls. Conversion is an illumination, a change from darkness to light, from blindness to seeing the kingdom of God. Yet few converted people see things distinctly at first. The nature and proportion of doctrines, practices, and ordinances of the Gospel are dimly seen by them and imperfectly understood. They are like the man before us, who at first saw men as trees walking. Their vision is dazzled and unaccustomed to the new world into which they have been introduced. It is not till the work of the Spirit has become deeper and their experience been somewhat matured that they see all things clearly and give to each part of religion its proper place. This is the history of thousands of God's children. They begin with seeing men as trees walking; they end with seeing all clearly. Happy is he who has learned this lesson well and is humble and distrustful of his own judgment.

Finally, let us see in the gradual cure of this blind man a striking picture of the present position of Christ's believing people in the world compared with that which is to come. We see in part and know in part in the present dispensation. We are like those that travel by night. We know not the meaning of much that is passing around us. In the providential dealings of God with his children, and in the conduct of many of God's saints, we see much that we cannot understand and cannot alter. In short, we are like him that saw "men as trees walking."

But let us look forward and take comfort. The time comes when we shall see all "clearly." The night is far spent; the day is at hand. Let us be content to wait, watch, work, and pray. When the day of the Lord comes, our spiritual eyesight will be perfected. We shall see as we have been seen, and know as we have been known.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 2

HEAVEN
J. C. Ryle

*"But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?
I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."*

2 Samuel 12:23

I wish to confine myself to one single point of deep and momentous interest to us, and that is, "Shall we know one another in heaven?" Now, what does the Scripture say on this subject? I grant freely that there are not many texts in the Bible which touch the subject at all. I admit fully that pious and learned divines are not of one mind with me about the matter in hand. But in theology, I dare not call any man master and father. My only aim and desire is to find out what the Bible says, and to take my stand upon its teaching.

Let us hear what David said when his child was dead. "But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me." What can these words mean but that David hoped to see his child and meet him again in another world? This was evidently the hope that cheered him and made him dry his tears. The separation would not be forever.

Let us hear what St. Paul said to the Thessalonians. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" These words must surely mean that the apostle expected to recognize his beloved Thessalonian converts in the day of Christ's second advent. He rejoiced in the thought that he would see them face to face at the last day, would stand side by side with them before the throne, and would be able to say, "Here am I, and the seals which thou did give to my ministry."

Paul says again, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus." There would be no point in these words of consolation if they did not imply the mutual recognition of saints. The hope with which he cheers wearied Christians is the hope of meeting their beloved friends again. He does not merely say, "Sorrow not, for they are at rest—they are happy—they are free from pain and trouble—they are better off than they would be here below." No! he goes a step further. He says, "God shall bring them with Christ, when he brings them back to the world. You are not parted forever. You will meet again."

I commend these three passages to the reader's attentive consideration. To my eye, they all seem to point to only one conclusion. They all imply the same great truth, that saints in heaven shall know one another. They shall have the same body and the same character that they had on earth, but a body perfected and transformed like Christ's in his transfiguration and a character perfected and purified from all sin. In the moment that we meet our several friends in heaven, we shall at once know them, and they will at once know us.

There is something to my mind unspeakably glorious in this prospect. Heaven will be no strange place to us when we get there. We shall feel at home. We shall see all of whom we read in Scripture and know them all, and mark the peculiar graces of each. We shall see Noah and remember his witness for God in ungodly times. We shall see Abraham and remember his faith,

Isaac and remember his meekness, Moses and remember his patience, David and remember all his troubles. We shall sit down with Peter, James, John, and Paul, and remember all their toil when they laid the foundations of the Church. If it is pleasant to know one or two saints and meet them occasionally now, what will it be to know them all and to dwell with them forever!

Shall We Know One Another?

Day 3

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

(Part 1)

J. C. Ryle

“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten pounds, and said to them, Occupy till I come.” (Luke 19:11-13)

These words form an introduction to the parable commonly called "The Parable of the Pounds." They contain matter which deserves the prayerful consideration of every true Christian. There are some parables of which Matthew Henry says, with equal quaintness and truth, "The key hangs beside the door." The Holy Ghost himself interprets them. There is no room left for doubt as to the purpose for which they were spoken. Of such parables, The Parable of the Pounds is an example.

St. Luke tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ *"added and spoke a parable because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear."* These words reveal the secret thoughts of our Lord's disciples. They gathered from many of their Master's sayings that something remarkable was about to happen. They had a strong impression that one great purpose of His coming into the world was about to be accomplished. So far they were quite right. But as to the precise nature of the event about to happen, they were quite wrong. What was their mistake, and how should present-day Christians regard it? This is the first question I shall consider.

Our Lord's disciples seem to have thought that the Old Testament promises of Messiah's visible kingdom and glory were about to be immediately fulfilled. They believed rightly that He was indeed the Messiah, the Christ of God. But they blindly supposed that He was going at once to take to Himself His great power and reign gloriously over the earth. This was the sum and substance of their error. They did not realize that before all these prophecies could be fulfilled, "it behoved Christ to suffer." Their sanguine expectations leaped over the crucifixion and the long parenthesis of time to follow, and bounded onward to the final glory. They did not see that there was to be a first advent of Messiah, when he was "to be cut off," before the second advent of Messiah, when he would reign. They did not comprehend that before the glory, Christ must be crucified and an elect people gathered out from among the Gentiles by the preaching of the Gospel. They grasped part of the prophetic word, but not all. They saw that Christ was to have a kingdom, but they did not see that He was to be wounded and bruised, and be an offering for sin. They understood the dispensation of the crown and the glory, but not the dispensation of the cross and the shame. It was a mistake which you will find partially clinging to the disciples even after the crucifixion.

I believe we have fallen into an error parallel with that of our Jewish brethren, an error less fatal in its consequences than theirs, but an error far more inexcusable, because we have had more light. If the Jew thought too exclusively of Christ reigning, has not the Gentile thought too exclusively of Christ suffering? If the Jew could see nothing in Old Testament prophecy but Christ's exaltation and final power, has not the Gentile often seen nothing but Christ's humiliation and the preaching of the Gospel? If the Jew dwelt too much on Christ's second

advent, has not the Gentile dwelt too exclusively on the first? If the Jew ignored the cross, has not the Gentile ignored the crown?

We Gentiles have been very guilty concerning a large portion of God's truth. I believe that we have cherished an arbitrary, reckless habit of interpreting first advent texts *literally*, and second advent texts *spiritually*. I believe we have not rightly understood "all that the prophets have spoken" about the second, personal advent of Christ any more than the Jews did about the first. And because we have done so, I say that we should speak of such mistakes as that referred to in our text with much tenderness and compassion.

I ask you in all affection to examine your own views about prophecy. Take heed, lest insensibly you commit as great an error about Christ's second coming and glory as they did about Christ's first coming and cross. Do not dismiss the subject as a matter of curious speculation and one of no practical importance. Believe me, it affects the whole question between yourself and the unconverted Jew. I warn you, that unless you interpret the prophetic portion of the Old Testament in the simple, literal meaning of its words, you will find it no easy matter to carry on an argument with an unconverted Jew.

You would probably tell the Jew that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament Scriptures. You would show him Psalm 22, Isaiah 53, Daniel 9:26, Micah 5:2, Zechariah 9:9, and 11:13. You would tell him that in Jesus of Nazareth those Scriptures were literally fulfilled. You would urge upon him that he ought to believe them and receive Christ as the Messiah. All this is very good. So far you would do well. But suppose the Jew asks you if you take *all* the prophecies of the old Testament in their simple literal meaning? Suppose he asks you if you believe in a literal personal advent of Messiah to reign over the earth in glory, in a literal restoration of Judah and Israel to Palestine, in a literal rebuilding and restoration of Zion and Jerusalem? What answer will you give?

Will you dare to tell him that Old Testament prophecies of this kind are not to be taken in their plain literal sense? Will you dare to tell him that the words Zion, Jerusalem, Jacob, Judah, Ephraim, and Israel do not mean what they seem to mean, but mean *the Church of Christ*? Will you dare to tell him that the glorious kingdom and future blessedness of Zion, so often dwelt upon in prophecy, means nothing more than the gradual Christianizing of the world by missionaries and Gospel preaching? Will you dare to tell him that you think it "carnal" to take such Scriptures literally; "carnal" to expect a literal rebuilding of Jerusalem; "carnal" to expect a literal coming of Messiah to reign; "carnal" to look for a literal gathering and restoration of Israel?

Do you not see that you are putting a weapon into the hand of the unconverted Jew which he will probably use with irresistible power? Do you not see that you are cutting the ground from under your own feet and supplying the Jew with a strong argument for not believing your own interpretation of Scripture? Do you not see that the Jew will reply that it is "carnal" for you to tell him that the Messiah has come literally to suffer when you say it is "carnal" for him to expect Messiah to come literally to reign? Do you not see that the Jew will tell you that it is far more "carnal" in you to believe that Messiah could come into the world as a despised, crucified man of sorrows than it is for him to believe that He will come into the world as a glorious King? Beyond doubt He will do so, and you will find no answer to give.

I entreat you to throw aside all prejudice and view the subject I am dwelling upon with calm and

dispassionate thought. I beseech you to take up anew the prophetic Scriptures and pray that you may not err in interpreting their meaning. Read them in the light of those two great polestars, the first and second advents of Jesus Christ. Bind up with *the first advent* the rejection of the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, the preaching of the Gospel as a witness to the world, and the gathering out of the election of grace. Bind up with *the second advent* the restoration of the Jews, the pouring out of judgments on unbelieving Christians, the conversion of the world, and the establishment of Christ's kingdom upon earth. Do this, and you will see a meaning and fulness in prophecy which perhaps you never yet discovered.

I believe it is high time for the Church of Christ to awake out of its sleep about Old Testament prophecy. From the time of the old Father, Jerome, down to the present day, men have gone on in a pernicious habit of "spiritualizing" the words of the Prophets until their true meaning has been well nigh buried. It is high time for Christians to interpret unfulfilled prophecy *by the light of prophecies already fulfilled*. The curses on the Jews were brought to pass literally, so also will be the blessings. The scattering was literal, so also will be the gathering. The pulling down of Zion was literal, so also will be the building up. The rejection of Israel was literal, so also will be the restoration.

It is high time to interpret the events that shall accompany Christ's second advent *by the light of those accompanying His first advent*. The first advent was literal, visible, personal, and so also will be His second. His first advent was with a literal body, so also will be His second. At His first advent the least predictions were fulfilled to the very letter, so also will they be at His second. The shame was literal and visible, so also will be the glory.

It is high time to cease from explaining Old Testament prophecies *in a way not warranted by the New Testament*. What right have we to say that Judah, Zion, Israel, and Jerusalem ever mean anything but literal Judah, literal Zion, literal Israel, and literal Jerusalem? What precedent shall we find in the New Testament? Hardly any, if indeed any at all. An admirable writer on this subject well says: "There are really only two or three places in the whole New Testament (Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation) where such names are used decidedly in what may be called a spiritual or figurative state. The word 'Jerusalem' occurs eighty times, and all of them unquestionably literal, save when the opposite is expressly pointed out by the epithets 'heavenly,' or 'new', or 'holy.' 'Jew' occurs one hundred times, and only four are even ambiguous, as Romans 2:28. 'Israel' and 'Israelite' occur forty times, and all literal. 'Judah' and 'Judea' above twenty times, and all literal." (*Bonar's Prophetic Landmarks, p.300*)

It is no answer to say that it is impossible to carry out the principle of a literal interpretation because Christ was not a literal "door," nor a literal "branch," nor was the bread in the sacrament His literal "body." I reply that when I speak of literal interpretation, I require no man to deny the use of *figurative* language. I fully admit that emblems, figures, and symbols are used in foretelling Messiah's glory, as well as in foretelling Messiah's sufferings. I do not believe that Jesus was a literal "root out of dry ground," or a literal "lamb." All I maintain is that prophecies about Christ's coming and kingdom do foretell literal facts, as truly as the prophecy about Christ being numbered with the transgressors; that prophecies about the Jews being gathered will be as really and literally made good as those about the Jews being scattered.

The argument that the principle of literal interpretation deprives the Church of the use and benefit of many parts of the Old Testament is not valid. All things written in the Prophets concerning the salvation of individual souls may be used by Gentiles as freely as by Jews. The

hearts of Jews and Gentiles are naturally just the same. The way to heaven is but one. Both Jews and Gentiles need justification, regeneration, sanctification. Whatever is written concerning such subjects is just as much the property of the Gentile as the Jew. Moreover, I hold Israel to be a people specially typical of the whole body of believers in Christ. I consider that believers now may take the comfort of every promise of pardon, comfort, and grace which is addressed to Israel. Such words I regard as the common portion of all believers. All I maintain is that whenever God says He shall do or give certain things to Israel and Jerusalem in *this world*, we ought to believe wholly that those things will be given and done to literal Israel and Jerusalem.

Occupy Till I Come

Day 4

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

(Part 2)

J. C. Ryle

“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten pounds, and said to them, Occupy till I come.” (Luke 19:11-13)

A second question I wish to consider is this: *What is the present position of our Lord Jesus Christ?* The parable appears to answer that question distinctly in the twelfth verse: *“A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return.”* This nobleman represents the Lord Jesus Christ, and that in two respects.

Like the nobleman, the Lord Jesus is gone into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom. He has not received it yet in possession, though He has it in promise. He has a spiritual kingdom unquestionably; He is king over the hearts of His believing people, and they are all His faithful subjects. He has a controlling power over the world without controversy; He is King of kings and Lord of lords. *“By Him all things consist,”* and nothing can happen without His permission. But as for His real, literal, visible, complete kingdom, that the Lord Jesus has not yet received. To use the words of Heb. 2:8, *“We see not yet all things put under Him.”* To use the words of Psalm 110:1, *“He sits on the right hand of the Father till His enemies are made His footstool.”*

The devil is the prince of this world during the present dispensation. The vast majority of the inhabitants of the earth choose the things that please the devil far more than the things that please God. Little as they may think it, they are doing the devil's will, behaving as the devil's subjects, and serving the devil far more than Christ. The Lord Jesus, during the present dispensation, is like David between the time of His anointing and Saul's death. He has the promise of the kingdom, but He has not yet received the crown and throne. He is followed by a few, and those often neither great nor wise, but they are a faithful people. He has none of the visible signs of the kingdom at present: no earthly glory, majesty, greatness, obedience. The vast majority of mankind see no beauty in Him; they will not have this man to reign over them. His people are not honoured for their Master's sake. They walk the earth like princes in disguise. It is not the day of *“His power.”* The Lord Jesus is biding His time. The day of His power has not yet begun. He is gathering out a people to carry the cross and walk in His steps until the time of His coronation arrives.

“This same Jesus which was taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” As His going away was a real literal going away, so His return shall be a real literal return. As He came personally the first time with a body, so He shall come personally the second time with a body. As He came visibly to this earth and visibly went away, so when He comes the second time He shall visibly return. And then--and not until then--the complete kingdom of Christ shall begin. He departed from His servants as *“a nobleman,”* He returns to His servants as *“a King.”* Then He intends to cast out that old usurper the devil, to bind him for a thousand years and strip him of his power. Then He intends to make a restitution of the face of creation. It shall be the world's jubilee day. Our earth shall at last bring forth her

increase, the King shall at length have His own again. At last the ninety-seventh Psalm shall be fulfilled, and men shall say, *"The Lord reigns. Let the earth rejoice!"*

Then He intends to fulfil the prophecies of Enoch, John the Baptist, and St. Paul; to execute judgment, to burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the Gospel. *Then* He intends to raise His dead saints and gather His living ones, to gather together the scattered tribes of Israel, and to set up an empire on earth in which every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord.

I charge you to establish in your mind the great truth that Christ is one day to have a complete kingdom in this world; that His kingdom is not yet set up, but that it will be set up in the day of His return. Remember that "the days are evil," and that the time of general conversion has not yet arrived. How can one possibly expect a millennium before the Lord Jesus returns if the world in the day of His coming is to be found as it was in the days of Noah and Lot?

Know these things clearly, and you will see why God delays the final glory and allows things to go on as they do in this world. It is not because He is unable to prevent evil; it is not because He is slack in the fulfilling of His promises. It is because the Lord is taking out for Himself a people by the preaching of the Gospel. He is longsuffering to unconverted Christians. The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Once let the number of the elect be gathered out of the world, once let the last elect sinner be brought to repentance, and then the kingdom of Christ shall be set up and the throne of grace exchanged for the throne of glory.

Occupy Till I Come

Day 5

THE PARABLE OF THE POUNDS

(Conclusion)

J. C. Ryle

“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten pounds, and said to them, Occupy till I come.” (Luke 19:11-13)

The third and last question I wish to consider is: *What is the present duty of all Christ's professing disciples?* When I speak of present duty, I mean, of course, their duty between the period of Christ's first and second advent. And I find an answer in the words of the nobleman to his servants: he *“delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.”*

Reader, I know few words more searching and impressive than these four: *“Occupy till I come.”* They are spoken to all who profess and call themselves Christians. They ought to stir up all hearers of the Gospel to examine themselves whether they are in the faith, and to prove themselves. Listen to me for a few minutes while I try to impress them on your attention.

The Lord Jesus bids you *“occupy.”* By that He means that you are to be *“a doer”* in your Christianity, and not merely a hearer and professor. He wants His servants not only to receive His wages, eat His bread, dwell in His house, and belong to His family, but also to do His work. You are to *“let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.”* He has given each one of His people some opportunity of glorifying Him. Everyone has got his own sphere, the poorest as well as the richest. Everyone has an open door before him and may, if he will, show forth his Master's praise. Your bodily health and strength, your mental gifts and capacities, your money and your earthly possessions, your rank and position in life, your example and influence with others, your liberty to read the Bible and hear the Gospel, your plentiful supply of means of grace--all these are your *“pounds.”* Oh, see to it that you pay out your Lord's money well and honestly! Take heed that you do not bury your pound!

But the Lord Jesus bids you also to *“occupy till He comes.”* By that He means that you are to do His work on earth, like one who continually looks for His return. You are to be like the faithful servant, who knows not what hour his master may come home, but keeps all things in readiness and is always prepared. You are to be like one who knows that Christ's coming is the great reckoning day, and to be ready to render up your account at any moment.

How *condemning* are these words to thousands of professing Christians! What an utter absence of preparation appears in their daily walk and conversation! How thoroughly unfit are they to meet Christ! They know nothing of using the gifts of God as loans for which they must give account. They show not the slightest desire to glorify Him with *“body and spirit which are His.”* They give no sign of readiness for the second advent. Old Gurnal has well said, *“It may be written on the grave of every unconverted man, Here lies one who never did for God an hour's work.”* In a world like this, who can wonder if a minister often cries to his congregation, *“Ye must be born again.”* *“Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”*

How encouraging are these words to all who seek first the kingdom of God and love the Lord Christ in sincerity. What does it matter if the children of the world regard them as "righteous overmuch!" Those words, "Occupy till I come," are words which justify their conduct.

Let me conclude with a few words of general application. First, there is a word of *solemn warning*. A great change is yet to come on this world, and a change we ought to keep constantly before our mind's eye. That change is a change of MASTERS. That old rebel, the devil, and all his adherents shall be cast down. The Lord Jesus and all His saints shall be exalted and raised to honour. "The kingdom of this world" shall "become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." Sin shall no longer be made light of and palliated. Wickedness shall no longer go unpunished and unreprieved. Holiness shall become the general character of the inhabitants of the earth. There shall be no more Deism, Scepticism, or Infidelity. All nations shall do honour to the crucified Lamb of God; all men shall know Him, from the least to the greatest.

Second, let me draw from the whole subject a solemn question: Are you ready for the great change? Are you ready for the coming and kingdom of Christ? Every justified and converted man is ready, and if you are not ready, you are not a justified man. This is nothing more than the New Testament standard. The Apostles would have doubted the truth of your religion if you were not looking and longing for the coming of the Lord. The grand end of the Gospel is to prepare men to meet God. What has your Christianity done for you if it has not made you ready for the kingdom of Christ?

Let me offer an invitation to all readers who do not feel ready for Christ's return. That invitation shall be short and simple. I beseech you to know your danger and come to Christ without delay so that you may be pardoned, justified, and made ready for things to come. I entreat you this day to "flee from the wrath to come," to the hope set before you in the Gospel. I pray you in Christ's stead, to lay down enmity and unbelief and to be this minute reconciled to God. Lay aside everything that stands between you and Christ. Find out the besetting sin that weighs you down and tear it from your heart, however dear it may be. Cry mightily to the Lord Jesus to reveal Himself to your soul. Rest not until you have a real, firm, and reasonable hope, and until know that your feet are on the Rock of Ages.

Last of all, let me draw from the subject an exhortation to all who know Christ indeed, and love His appearing. That exhortation is simply this: strive more and more to be a "doing" Christian. Labor more and more to show forth the praises of Him who has called you out of darkness into marvellous light. Improve every talent which the Lord Jesus has committed to your charge to the setting forth of His glory. Let your conformity to the mind of Christ be unquestionable and unmistakable. Let your holiness be a clear plain fact which even the worst enemies of the Gospel cannot deny. Never was there a greater mistake than to fancy that the doctrine of the personal return of Christ is calculated to paralyze Christian diligence. Surely there can be no greater spur to the servant's activity than the expectation of his master's speedy return.

Occupy Till I Come

Day 6

THE PENITENT THIEF

J. C. Ryle

“Then one of the criminals who were hanged blasphemed Him, saying, If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us. But the other, answering, rebuked him, saying, Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong. Then he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” (Luke 23:39-43)

Reader, I wish to speak to you about these verses. Listen to me while I try to unfold the leading lessons which they are meant to teach. I cannot see the state of your heart before God, but I can see truths in this passage which no man can ever know too well.

First, you are meant to learn *Christ's power and willingness to save sinners*. This is the main doctrine to be gathered from the history of the penitent thief. It teaches you that which ought to be music in the ears of all who hear it: Jesus Christ is mighty to save.

I ask you if any man's case could look more hopeless and desperate than this man's? He was a *wicked* man, a malefactor, a thief, if not a murderer. He was suffering a just punishment for breaking the law. And as he had lived wickedly, so he seemed determined to die wickedly, for when he first was crucified, he railed on our Lord.

He was a *dying man*. He hung there nailed to a cross, from which he was never to come down alive. His hours were numbered, the grave was ready for him. There was but a step between him and death. If ever there was a soul hovering on the brink of hell, it was the soul of this thief. If ever there was a case that seemed lost, gone, and past recovery, it was his. If ever there was a child of Adam whom the devil made sure of as his own, it was this man.

But see now what happened. He ceased to rail and blaspheme, and began to speak in another manner altogether. He turned to our blessed Lord in prayer and asked Jesus to “remember him when He came into His kingdom.” He asked that his soul might be cared for, his sins pardoned, and himself thought of in another world. Truly this was a wonderful change.

Mark what kind of answer he received. Some would have said he was too wicked a man to be saved. But it was not so. Some would have fancied it was too late, the door was shut, and there was no room for mercy. But it proved not too late at all. The Lord Jesus returned an immediate answer, spoke kindly to him, and assured him that he should be with Him that day in Paradise. He pardoned him completely, cleansed him thoroughly from his sins, received him graciously, justified him freely, raised him from the gates of hell, and gave him a title to glory.

The second lesson you are meant to learn is this: *if some are saved in the very hour of death, others are not*. This is a truth that never ought to be passed over, and I dare not leave it unnoticed. It is a truth that stands out plainly in the sad end of the other malefactor, and is only too often forgotten. What became of the other thief who was crucified? Why did he not turn from his sin and call upon the Lord? Why did he remain hardened and impenitent? Why was he not saved? It is useless to try to answer such questions. Let us be content to take the fact as we find it, and see what it is meant to teach us.

We have no right whatever to say this thief was a worse man than his companion. There is nothing to prove it. Both plainly were wicked men. Both were receiving the due reward of their deeds. Both hung by the side of our Lord Jesus Christ. Both heard Him pray for His murderers. Both saw Him suffer patiently. But while one repented, the other remained hardened. While one began to pray, the other went on railing. While one was converted in his last hours, the other died as bad a man as he had lived. While one was taken to paradise, the other went to his own place, the place of the devil and his angels.

Now these things are written for our warning. They tell me that though some may repent and be converted on their death-bed, it does not follow that all will. A death-bed is not always a saving time. They tell me that two men may have the same opportunities of getting good for their souls, may be placed in the same position, see the same things, and hear the same things, and yet only one shall take advantage of them. Only one will repent, believe, and be saved. They tell me, above all, that repentance and faith are the gifts of God and are not in a man's own power. If any one flatters himself that he can repent at his own time, choose his own season, seek the Lord when he pleases, and, like the penitent thief, be saved at the very last, he may find he is greatly deceived. Beware of presumption. Do not abuse God's mercy and compassion. If you would be wise, put nothing off that concerns your soul.

The third lesson you are meant to learn is: *the Spirit always leads saved souls in one way.* This is a point that deserves particular attention and is often overlooked. Men look at the broad fact that the penitent thief was saved when he was dying, and they look no further. They do not consider the evidences this thief left behind him. They do not observe the abundant proof he gave of the work of the Spirit in his heart. And these proofs I wish to trace out. I wish to show you that the Spirit always works in one way, and that whether He converts a man in an hour, as He did the penitent thief, or by slow degrees, as he does others, the steps by which He leads souls to heaven are always the same.

First, see how strong was the faith of this man. He called Jesus, "Lord." He declared his belief that He would have a kingdom. He believed that He was able to give him eternal life and glory, and in this belief prayed to Him. He maintained Christ's innocence of all the charges brought against Him. When even Christ's own disciples had forsaken Him and fled, when He was bleeding and dying on the cross, this was the hour when the thief believed in Christ and prayed to Him.

Second, see what a right sense of sin the thief had. He says to his companion, "We receive the due reward of our deeds." He acknowledges his own ungodliness and the justice of his punishment. He makes no attempt to justify himself or excuse his wickedness. He is a man humbled and self-abased by the remembrance of past iniquities. This is what all God's children feel. They are ready to allow they are poor hell-deserving sinners. They can say with their hearts as well as with their lips, "We have left undone the things that we ought to have done, and we have done those things that we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us."

See what brotherly love the thief showed to his companion. He tried to stop his railing and blaspheming and bring him to a better mind. There is no surer mark of grace than this. Grace shakes a man out of his selfishness and makes him feel for the souls of others.

In one word, you see in the penitent thief a finished work of the Holy Ghost. Every part of the

believer's character may be traced in him. Short as his life was after conversion, he found time to leave abundant evidence that he was a child of God. His faith, his prayer, his humility, his brotherly love, are unmistakable witnesses of the reality of his repentance. He was not a penitent in name only, but in deed and in truth.

You are meant to learn from these verses *that believers in Christ are with the Lord when they die*. I cannot describe what kind of place paradise is, but I ask no brighter view of it than this--that Christ is there. Let me only see Christ in paradise when my eyes close in death, and that suffices me.

Reader, the day that believers die they are in paradise. Their battle is fought, their strife is over. They have passed through that gloomy valley we must one day tread. They have gone over that dark river we must one day cross. They have drunk that last bitter cup which sin has mingled for man. They have reached that place where sorrow and sighing are no more. Surely we should not wish them back again. We should not weep for them, but for ourselves.

This tract may fall into the hands of some humble-hearted and contrite sinner. Are you that man? Then here is encouragement for you. See what the penitent thief did and do likewise. See how he prayed, see how he called on the Lord Jesus Christ, see what an answer of peace he obtained. Why should not you also be saved?

Christ and the Two Thieves

Day 7

GREAT FAITH

J. C. Ryle

"And Jesus went away from there and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. And behold, a Canaanite woman came out from that region and began to cry out, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed. But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came to him and kept asking him, saying, Send her away, for she is shouting out after us. But he answered and said, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. But she came and began to bow down before him, saying, Lord, help me! And he answered and said, It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. But she said, Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their master's table. Then Jesus answered and said to her, O woman, your faith is great; be it done for you as you wish. And her daughter was healed at once." (Matthew 15:21-28)

Another of our Lord's miracles is recorded in these verses. The circumstances which attend it are peculiarly full of interest. Let us take them up in order and see what they are. Every word in these narratives is rich in instruction.

We see, in the first place, *that true faith may sometimes be found where it might have been least expected.* A Canaanitish woman cries to our Lord for help on behalf of her daughter. "Have mercy on me," she says, "O Lord, thou Son of David." Such a prayer would have showed great faith, had she lived in Bethany or Jerusalem. But when we find that she came from the "coasts of Tyre and Sidon," such a prayer may well fill us with surprise. It ought to teach us that it is grace, not place, which makes people believers. We may live in a prophet's family, like Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, and yet continue impenitent, unbelieving, and fond of the world. We may dwell in the midst of superstition and dark idolatry, like the little maid in Naaman's house, and yet be faithful witnesses for God and his Christ. Let us not despair of anyone's soul merely because his lot is cast in an unfavorable position. It is possible to dwell in the coasts of Tyre and Sidon and yet sit down in the kingdom of God.

We see, in the second place, *that affliction sometimes proves a blessing to a person's soul.* This Canaanitish mother no doubt had been sorely tried. She had seen her darling child vexed with a devil and been unable to relieve her. But yet that trouble brought her to Christ and taught her to pray. Without it, she might have lived and died in careless ignorance and never seen Jesus at all. Surely it was good for her that she was afflicted.

Let us mark this well. There is nothing which shows our ignorance so much as our impatience under trouble. We forget that every cross is a message from God and intended to do us good in the end. Trials are intended to make us think, to wean us from the world, to send us to the Bible, to drive us to our knees. Health is a good thing, but sickness is far better if it leads us to God. Prosperity is a great mercy, but adversity is a greater one if it brings us to Christ. Anything, anything is better than living in carelessness and dying in sin. Better a thousand times be afflicted like the Canaanitish mother, and like her to flee to Christ than to live at ease like the rich "fool," and die at last without Christ and without hope.

We see, in the third place, *that Christ's people are often less gracious and compassionate than Christ himself.* The woman about whom we are reading found small favor with our Lord's

disciples. Perhaps they regarded an inhabitant of the coasts of Tyre and Sidon as unworthy of their Master's help. At any rate they said, "Send her away."

There is only too much of this spirit among many who profess and call themselves believers. They are apt to discourage inquirers after Christ instead of helping them forward. They are too ready to doubt the reality of a beginner's grace, because it is small, and to treat him as Saul was treated when he first came to Jerusalem after his conversion. "They believed not that he was a disciple." Let us beware of giving way to this spirit. Let us seek to have more of the mind that was in Christ. Like him, let us be gentle, and kind, and encouraging in all our treatment of those who are seeking to be saved. Above all, let us tell men continually that they must not judge of Christ by Christians. Let us assure them that there is far more in that gracious Master than there is in the best of his servants. Peter, James, and John may say to the afflicted soul, "Send her away." But such a word never came from the lips of Christ. He may sometimes keep us long waiting, as he did this woman. But he will never send us away empty.

We see, in the last place, *what encouragement there is to persevere in prayer, both for ourselves and others.* It is hard to conceive a more striking illustration of this truth than we have in this passage. The prayer of this afflicted mother at first seemed entirely unnoticed: Jesus "answered her not a word." Yet she prayed on. The saying which next fell from our Lord's lips sounded discouraging: "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Yet she prayed on, "Lord help me." The second saying of our Lord was even less encouraging than the first: "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Even then she finds a plea for some "crumbs" of mercy to be granted to her. And her importunity obtained at length a gracious reward. "O woman, great is thy faith: be it done for you as you wish." That promise never yet was broken, "Seek and you shall find."

Let us remember this history when we pray for ourselves. We are sometimes tempted to think that we get no good by our prayers, and that we may as well give them up altogether. Let us resist the temptation; it comes from the devil. Let us believe, and pray on. Against our besetting sins, against the spirit of the world, against the wiles of the devil, let us pray on and not faint. Let us pray for strength to do our duty, for grace to bear our trials, for comfort in every trouble. Let us be sure of the fact that no time of every day is so well-spent as that which we spend upon our knees. Jesus hears us and in his own good time will give an answer.

Let us remember this history when we intercede for others. Have we children whose conversion we desire? Have we relations and friends about whose salvation we are anxious? Let us follow the example of this Canaanitish woman and lay the state of their souls before Christ. Let us name their names before him night and day, and let us never rest until we have an answer. We may have to wait many a long year. We may seem to pray in vain and intercede without profit. But let us never give up. Let us believe that Jesus is not changed, and that he who heard the Canaanitish mother and granted her request will also hear us and one day give us an answer of peace.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 8

A PRAYING SAVIOR

J. C. Ryle

"Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, he went out and departed to a solitary place; and there he prayed. Simon and those who were with him searched for him. When they found him, they said, to him, 'Everyone is looking for you.' But he said to them, 'Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also, because for this purpose I have come forth.' And he was preaching in their synagogues throughout all Galilee, and casting out demons." (Mark 1:35-39)

Every fact in our Lord's life on earth, and every word which fell from his lips, ought to be deeply interesting to a true Christian. We see a fact and a saying in the passage we have just read which deserve close attention.

We see, for one thing, *an example of our Lord Jesus Christ's habits about private prayer.* We are told, that "in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed." We shall find the same thing often recorded of our Lord in the Gospel history. When he was baptized, we are told that he was "praying." When he was transfigured, we are told that "as he prayed, the fashion of his face was altered." Before he chose the twelve apostles, we are told that "He continued all night in prayer to God." When all men spoke well of him and would fain have made him a King, we are told that "He went up into a mountain apart to pray." When tempted in the garden of Gethsemane, he said, "Sit ye here, while I shall pray." In short, our Lord prayed always, and did not faint. Sinless as he was, he set us an example of diligent communion with his Father. His Godhead did not render him independent of the use of all means as a man. His very perfection was a perfection kept up through the exercise of prayer.

We ought to see in all this the immense importance of private devotion. If he who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners," thus prayed continually, how much more ought we who are compassed with infirmity? If he found it needful to offer up supplications with strong crying and tears, how much more needful is it for us, who in many things offend daily?

What shall we say to those who never pray at all, in the face of such a passage as this? There are many such, it may be feared, in the list of baptized people--many who rise up in the morning without prayer, and without prayer lie down at night--many who never speak one word to God. Are they Christians? It is impossible to say so. A praying Master, like Jesus, can have no prayerless servants. The Spirit of adoption will always make a man call upon God. To be prayerless is to be Christless, Godless, and in the high road to destruction. What shall we say to those who pray, yet give but little time to their prayers? We are obliged to say that they show at present very little of the mind of Christ. Asking little, they must expect to have little. Seeking little, they cannot be surprised if they possess little. It will always be found that when prayers are few, grace, strength, peace, and hope are small.

We shall do well to watch our habits of prayer with a holy watchfulness. Here is the pulse of our Christianity. Here is the true test of our state before God. Here true religion begins in the soul, when it does begin. Here it decays and goes backward, when a man backslides from God. Let us walk in the steps of our blessed Master in this respect as well as in every other. Like him, let us be diligent in our private devotion. Let us know what it is to "depart into solitary places and

pray."

We see, for another thing, in this passage, *a remarkable saying of our Lord as to the purpose for which he came into the world.* We find him saying, "Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth."

The meaning of these words is plain and unmistakeable. Our Lord declares that he came on earth to be a preacher and a teacher. He came to fulfill the prophetic office, to be the "prophet greater than Moses," who had been so long foretold. He left the glory which he had from all eternity with the Father to do the work of an evangelist. He came down to earth to show to man the way of peace, to proclaim deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. One principal part of his work on earth was to go up and down and publish glad tidings, to offer healing to the broken-hearted, light to them that sat in darkness, and pardon to the chief of sinners.

We ought to observe here what infinite honor the Lord Jesus puts on the office of the preacher. It is an office which the eternal Son of God himself undertook. He might have spent his earthly ministry in instituting and keeping up ceremonies, like Aaron. He might have ruled and reigned as a king, like David. But he chose a different calling. Until the time when he died as a sacrifice for our sins, his daily, and almost hourly work was to preach.

Let us never be moved by those who cry down the preacher's office, and tell us that sacraments and other ordinances are of more importance than sermons. Let us give to every part of God's public worship its proper place and honor, but let us beware of placing any part of it above preaching. By preaching, the Church of Christ was first gathered together and founded, and by preaching, it has ever been maintained in health and prosperity. By preaching, sinners are awakened. By preaching, inquirers are led on. By preaching, saints are built up. By preaching, Christianity is being carried to the heathen world.

There are many now who sneer at missionaries, and mock at those who go out into the highways of our own land to preach to crowds in the open air. But such persons would do well to pause and consider calmly what they are doing. The very work which they ridicule is the work which turned the world upside down, and cast heathenism to the ground. Above all, it is the very work which Christ himself undertook. The King of kings and Lord of lords himself was once a preacher. For three long years he went to and fro proclaiming the Gospel. Sometimes we see him in a house, sometimes on the mountain side, sometimes in a Jewish synagogue, sometimes in a boat on the sea. But the great work he took up was always one and the same. He came always preaching and teaching.

Let us leave this passage with a solemn resolution never to "despise prophesying." The minister we hear may not be highly gifted. The sermons that we listen to may be weak and poor. But after all, preaching is God's grand ordinance for converting and saving souls. The faithful preacher of the Gospel is handling the very weapon which the Son of God was not ashamed to employ.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 9

PERISHABLE FOOD

J. C. Ryle

"Jesus answered them and said, Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you." (John 6:26,27)

This is a sad exposure of the true reason why many followed our Lord. It was not now even a desire to see miracles performed, as it had been the day before. These, after a time when the novelty was past, would cease to astonish and attract. It was a lower and more carnal motive still: it was the mere wish to be fed again with loaves and fishes. They wanted to get something more out of our Lord. They had been fed once, and they would like to be fed again. The poor, low, and carnal motives which induce men to make some religious profession are painfully exhibited here. Our Lord's perfect knowledge of the secret springs of men's actions is striking. We cannot deceive Christ even if we deceive man; our true characters will be exposed in the day of judgment if not found out before we die. Whatever we are in religion, let us be honest and true.

"Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life." This verse is peculiarly full of instructive lessons. (1) There is something forbidden. We are not to labor exclusively or excessively for the satisfaction of bodily needs--for that food which perishes in the using and does us only a little temporary good. (2) There is something commanded. We ought to work hard and strive for that spiritual food which supplies the needs of our souls, and when once obtained, is an everlasting possession. (3) There is something promised. The Son of Man is ready to give that spiritual food (which endures forever) to everyone who desires to have it. (4) There is something declared. Jesus Christ has been designated and appointed by God the Father for this very purpose, to be the dispenser of this spiritual food to all who desire it.

The entire verse is a strong proof that however carnal and wicked men may be, we should never hesitate to offer them freely and fully the salvation of the Gospel. Bad as the motives of these Jews were, we see our Lord, in the same breath, first exposing their sin and then showing them their remedy.

When our Lord said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes," we must not for a moment suppose that He meant to encourage idleness and the neglect of all lawful means in order to get our living. This kind of expression--when two things are put in comparison--is not uncommon in the Bible. The simple meaning here is that we ought to take far more pains about meeting the needs of our souls than our bodies. When our Lord says to labor for the food which endures, he teaches very plainly that it is the duty of everyone to use every means, and to endeavor in every way to promote the welfare of his soul. We are especially to labor in the use of prayer, in reading the Bible, and in attendance at the preaching of God's Word.

When our Lord says that the Son of man shall give you the food that endures to everlasting life, he appears to make one of the widest and most general offers to unconverted sinners that we have in the Bible. The men to whom he was speaking were, beyond question, carnal-minded and unconverted. Yet even to them Jesus says, "which the Son of Man will give you." It seems an unmistakable statement of Christ's willingness and readiness to give pardon and grace to any sinner. It warrants us in proclaiming Christ's readiness to save anyone, and in offering salvation

to anyone if he will only repent and believe the Gospel.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 10

THE BREAD OF LIFE

J. C. Ryle

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

Truths of the weightiest importance follow each other in rapid succession in the sixth chapter of John. There are probably very few parts of the Bible which contain so many "deep things" as this chapter. For one thing, we learn that Christ's lowly condition was a stumbling block to the natural man. We read that the Jews said, *"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, I came down from heaven?"* Had our Lord come as a conquering king, with wealth and honors to bestow upon his followers and mighty armies in his train, they would have been willing enough to receive him. But a poor, lowly, and suffering Messiah was an offense to them.

"Jesus therefore answered and said to them, Do not murmur among yourselves." This seems a mild hint that they need not waste their time in murmuring. It neither surprised our Lord nor discouraged him. It is as though he said, "Your murmuring is only what I am prepared to expect. I know what human nature is; I am not moved by it. Think not that your unbelief will shake my confidence in my divine mission or prevent my saying what I do. I know that you cannot naturally understand such things I am speaking of, and I will proceed to tell you why."

"No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." The precise link to this sentence is not very evident. I believe it is something of this sort: "You are murmuring among yourselves because I speak of coming down from heaven; and you are making my apparently low origin an excuse for not believing on me. But all the time the fault is not in my sayings but in your lack of grace and your unbelief. There is a deeper and more solemn truth to which you seem totally blind, and that is man's need of God's grace in order to believe on me. You are never likely to believe until you acknowledge your own corruption and ask for grace to draw your soul to me. I am aware that it needs something more than argument and reasoning to make anyone believe in me. Your unbelief and murmuring do not surprise me or discourage me. I neither expect to see you nor anyone else believe until you are drawn by my Father." Our Lord's intent was not to excuse the unbelief of his hearers. He rather desired to magnify their danger and guilt, and make them see that faith in him was not so easy an affair as they supposed. It was not knowledge of his origin alone, but the drawing grace of God the Father which they needed. Let them awake to see that and cry for grace before it was too late.

Our Lord lays down the great principle "that no man whatsoever can come to Christ by faith, and really believe in Him, unless God the Father draws him so to come and inclines his will to believe." The nature of man since the fall is so corrupt and depraved that even when Christ is made known and preached to him, he will not come and believe without the special grace of God inclining his will and giving him a disposition to come. Moral persuasion and advice alone will not bring him. He must be "drawn." This is no doubt a very humbling truth, and one which in every age has called forth the hatred and opposition of man. The favorite notion of man is that he can do what he likes--repent or not repent, believe or not believe, come to Christ or not come--entirely at his own discretion. Man likes to think that his salvation is in his own power. Such

notions are flatly contradictory to the text before us. The words of our Lord here are clear and unmistakable and cannot be explained away.

We must carefully remember that it is *moral* inability and not *physical* inability that Christ speaks of. We are not to suppose that any man can have a sincere and hearty wish to come to Christ and yet be prevented by some mysterious impotence. The impotence lies in man's will. He cannot come because he will not come. There is an Old Testament sentence which throws much light on the expression before us. It is said of Joseph's brethren, that "*they hated him and could not speak peaceably unto him.*" Anyone must see at a glance what this "could not" means: They could not because they would not.

These things, no doubt, are deep and mysterious. By truths like these God proves the faith and patience of his people. Can they believe him? Can they wait for a fuller explanation at the last day? What they do not understand now they shall understand hereafter. One thing at any rate is abundantly clear, and that is man's responsibility for his own soul. His inability to come to Christ does not make an end of his accountability. Both things are equally true. If lost at last, it will prove to have been his own fault. Christ would have saved him, but he would not be saved. He would not come to Christ that he might have life.

"I am the living bread." Here our Lord distinctly proclaims to the Jews that he himself is that "bread of life," that soul-satisfying food, the true bread, the bread of God. He had awakened their curiosity by speaking of that bread as a real thing, and a thing worth their attention. He now unveils the whole truth to them and tells them plainly that he is that bread. "If you ask what it is, and where it is, you have only to look at Me."

When our Lord says, "I will give my flesh for the life of the world," I believe he means, "I will give my death to procure the world's life. My death shall be the ransom, the payment, and the redemption money by which eternal life shall be purchased for a world of sinners." I can see only one meaning in the word "world." It means all mankind. Christ died for all mankind, not for the elect only. That all the world is not saved is perfectly certain. That many die in unbelief and get no benefit from Christ's death is certain. But that Christ's death was enough for all mankind, and that when he died he made sufficient atonement for all the world, are truths which, both in this text and others like it, appear to my mind incontrovertible.

Let us note what a full and broad offer Christ holds out to sinners: "*If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.*" Happy would it be for many, whose whole hearts are set on eating, drinking, and feasting their poor perishable bodies, if they would but look at these words!

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 11

A DIFFICULT PASSAGE

J. C. Ryle

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven--not as your father ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:53-58)

Few passages of Scripture have been so painfully distorted and perverted as that which we have now read. The Jews are not the only people who have striven about its meaning. A sense has been put upon it which it was never intended to bear. Fallen man, in interpreting the Bible, has an unhappy aptitude for turning food into poison. The things that were written for his benefit, he often makes an occasion for falling.

Let us first consider carefully *what these verses do not mean*. The "eating and drinking" of which Christ speaks do not mean any literal eating and drinking. Above all, the words were not spoken with any reference to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We may eat the Lord's Supper, and yet not eat and drink Christ's body and blood. We may eat and drink Christ's body and blood, and yet not eat the Lord's Supper. Let this never be forgotten.

The opinion here expressed may startle some who have not looked closely into the subject. But it is an opinion which is supported by three weighty reasons. For one thing, a literal "eating and drinking" of Christ's body and blood would have been an idea utterly revolting to all Jews, and one flatly contradictory to an often repeated precept of their law.

For another thing, to take a literal view of "eating and drinking" is to interpose a *bodily* act between the soul of man and salvation. For this there is no precedent in Scripture. It cuts off from eternal life all who do not receive the communion: all who die in infancy and childhood, all who die of full age without coming to the communion, and also the penitent thief. It was to avoid this painful conclusion that many early Christians in Cyprian's time held the doctrine of infant communion.

To take a literal view of "eating and drinking" opens wide a door to formalism and superstition. It would admit to heaven thousands of ignorant, godless communicants in the present day who would wish nothing better than to hear, "He that eats my flesh and drinks my blood (that is, eats the sacramental bread and drinks the sacramental wine) has eternal life." Here is precisely what the heart of natural man likes! He likes to go to heaven by formally using ordinances. He literally eats and drinks, no doubt! But he has no eternal life and will not be raised to glory at the last day.

The plain truth is that there is a morbid anxiety in fallen man to put a carnal sense on Scriptural expressions wherever he possibly can. He struggles hard to make religion a matter of forms and ceremonies--of doing and performing, of sacraments and ordinances, of sense and of sight. He secretly dislikes that system of Christianity which makes the state of the heart the

principal thing, and labors to keep sacraments and ordinances in the second place. Happy is that Christian who remembers these things and stands on his guard! Baptism and the Lord's supper, no doubt, are holy sacraments and mighty blessings, when rightly used. But it is worse than useless to drag them in everywhere, and to see them everywhere in God's Word.

Let us next consider carefully *what these verses do mean*. The expressions they contain are very remarkable. Let us try to get some clear notion of their meaning. The "flesh and blood of the Son of man" means that sacrifice of His own body which Christ offered up on the cross when He died for sinners. The atonement made by His death, the satisfaction made by his sufferings as our Substitute, the redemption effected by His enduring the penalty of our sins in His own body on the tree--this seems to be the true idea that we should set before our minds. The "eating and drinking," without which there is no life in us, means that reception of Christ's sacrifice, which takes place when a man believes on Christ crucified for salvation. It is an inward and spiritual act of the heart and has nothing to do with the body. Whenever a man, feeling his own guilt and sinfulness, lays hold on Christ and trusts in the atonement made for him by Christ's death, at once he "eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks His blood." His soul feeds on Christ's sacrifice by faith, just as his body would feed on bread. Believing, he is said to "eat." Believing, he is said to "drink." And the special thing that he eats and drinks and gets benefit from is the atonement made for his sins by Christ's death for him on Calvary.

The practical lessons which may be gathered are weighty and important. The point being once settled that "the flesh and blood" in these verses means Christ's atonement, and the "eating and drinking" means faith, we may find in these verses great principles of truth which lie at the very root of Christianity. We may learn that faith in Christ's atonement is a thing of absolute necessity to salvation. Just as there was no safety for the Israelite in Egypt who did not eat the passover lamb in the night when the first-born were slain, so there is no life for the sinner who does not eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood.

We may learn that faith in Christ's atonement unites us by the closest possible bonds to our Savior, and entitles us to the highest privileges. Our souls shall find full satisfaction for all their needs--"His flesh is food indeed, and His blood is drink indeed." All things that we can need for time and eternity are secured to us. *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

Last, but not least, we may learn that faith in Christ's atonement is a personal act, a daily act, and an act that can be felt. No one can eat and drink for us, and no one, in like manner, can believe for us. We need food every day, and not once a week or once a month. In like manner, we need to employ faith every day. We feel benefit when we have eaten and drunk; we feel strengthened, nourished, and refreshed. In like manner, if we believe truly, we shall feel the better for it by sensible hope and peace in our inward man.

Let us take heed that we use these truths, as well as know them. The food of this world, for which so many take thought, will perish in the using and not feed our souls. He only that eats of "the bread that came down from heaven" shall live forever.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 12

ONE IN CHRIST

J. C. Ryle

***"Sanctify them by your truth . . . for their sakes, I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in me through their word; that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me . . . Father, I desire that they also whom you gave me may be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which you have given me; for you loved me before the foundation of the world . . . I have declared to them your name, and will declare it, that the love with which you loved me may be in them, and I in them."* (John 17:17-26)**

These wonderful verses form a fitting conclusion of the most wonderful prayer that was ever prayed on earth--the last Lord's prayer after the first Lord's Supper. They contain three most important petitions which our Lord offered up in behalf of his disciples. On these three petitions let us fix our attention. Passing by all other things in the passage, let us look steadily at these three points.

We should mark, first, *how Jesus prays that his people may be sanctified*. "Sanctify them," he says, "through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." We need not doubt that, in this place at any rate, the word "sanctify" means "make holy." It is a prayer that the Father would make his people more holy, more spiritual, more pure, more saintly in thought and word and deed, in life and character. Grace had done something for the disciples already--called, converted, renewed, and changed them. The great Head of the Church prays that the work of grace may be carried higher and further, and that his people may be more thoroughly sanctified and made holy in body, soul, and spirit--in fact more like himself.

Surely we need not say much to show the matchless wisdom of this prayer. More holiness is the very thing to be desired for all servants of Christ. Holy living is the great proof of the reality of Christianity. Men may refuse to see the truth of our arguments, but they cannot evade the evidence of a godly life. Such a life adorns religion and makes it beautiful, and sometimes wins those who are not "won by the Word," (I Pet. 3:1). Holy living trains Christians for heaven. The nearer we live to God while we live, the more ready shall we be to dwell forever in his presence when we die. Our entrance into heaven will be entirely by grace, and not of works; but heaven itself would be no heaven to us if we entered it with an unsanctified character. Our hearts must be in tune for heaven if we are to enjoy it. There must be a moral "meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light," as well as a title. Christ's blood alone can give us a title to enter the inheritance. Sanctification must give us a capacity to enjoy it.

Thomas Manton has aptly said, "If an earthly King lie but one night in a house, what care there is taken that nothing be offensive to him, and that all be neat, and sweet, and clean! How much more careful ought we to be to keep our hearts clean, to perform service acceptable to him, to be in the exercise of faith, love, and other graces, that we may entertain, as we ought, our heavenly King who comes to take up his continual abode in our hearts."

Who, in the face of such facts as these, need wonder that increased sanctification should be the first thing that Jesus asks for his people? Who that is really taught of God can fail to know that holiness is happiness, and that those who walk with God most closely, are always those who walk

with him most comfortably? Let no man deceive us with vain words in this matter. He who despises holiness and neglects good works, under the vain pretense of giving honor to justification by faith, shows plainly that he has not the mind of Christ.

We should mark, secondly, in these verses, *how Jesus prays for the unity and oneness of his people.* "That they all may be one--that they may be one in us--that they may be one even as we are one--and "that so the world may believe and know that Thou hast sent me"--these are leading petitions in our Lord's prayer to his Father.

We can ask no stronger proof of the value of unity among Christians, and the sinfulness of divisions, than the great prominence which our Master assigns to the subject in this passage. How painfully true it is that in every age divisions have been the scandal of religion and the weakness of the Church of Christ! How often Christians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren instead of contending against sin and the devil! How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say, "When you have settled your own internal differences, we will believe!" All this, we need not doubt, the Lord Jesus foresaw with prophetic eye. It was the foresight of it which made him pray so earnestly that believers might be "one."

The unity which our Lord prays about here is that true, substantial, spiritual, internal, heart unity which undoubtedly exists among all true members of Christ of every church and denomination. It is the unity which results from one Holy Ghost having made the members of Christ what they are. It is this unity which makes them feel more of one mind with one another than with mere professors of their own party. It is this unity which shakes the world, and obliges it to confess the truth of Christianity. For the continued maintenance of this unity, and an increase of it, our Lord seems to me in this prayer specially to pray. And we need not wonder. The divisions of mere worldly professors are of little moment. The divisions of real true believers are the greatest possible injury to the cause of the Gospel. They waste precious time and strength, and supply the world with reasons for unbelief. If all believers at this moment were of one mind, and would work together, they might soon turn the world upside down. No wonder the Lord prayed for unity.

Let the recollection of this part of Christ's prayer abide in our minds, and exercise a constant influence on our behavior as Christians. Let no man think lightly, as some men seem to do, of schism, or count it a small thing to multiply sects, parties, and denominations. These very things, we may depend, only help the devil and damage the cause of Christ. "If it be possible, as much as lies in us, let us live peaceably with all men." Let us bear much, concede much, and put up with much, before we plunge into secessions and separations. They are movements in which there is often much false fire. Let rabid zealots who delight in sect-making and party-forming rail at us and denounce us if they please. We need not mind them. So long as we have Christ and a good conscience, let us patiently hold on our way, follow the things that make for peace, and strive to promote unity. It was not for nothing that our Lord prayed so fervently that his people might be "one."

We should mark, finally, in these verses, *how Jesus prays that his people may at last be with him and behold his glory.* "I will," he says, "that those whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory."

This is a singularly beautiful and touching conclusion to our Lord's remarkable prayer. We may

well believe that it was meant to cheer and comfort those who heard it, and to strengthen them for the parting scene which was fast drawing near. But for all who read it even now, this part of his prayer is full of sweet and unspeakable comfort.

We do not see Christ now. We read of him, hear of him, believe in him, and rest our souls in his finished work. But even the best of us, at our best, walk by faith and not by sight, and our poor halting faith often makes us walk very feebly in the way to heaven. There shall be an end of all this state of things one day. We shall at length see Christ as he is, and know as we have been known. We shall behold him face to face, and not through a glass darkly. We shall actually be in his presence and company, and go out no more. If faith has been pleasant, much more will sight be; and if hope has been sweet, much more will certainty be. No wonder that when St. Paul has written, "We shall ever be with the Lord," he adds, "Comfort one another with these words."

We know little of heaven now. Our thoughts are all confounded when we try to form an idea of a future state in which pardoned sinners shall be perfectly happy. "It does not yet appear what we shall be." But we may rest ourselves on the blessed thought, that after death we shall be "with Christ." Whether before the resurrection in paradise, or after the resurrection in final glory, the prospect is still the same. True Christians shall be "with Christ." We need no more information. Where that blessed Person is who was born for us, died for us, and rose again, there can be no lack of anything. David might well say, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy, and at Thy right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Let us leave this wonderful prayer with a solemn recollection of the three great petitions which it contains. Let holiness and unity by the way, and Christ's company in the end, be subjects never long out of our thoughts or distant from our minds. Happy is that Christian who cares for nothing so much as to be holy and loving like his Master, while he lives, and a companion of his Master when he dies.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 13

CHRIST ETERNAL

J. C. Ryle

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not."
(John 1:1-5)

The five verses now before us contain a statement of matchless sublimity concerning the divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ. He it is, beyond all question, whom St. John means when he speaks of "the Word." No doubt there are heights and depths in that statement which are far beyond man's understanding. And yet there are plain lessons in it, which every Christian would do well to treasure up in his mind.

We learn, firstly, that our Lord Jesus Christ is *eternal*. St. John tells us that "in the beginning was the Word." He did not begin to exist when the heavens and the earth were made. Much less did He begin to exist when the Gospel was brought into the world. He had glory with the Father "before the world was," (John 17:5). He was existing when matter was first created and before time began. He was "before all things," (Col. 1:17). He was from all eternity.

We learn, secondly, that our Lord Jesus Christ is *a Person distinct from God the Father, and yet one with Him*. St. John tells us that "the Word was with God." The Father and the Word, though two persons, are joined by an ineffable union. Where God the Father was from all eternity, there also was the Word, even God the Son--their glory equal, their majesty co-eternal, and yet their Godhead one. This is a great mystery! Happy is he who can receive it as a little child, without attempting to explain it.

We learn, thirdly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is *very God*. St. John tells us that "the Word was God." He is not merely a created angel, or a being inferior to God the Father and invested by Him with power to redeem sinners. He is nothing less than perfect God, equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds.

We learn, fourthly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the *Creator of all things*. St. John tells us that "by Him were all things made, and without Him was not anything made that was made." So far from being a creature of God, as some heretics have falsely asserted, He is the Being who made the worlds and all that they contain.

We learn, lastly, that the Lord Jesus Christ is *the source of all spiritual life and light*. St. John tells us that "in Him was life, and the life was the light of men." He is the eternal fountain from which alone the sons of men have ever derived life. Whatever spiritual life and light Adam and Eve possessed before the fall, was from Christ. Whatever deliverance from sin and spiritual death any child of Adam has ever enjoyed since the fall, whatever light of conscience of understanding anyone has obtained, all has flowed from Christ. The vast majority of mankind in every age have refused to know Him, have forgotten the fall and their own need of a Saviour. The light has been constantly shining "in darkness." Most have "not comprehended the light." But if any men and women out of the countless millions of mankind have ever had spiritual life and light, they have owed all to Christ.

Such is a brief summary of the leading lessons which these wonderful verses appear to contain. There is much in them, without controversy, which is above our reason; but there is nothing contrary to it. There is much that we cannot explain and must be content humbly to believe. Let us, however, never forget that there are plain practical consequences flowing from the passage, which we can never grasp too firmly or know too well.

Would we know, for one thing, the exceeding sinfulness of sin? Let us often read these first five verses of St. John's Gospel. Let us mark what kind of Being the Redeemer of mankind must needs be in order to provide eternal redemption for sinners. If no one less than the Eternal God, the Creator and Preserver of all things, could take away the sin of the world, sin must be a far more abominable thing in the sight of God than most men suppose. The right measure of sin's sinfulness is the dignity of Him who came into the world to save sinners. If Christ is so great, then sin must indeed be sinful!

Would we know the strength of a true Christian's foundation for hope? Let us often read these first five verses of St. John's Gospel. Let us mark that the Savior in whom the believer is bid to trust is nothing less than the Eternal God, One able to save to the uttermost all that come to the Father by Him. He was "with God," and "was God," is also "Emmanuel, God with us." Let us thank God that our help is laid on One that is mighty. In ourselves we are great sinners. But in Jesus Christ we have a great Savior. He is a strong foundation stone, able to bear the weight of a world's sin. He that believes on Him shall not be confounded.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 14

A CONVERSATION WITH NICODEMUS

J. C. Ryle

"I tell you the solemn truth, unless a person is born of water and spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, You must all be born from above. The wind blows wherever it will, and you hear the sound it makes, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."
(John 3:5-8)

The conversation between Christ and Nicodemus is one of the most important passages in the whole Bible. Nowhere else do we find stronger statements about those two mighty subjects--the new birth, and salvation by faith in the Son of God. The servant of Christ will do well to make himself thoroughly acquainted with this chapter. A man may be ignorant of many things in religion and yet be saved. But to be ignorant of the matters handled in this chapter is to be in the broad way which leads to destruction.

We should notice, firstly, what a weak and feeble beginning a man may make in religion and yet finally prove a strong Christian. We are told of a certain Pharisee, named Nicodemus, who, feeling concerned about his soul, "came to Jesus by night." There can be little doubt that Nicodemus acted as he did from the fear of man. He was afraid of what man would think, say or do if his visit to Jesus was known. He came "by night," because he had not faith and courage enough to come by day. And yet there was a time afterwards when this very Nicodemus took our Lord's part in open day in the council of the Jews. "*Does our law judge any man,*" he said, "*before it hear him, and know what he does.*" Nor was this all. There came a time when this very Nicodemus was one of the only two men who did honor to our Lord's dead body. He helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus, when even the apostles had forsaken their Master and fled. His last things were more than his first. Though he began badly, he ended well.

The history of Nicodemus is meant to teach us that we should never "despise the day of small things" in religion. We must not set down a man as having no grace because his first steps toward God are timid and wavering, and the first movements of his soul are uncertain, hesitating, and stamped with much imperfection. We must remember our Lord's reception of Nicodemus. He did not "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax." Like Him, let us take inquirers by the hand and deal with them gently and lovingly. In everything there must be a beginning. It is not those who make the most flaming profession of religion at first who endure the longest and prove the most steadfast. Judas Iscariot was an apostle when Nicodemus was just groping his way slowly into full light. Yet afterward, when Nicodemus was boldly helping to bury his crucified Savior, Judas Iscariot had betrayed Him and hanged himself! This is a fact which ought not to be forgotten.

We should notice, secondly, what a mighty change our Lord declares to be needful to salvation, and what a remarkable expression He uses in describing it. He speaks of a new birth. He says to Nicodemus, "*Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*" He announces the same truth in other words, in order to make it more plain to his hearer's mind: "*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*" By this expression, He meant Nicodemus to understand that "no one could become His disciple, unless his inward man was as thoroughly cleansed and renewed by the Spirit as the outward man is

cleansed by water." To possess the privileges of Judaism, a man only needed to be born of the seed of Abraham after the flesh. To possess the privileges of Christ's kingdom, a man must be born again of the Holy Spirit. The change which our Lord here declares needful to salvation is evidently no slight or superficial one. It is not merely reformation, or amendment, or moral change, or outward alteration of life. It is a thorough change of heart, will, and character. It is a resurrection. It is a new creation. It is a passing from death to life. It is the implanting into our dead hearts of a new principle from above. It is the calling into existence of a new creature, with a new nature, new habits of life, new tastes, new desires, new appetites, new judgments, new opinions, new hopes, and new fears. All this, and nothing less than this, is implied when our Lord declares that we all need a "new birth."

This change of heart is rendered absolutely necessary to salvation by the corrupt condition in which we are all, without exception, born. *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh."* Our nature is thoroughly fallen. The carnal mind is enmity against God. We come into the world without faith, love, or fear toward God. We have no natural inclination to serve Him or obey Him, and no natural pleasure in doing His will. Left to himself, no child of Adam would ever turn to God. The truest description of the change which we all need in order to make us real Christians is the expression, "new birth."

This mighty change, it must never be forgotten, we cannot give to ourselves. The very name which our Lord gives to it is a convincing proof of this. He calls it "a birth." No man is the author of his own existence, and no man can quicken his own soul. We might as well expect a dead man to give himself life, as expect a natural man to make himself spiritual. A power *from above* must be put in exercise, even that same power which created the world. Man can do many things, but he cannot give life either to himself or to others. To give life is the peculiar prerogative of God. Well may our Lord declare that we need to be "born again!"

We should notice, lastly, the instructive comparison which our Lord uses in explaining the new birth. He saw Nicodemus perplexed and astonished by the things he had just heard. He graciously helped his wondering mind by an illustration drawn from "the wind." A more beautiful and fitting illustration of the work of the Spirit it is impossible to conceive.

There is much about the wind that is mysterious and inexplicable. "You cannot tell," says our Lord, "whence it comes and where it goes." We cannot handle it with our hands or see it with our eyes. When the wind blows, we cannot point out the exact spot where its breath first began to be felt, and the exact distance to which its influence shall extend. But we do not on that account deny its presence. It is just the same with the operations of the Spirit in the new birth of man. They may be mysterious, sovereign, and incomprehensible to us in many ways, but it is foolish to stumble at them because there is much we cannot explain. Whatever mystery there may be about the wind, its presence may always be known by its sound and effects. "You hear the sound thereof," says our Lord. When our ears hear it whistling in the windows and our eyes see the clouds driving before it, we do not hesitate to say, "There is wind." It is just the same with the operations of the Holy Spirit in the new birth of man. Marvelous and incomprehensible as His work may be, it is work that can always be seen and known. The new birth is a thing that "cannot be hidden." There will always be visible "fruits of the Spirit" in every one that is born of the Spirit.

Would we know what the marks of the new birth are? We shall find them already written for our learning in the First Epistle of John. The man born of God "believes that Jesus is the

Christ,"--"does not commit sin,"--"does righteousness,"--"loves the brethren,"--"overcomes the world,"--"keeps himself from the wicked one." This is the man born of the Spirit! Where these fruits are to be seen, there is the new birth of which our Lord is speaking. He that lacks these marks is yet dead in trespasses and sins.

And now let us solemnly ask ourselves whether we know anything of the mighty change of which we have been reading? Have we been born again? Can any marks of the new birth be seen in us? Can the sound of the Spirit be heard in our daily conversation? Is the image and superscription of the Spirit to be discerned in our lives? Happy is the man who can give satisfactory answers to these questions! A day will come when those who are not born again will wish that they had never been born at all.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 15

JOHN 3:16

J. C. Ryle

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

Our Lord, in this verse, shows Nicodemus another "heavenly thing." Nicodemus probably thought, like many Jews, that God's purposes of mercy were entirely confined to his chosen people Israel, and that when Messiah appeared, he would appear only for the special benefit of the Jewish nation. Our Lord here declares to him that God loves all the world, without any exception; that the Messiah, the only-begotten Son of God, is the Father's gift to the whole family of Adam; and that everyone, whether Jew or Gentile, who believes on him for salvation may have eternal life. A more startling declaration to the ears of a rigid Pharisee it is impossible to conceive! A more wonderful verse is not to be found in the Bible! That God should love such a wicked world as this and not hate it, that he should love it so as to provide salvation, that in order to provide salvation he should give not an angel but such a priceless gift as his only-begotten Son, that this great salvation should be freely offered to everyone that believes, all this is wonderful indeed! This was indeed a "heavenly thing."

The words, "God loved the world," have received two very different interpretations. The importance of the subject in the present day makes it desirable to state both views fully.

Some think that the "world" here means God's elect out of every nation, whether Jews or Gentiles, and that the "love" with which God is said to love them is that eternal love with which the elect were loved before creation began, and by which their calling, justification, preservation and final salvation are completely secured. This view, though supported by many and great divines, does not appear to me to be our Lord's meaning. For one thing, it seems to me a violent straining of language to confine the word "world" to the elect. "The world" is undoubtedly a name sometimes given to the "wicked" exclusively. But I cannot see that it is a name ever given to the saints. For another thing, to interpret the word "world" of the elect only, is to ignore the distinction which, to my eyes, is plainly drawn in the text between the whole of mankind and those out of mankind who "believe." If the "world" means only the believing portion of mankind, it would have been quite enough to say, "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that the world should not perish." But our Lord does not say so. He says, "that whosoever believes;" in other words, "that whosoever out of the world believes." Lastly, to confine God's love to the elect is taking a harsh and narrow view of God's character, and fairly lays Christianity open to the modern charges brought against it as cruel and unjust to the ungodly. If God takes no thought for any but his elect, and cares for none beside, how shall God judge the world? I believe in the electing love of God the Father as strongly as anyone. I regard the special love with which God loves the sheep whom he has given to Christ from all eternity as a most blessed and comfortable truth, and one most cheering and profitable to believers. I only say, that it is not the truth of this text.

The true view of the words, "God loved the world," I believe to be this: The "world" means the whole race of mankind, both saints and sinners, without any exception. The word, in my opinion, is so used in John 1:10,29; 6:33,51; 8:12; Rom. 3:19; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2 and 4:14. The "love" spoken of is that love of pity and compassion with which God regards all his creatures, and especially regards mankind. It is the same feeling of "love" which appears in Psalm 145:9, Ezek.

33:11, John 6:32, Titus 3:4, 1 John 4:10, 2 Pet. 3:9, and I Tim. 2:4. It is a love unquestionably distinct and separate from the special love with which God regards his saints. It is a love of pity and not of approbation or complaisance. But it is, not the less, a real love. It is a love which clears God of injustice in judging the world.

I am quite familiar with the objections commonly brought against the theory I have just propounded. I find no weight in them. Those who confine God's love exclusively to the elect appear, to me, to take a narrow and contracted view of God's character and attributes. They refuse to God that attribute of compassion with which even an earthly father can regard a profligate son, who can offer to him pardon even though his compassion is despised and his offers refused. I have long come to the conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a system. The following quotations from one whom, for convenience sake, I must call a thorough Calvinist--I mean Bishop Davenant--will show that the view I advocate is not new.

"The general love of God toward mankind is so clearly testified in Holy Scripture, and so demonstrated by the manifold effects of God's goodness and mercy extended to every particular man in this world, that to doubt thereof were infidelity, and to deny it plain blasphemy." (Davenant's Answer to Hoard, p. 1)

"God hates nothing which Himself created. And yet it is most true that He hates sin in any creature, and hates the creature infected with sin, in such manner as hatred may be attributed to God. But for all this, He so generally loved mankind, fallen in Adam, that He has given His only begotten Son, that what sinner soever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. And this everlasting life is so provided for man by God, that no decrees of His can bring any man thither without faith and repentance; and no decrees of His can keep any man out who repents and believes. As for the measure of God's love exhibited in the external effect unto man, it must not be denied that God pours out His grace more abundantly on some men than on others, and works more powerfully and effectually in the hearts of some than of others, and that out of His alone will and pleasure. But yet, when this more special love is not extended, His less special love is not restrained to outward and temporal mercies, but reaches to internal and spiritual blessings, even such as will bring men to an eternal blessedness, if their voluntary wickedness hinders not." (Davenant's Answer to Hoard, p. 469)

Calvin observes on this text, "Christ brought life, because the heavenly Father loves the human race, and wishes that they should not perish." Again he says, "Christ employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite indiscriminately all to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such also is the import of the term *world*. Though there is nothing in the world that is worthy of God's favor, yet He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ."

The little word "so" in this verse has called forth many remarks on account of its depth of meaning. It doubtless signifies "so greatly, so much, so dearly." Bishop Sanderson observes: "How much that 'so' contains, no tongue or wit of man can reach: nothing expresses it better to the life than the work itself does."

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

THE FOURFOLD WITNESS

J. C. Ryle

"There is another who bears witness of me, and I know that the witness which he witnesses of me is true. You have sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth . . . But I have a greater witness than John's; for the works which the Father has given me to finish--the very works that I do--bear witness of me that the Father has sent me. And the Father himself, who sent me, has testified of me . . . You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me." (John 5:32-39)

In these verses of John's gospel, we see the proof of our Lord Jesus Christ being the promised Messiah, set forth before the Jews in one view. Four different witnesses are brought forward, four kinds of evidence are offered: His Father in heaven, John the Baptist, the miraculous works He had done, and the Scriptures which the Jews professed to honor. Each and all are named by our Lord as testifying that He was the Christ, the Son of God. Hard must those hearts have been which could hear such testimony and yet remain unmoved! But it only proves the truth of the old saying that unbelief does not arise so much from lack of evidence, as from lack of will to believe.

Let us observe for one thing in this passage, *the honor Christ puts on His faithful SERVANTS*. See how He speaks of John the Baptist. "He bore witness of the truth"--"He was a burning and a shining light." John had probably passed away from his earthly labors when these words were spoken. He had been persecuted, imprisoned, and put to death by Herod with none interfering, none trying to prevent his murder. But this murdered disciple was not forgotten by his Divine Master. If no one else remembered him, Jesus did. He had honored Christ, and Christ honored him.

These things ought not to be overlooked. They are written to teach us that Christ cares for all His believing people and never forgets them. Forgotten and despised by the world, perhaps, they are never forgotten by their Savior. He knows where they dwell, and what their trials are. A book of remembrance is written for them. "Their tears are all in His bottle." (Psalm 56:8.) Their names are engraved on the palms of His hands. He notices all they do for Him in this evil world, though they think it not worth notice, and He will confess it one day publicly, before His Father and the holy angels. He that bore witness to John the Baptist never changes. Let believers remember this. In their worst estate they may boldly say with David, "I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinks upon me."

Let us observe, for another thing, *the honor Christ puts upon MIRACLES, as an evidence of His being the Messiah*. He says, "The works which the Father has given me . . . bear witness of me that the Father has sent me." The miracles of the Lord receive far less attention, in the present day, as proofs of His Divine mission than they ought to do. Too many regard them with a silent incredulity, as things which, not having seen, they cannot be expected to care for. Not a few openly avow that they do not believe in the possibility of such things as miracles, and would like to strike them out of the Bible as weak stories, which, like burdensome lumber, should be cast overboard in order to lighten the ship. But, after all, there is no getting over the fact that in the days when our Lord was upon earth, his miracles produced an immense effect on the minds of men. They aroused attention to him who worked them. They excited inquiry, if they did not

convert. They were so many, so public, and so incapable of being explained away, that our Lord's enemies could only say that they were done by satanic agency. That they were *done*, they could not deny. "This man," they said, "does many miracles" (John 11:47). The facts which wise men pretend to deny now, no one pretended to deny eighteen hundred years ago.

Five things should always be noted about our Lord's miracles. (1) Their number: they were not a few only, but very many indeed. (2) Their greatness: they were not little, but mighty interferences with the ordinary course of nature. (3) Their publicity: they were generally not done in a corner, but in open day and before many witnesses, and often before enemies. (4) Their character: they were almost always works of love, mercy, and compassion; helpful and beneficial to man and not mere barren exhibitions of power. (5) Their direct appeal to men's senses: they were visible and would bear any examination. The difference between them and the boasted miracles of the Church of Rome, on all these points, is striking and instructive.

Let the enemies of the Bible take our Lord's last and greatest miracle--his own resurrection from the dead--and disprove it if they can. When they have done that, it will be time to consider what they say about miracles in general. They have never answered the evidence of it yet, and they never will. Let the friends of the Bible not be moved by objections against miracles until that one miracle has been fairly disposed of. If that is proved unassailable, they need not care much for quibbling arguments against other miracles. If Christ did really rise from the dead by His own power, there is none of His mighty works which man need hesitate to believe.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *the honor that Christ puts upon the SCRIPTURES*. He refers to them, in concluding his list of evidences, as the great witnesses to him. "Search the Scriptures," he says. "These are they which testify of me." The Scriptures of which our Lord speaks are, of course, the Old Testament. And his words show the important truth which too many are apt to overlook, that every part of our Bible is meant to teach us about Christ. Christ is not merely in the Gospels and Epistles. Christ is to be found directly and indirectly in the Law, the Psalms, and the Prophets. In the promises to Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David--in the types and emblems of the ceremonial law--in the predictions of Isaiah and the other prophets--Jesus, the Messiah, is everywhere to be found in the Old Testament.

How is it that men see these things so little? The answer is plain. They do not "search the Scriptures." They do not dig into that wondrous mine of wisdom and knowledge, and seek to become acquainted with its contents. Simple, regular reading of the Bible is the grand secret of establishment in the faith. Ignorance of the Scriptures is the root of all error.

And now what will men believe, if they do not believe the Divine mission of Christ? Great indeed is the obstinacy of infidelity. A cloud of witnesses testify that Jesus was the Son of God. To talk of lacking evidence is childish folly. The plain truth is, that the chief seat of unbelief is the heart. Many do not wish to believe, and therefore remain unbelievers.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 17

SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

J. C. Ryle

"If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority . . . I did one work, and you all marvel. Moses therefore gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath, so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with Me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (John 7:17-24)

We learn, first, in this passage, that honest obedience to God's will is one way to obtain clear spiritual knowledge. Our Lord says, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." The English language fails to give the full force of the Greek. It is literally, "If any man is willing to do--has a mind and desire and inclination to do--God's will." The principle laid down is one of immense importance. Clear knowledge depends greatly on honest obedience, and the distinct views of Divine truth cannot be expected unless we try to practice such things as we know. Living up to our light, we shall have more light. Striving to do the few things we know, we shall find the eyes of our understanding enlightened and shall know more.

Those greatly err who profess to be waiting until their mental difficulties are removed before they become decided Christians. They must change their plan. They must understand that knowledge comes through humble obedience as well as through the intellect. Let them begin by honestly doing God's will, as far as they know that will, and in so doing they will find their minds enlightened.

We learn, furthermore, that God tests men's sincerity by making obedience part of the process by which religious knowledge is obtained. Are we really willing to do God's will so far as we know it? If we are, God will take care that our knowledge is increased. Bishop Hall paraphrases the text as follows: "If any man shall, with a simple and honest heart, yield himself over to do the will of my Father, according to the measure of what he knows, God shall encourage and bless that man with further light."

We learn also the great principle on which many will be condemned at the last day: they did not live up to their light. They did not use such knowledge as they possessed, and so were left in darkness and dead in sins. There is probably not one in a thousand among unconverted people who does not know far better than he practices. Such men surely, if lost, will have no one to blame but themselves!

From this passage we learn the danger of forming a hasty judgment. The Jews at Jerusalem were ready to condemn our Lord as a sinner against the law of Moses, because He had done a miracle of healing on the Sabbath day (the miracle at the pool of Bethesda). Our Lord argues as follows: "Even among yourselves you circumcise a child on the Sabbath day when it happens to be the eighth day after his birth, in order that the law of circumcision (which your great lawgiver, Moses, sanctioned and reordained) should not be broken. You thus admit the entire principle that there is some work which may be done on the Sabbath day. Is it then just and fair to be angry with Me, because I have done a far greater work to a man on the Sabbath than that of

circumcision? I have not wounded his body by circumcision, but made him perfectly whole. It was an act of necessity and mercy, and therefore an act as lawful to be done as circumcision. In appearance, the Sabbath was broken. In reality, it was not broken at all. Do not hastily condemn an action, such as this, without looking below the surface."

The principle here laid down is one of vast importance. Nothing is so common as to judge--either too favorably or too unfavorably--people and their actions merely by looking at the outward appearance. We are apt to form hasty opinions of others, either for good or evil, on very insufficient grounds. We pronounce some men to be good and others to be bad, some to be godly and others to be ungodly, without anything but appearance to aid our decision. We should do well to remember our blindness, and to keep in mind this text. The bad are not always so bad, nor the good always so good, as they appear. A potsherd may be covered over with gilding and look valuable. A nugget of gold may be covered with dirt and look like worthless rubbish. One man's work may look good at first, yet by-and-by, turn out to have been done from the basest motives. Another man's work may look very questionable at first, and yet at last may prove Christ-like and truly godly.

May the Lord deliver us from rashly judging by appearances!

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 18

TWO DIFFERENT RESURRECTIONS

J. C. Ryle

***"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the grave will hear his voice and come forth--those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29)**

These words contain one of the most distinct statements in Scripture of that great truth--the resurrection of the dead. It shall be universal and not confined to a few only. "All" in the graves shall come forth, whether old or young, rich or poor. It shall take place at Christ's command and bidding. His "voice" shall be the call that shall summon the dead from their graves. There shall be a distinction of those who rise again into two classes. Some shall rise to glory and happiness, to what is called a "resurrection of life." Some shall rise to be lost and ruined forever, to what is called a "resurrection of damnation." The doings of men shall be the test by which their final state shall be decided. "Life" shall be the portion of those that have "done good," and "damnation" the portion of those that have "done evil," in the resurrection day.

This passage condemns those who fancy that this world is all, and that this life ends everything, and that the grave is the conclusion. They are awfully mistaken. There is a resurrection and a life to come.

This passage condemns those who try to persuade us in the present day that there is no future punishment, no hell, no condemnation for the wicked in the world to come; that the love of God is lower than hell; that God is too merciful and compassionate to punish anyone. There is a resurrection, we are told, of damnation.

This passage condemns those who try to make out that the resurrection is the peculiar privilege of believers and saints, and that the wicked will be punished by complete annihilation. Both here and in Acts 24:15 we are distinctly told that both bad and good shall rise again. (In St. Paul's famous chapter about the resurrection, 1 Cor. 15, the resurrection of believers only is treated of.)

This passage condemns those who try to make out that men's lives and conduct are of little importance so long as they profess to have faith and to believe in Christ. Christ himself tells us expressly that the "doings" of men, whether good or evil, will be the evidence that shall decide whether they rise again to glory or to condemnation.

Musculus remarks that the goodness which God requires of us is not such as begins in the next world only, after the resurrection. We must have it now, and it must precede the time of judgment. It is not said, "some shall rise again that they may be made good and partakers of life," but, "they that have done good shall come forth to a resurrection of life." We should take care to be such in this life as we desire to be found in the day of judgment. He also remarks that our Lord does not say it is "those who have known or talked what is good," but "those who have actually done good" who shall come forth to a resurrection of life. Only those will be found to have "done good" who are God's elect--born again, and true believers. Nothing but true faith will bear the fruit of good works.

Calvin remarks that our Lord is not here speaking of the cause of salvation, but of the marks of the saved. That one great mark which distinguishes the elect from the reprobate is good doing.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES' FEET

J. C. Ryle

"Then he came to Simon Peter. And Peter said to him, Lord, are you washing my feet? Jesus answered and said to him, What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this . . . So when he had washed their feet, taken his garments, and sat down again, he said to them, Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." (John 13: 6-15)

The verses we have now read conclude the story of our Lord's washing the feet of his disciples the night before he was crucified. The wonderful condescension of Christ in doing such a menial action can hardly fail to strike any reader. We should notice the plain practical lesson which lies upon its surface. The Lord says, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."

Humility is evidently one part of the lesson. If the only begotten Son of God, the King of kings, did not think it beneath him to do the humblest work of a servant, there is nothing which his disciples should think themselves too great or too good to do. No sin is so offensive to God and so injurious to the soul as pride. No grace is so commended as humility. It would be well for the Church if this very simple truth was more remembered and real humility was not so rare. Perhaps there is no sight so displeasing in God's eyes as a self-conceited, self-satisfied, self-contented, stuck-up professor of religion.

Love is manifestly the other part of the great practical lesson. Our Lord would have us love others so much that we should delight to do anything that can promote their happiness. We ought to rejoice in doing kindnesses, even in little things. We ought to count it a pleasure to lessen sorrow and multiply joy, even when it costs us some self-sacrifice and self-denial. We ought to love every child of Adam so well, that if in the least trifle we can do anything to make him more happy and comfortable, we should be glad to do it. This was the mind of the Master, and this the ruling principle of his conduct upon earth.

The lesson before us may seem a very simple one; but its importance can never be overrated. Humility and love are precisely the graces which the men of the world can understand, if they do not comprehend doctrines. They are graces about which there is no mystery, and they are within reach of all classes. The poorest and most ignorant Christian can find occasion each day for practicing love and humility. If we would do good to the world, and if we would make our calling and election sure, let us never forget our Lord's example in this passage. Like him, let us be humble and loving toward all.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

SANCTIFICATION

(Part 1)

J. C. Ryle

"Sanctify them through Thy truth."

John 17:17

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

I Thessalonians. 4:3

Sanctification is a subject of the utmost importance to our souls. If the Bible be true, it is certain that unless we are "sanctified," we shall not be saved. In the first place, let us consider the *nature of sanctification*. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of a "sanctified" man? I shall lay before my readers a series of connected propositions or statements, drawn from Scripture, which I think will be found useful in defining the exact nature of sanctification.

1. It is the invariable result of that vital union with Christ which true faith gives to a Christian. "He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit." The branch that bears no fruit is no living branch of the vine. The union with Christ that produces no effect on heart and life is a mere formal union, worthless before God.

2. It is the outcome and inseparable consequence of regeneration. He that is born again and made a new creature receives a new nature and a new principle; he always lives a new life. In a word, where there is no holy life, there is no new birth.

3. It is the only certain evidence of that indwelling of the Holy Spirit which is essential to salvation. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His." The Spirit never lies dormant and idle within the soul. He always makes his presence known by the fruit he causes to be borne in heart, character, and life. We may depend on it as a positive certainty, that where there is no holy living, there is no Holy Ghost.

4. It is the only sure mark of God's election. It is not given to us to study the pages of the Book of Life and see if our names are there. But if there is one thing clearly and plainly laid down about election, it is this: Elect men and women may be known and distinguished by holy lives. He that boasts of being one of God's elect while willfully and habitually living in sin is only deceiving himself.

5. It will always be seen. A truly sanctified person may be so clothed with humility that he can see in himself nothing but infirmity and defects. But others will always see in him a tone, taste, character, and habit of life unlike that of other men. The very idea of a man being "sanctified" while no holiness can be seen in his life is flat nonsense.

6. It is a thing for which every believer is responsible. Believers are eminently and peculiarly responsible and under a special obligation to live holy lives. They are not as others--dead, blind, and unrenewed. They are alive unto God and have light, knowledge, and a new principle within them. Whose fault is it if they are not holy, but their own? God, who has given them grace, a new heart, and a new nature, has deprived them of all excuse if they do not live for his praise. This is a point which is far too often forgotten.

7. It admits of growth and degrees. A man may climb from one step to another in holiness and be far more sanctified at one period of his life than another. If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree, it is this: That they see more, know more, feel more, do more, repent more, and believe more as they get on in spiritual life and in proportion to the closeness of their walk with God.

8. It depends greatly on a diligent use of Scriptural means. I have in view Bible reading, private prayer, regular attendance at public worship, regular hearing of God's Word, and regular reception of the Lord's Supper. No one who is careless about such things must ever expect to make much progress in sanctification. I can find no record of any eminent saint who ever neglected them. Our God is a God who works by means, and he will never bless the soul of that man who pretends to be so high and spiritual that he can get on without them.

9. It does not prevent man from having a great deal of inward spiritual conflict. By conflict I mean struggle within the heart between the old nature and the new, which are to be found together in every believer. A deep sense of that struggle and a vast amount of mental discomfort from it are no proof that a man is not sanctified. Rather, I believe they are healthy symptoms of our condition and prove that we are not dead, but alive. A true Christian is one who has not only peace of conscience, but war within. The heart of the best Christian, even at his best, is a field occupied by two rival camps.

10. It cannot justify a man, yet it pleases God. The holiest actions of the holiest saint that ever lived are all, more or less, full of defects and imperfections. To suppose that such actions can stand the severity of God's judgment, atone for sin, and merit heaven is simply absurd. For all this, however, the Bible distinctly teaches that the holy actions of a sanctified man, although imperfect, are pleasing in the sight of God. "With such sacrifices God is well pleased." (Heb. 13:16)

11. It will be found absolutely necessary as a witness to our character in the great day of judgment. It will be utterly useless to plead that we believed in Christ unless our faith has had some sanctifying effect and been seen in our lives. Evidence will be the one thing wanted when the great white throne is set, when the books are opened, when the graves give up their tenants, when the dead are arraigned before the bar of God. Without some evidence that our faith in Christ was real and genuine, we shall only rise again to be condemned. He that supposes works are of no importance, because they cannot justify us, is a very ignorant Christian.

12. Lastly, sanctification is absolutely necessary in order to train and prepare us for heaven. Heaven is essentially a holy place; its inhabitants are all holy, its occupations are all holy. To be really happy in heaven, it is clear and plain that we must be somewhat trained and made ready while we are on earth. We must be saints before we die if we are to be saints afterward in glory. What could an unsanctified man do in heaven, if by any chance he got there? No man can possibly be happy in a place where he is not in his element, and where all around him is not congenial to his tastes, habits, and character.

I lay down these twelve propositions about sanctification with a firm persuasion that they are true, and I ask all who read these pages to ponder them well.

Holiness

Day 21

SANCTIFICATION

(Conclusion)

J. C. Ryle

"Sanctify them through Thy truth."

John 17:17

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification."

I Thessalonians. 4:3

I now proceed to consider the visible evidence of sanctification. In a word, what are the visible marks of a sanctified man? What may we expect to see in him?

1. True sanctification does not consist in talk about religion. This is a point that ought never to be forgotten. People hear so much of Gospel truth that they contract an unholy familiarity with its words and phrases. Sometimes they talk so fluently about its doctrines that you might think them true Christians. In fact, it is sickening and disgusting to hear the cool and flippant language that many pour out about conversion while they are notoriously serving sin or living for the world.

2. True sanctification does not consist in temporary religious feelings. Mission services and revival meetings attract great attention and produce a great sensation, but these things have attendant dangers as well as advantages. Wherever wheat is sown, the devil is sure to sow tares. Many, it may be feared, appear moved and touched, roused under the preaching of the Gospel, while in reality their hearts are not changed at all. A kind of animal excitement from the contagion of seeing others weeping, rejoicing, or affected is the true account of their case. Let us urge everyone who exhibits new interest in religion to be content with nothing short of the deep, solid, sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost. Better a thousand times to begin more slowly and continue in the word steadfastly than to begin in a hurry, without counting the cost, and by and by look back and return to the world. I declare I know no state of soul more dangerous than to imagine we are born again and sanctified by the Holy Ghost because we have picked up a few religious feelings.

3. True sanctification does not consist in outward formalism and external devoutness. This is an enormous delusion, but unhappily a very common one. Thousands imagine true holiness is to be seen in constant attendance at Church services, reception of the Lord's Supper, observance of fasts and saints' days, multiplied bowings and gestures during public worship, self-imposed austerities and petty self-denials, wearing peculiar dresses, and the use of pictures and crosses. I am afraid that in many cases this external religiousness is made a substitute for inward holiness and am quite certain that it falls utterly short of sanctification of heart.

4. Sanctification does not consist in retirement from our place in life and the renunciation of our social duties. Hundreds of hermits have buried themselves in some wilderness, and thousands of men and women have shut themselves up within the walls of monasteries and convents under the vain idea that by so doing they would escape sin and become eminently holy. They have forgotten that no bolts and bars can keep the devil out and that, wherever we go, we carry that root of all evil--our own hearts. True holiness does not make a Christian evade difficulties but face and overcome them. Christ would have his people show that his grace is not a mere hothouse plant, which can only thrive under shelter, but a strong hardy thing which can flourish in every

relation of life.

5. Sanctification does not consist in the occasional performance of right actions. It is the habitual working of a new heavenly principle within, which runs through all a man's daily conduct both in great things and in small. A true saint, like Hezekiah, will be whole-hearted.

6. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual respect to God's law and habitual effort to live in obedience to it as the rule of life. He that pretends to be a saint while he sneers at the Ten Commandments and thinks nothing of lying, hypocrisy, swindling, ill-temper, slander, drunkenness, and breach of the seventh commandment, is under a fearful delusion. He will find it hard to prove that he is a "saint" in the last day!

7. Genuine sanctification will show itself in a habitual endeavor to do Christ's will and to live by his practical precepts. These precepts are to be found scattered everywhere throughout the four Gospels, and especially in the Sermon on the Mount. He that supposes they were spoken without the intention of promoting holiness and that he need not attend to them in his daily life, is little better than a lunatic. At any rate, he is a grossly ignorant person.

8. Genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the active graces which our Lord so beautifully exemplified, especially the grace of charity. "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another." A sanctified man will try to do good in the world and to lessen the sorrow and increase the happiness of all around him. He will aim to be like his Master, full of kindness and love to everyone; and this not in word only, but by deeds, actions, and self-denying works, as he has opportunity.

9. Lastly, genuine sanctification will show itself in habitual attention to the passive graces of Christianity. By these I mean those graces which are specially shown in submission to the will of God and in bearing and forbearing toward one another. This is the one piece of profession which the Lord's prayer requires us to make: "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." This is the point which occupies one third of the list of the fruits of the Spirit, supplied by St. Paul. Nine are named and three of these--longsuffering, gentleness, and meekness--are unquestionably passive graces. The passive graces are no doubt harder to attain than the active ones, but they are precisely those that have the greatest influence on the world. People who are habitually giving way to peevish and cross tempers in daily life, are constantly sharp with their tongues, are disagreeable to all around them, who are spiteful, vindictive, revengeful, and malicious, know little about sanctification.

What practical reflections should be raised in our minds from the above? For one thing, let us all awake to a sense of the perilous state of many professing Christians. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Without sanctification, there is no salvation. For another thing, let us make sure work of our own condition and never rest until we feel and know that we are "sanctified" ourselves. What are our tastes, choices, liking, and inclinations? Are we sanctified or not? If not, the fault is all our own.

Let us never be ashamed of making much of sanctification and contending for a high standard of holiness. While some are satisfied with a miserably low degree of attainment and others are not ashamed to live without any holiness at all, let us stand fast and follow after eminent holiness and recommend it boldly to others. Whatever others may say, let us be convinced that holiness is happiness, and that the man who gets through life most comfortably is the sanctified man. They

have solid comforts which the world can neither give nor take away. It was said by One who cannot lie, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Holiness

Day 22

THE DEATH OF CHRIST

J. C. Ryle

"And when the sixth hour had come, darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is translated, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And when some of the bystanders heard it, they began saying, Behold, he is calling for Elijah. And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave him a drink, saying, Let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom." (Mark 15:33-38)

We have in these verses the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. All deaths are solemn events. Nothing in the whole history of a man is so important as his end. But never was there a death of such solemn moment as that which is now before us. In the instant that our Lord drew his last breath, the work of atonement for a world's sin was accomplished. The ransom for sinners was at length paid. The kingdom of heaven was thrown fully open to all believers. All the solid hope that mortal men enjoy about their souls may be traced to Jesus giving up the ghost on the cross.

Let us observe, in these verses, the visible signs and wonders which accompanied our Lord's death. St. Mark mentions two in particular which demand our attention. One is the darkening of the sun for the space of three hours. The other is the rending of the veil which divided the holy of holies from the holy place in the temple. Both were miraculous events. Both had, no doubt, a deep meaning about them. Both were calculated to arrest the attention of the whole multitude assembled at Jerusalem. The darkness would strike even thoughtless Gentiles, like Pilate and the Roman soldiers. The rent veil would strike even Annas and Caiaphas and their unbelieving companions. There were probably few houses in Jerusalem that evening in which men would not say, "We have heard and seen strange things today."

What did the miraculous darkness teach? It taught the exceeding wickedness of the Jewish nation. They were actually crucifying their own Messiah and slaying their own King. The sun itself hid its face at the sight. It taught the exceeding sinfulness of sin in the eyes of God. The Son of God himself must needs be left without the cheering light of day when he became sin for us and carried our transgressions.

What did the miraculous rending of the veil mean? It taught the abolition and termination of the whole Jewish law of ceremonies. It taught that the way into the holiest of all was now thrown open to all mankind by Christ's death. It taught that Gentiles as well as Jews might now draw nigh to God with boldness through Jesus the one High Priest, and that all barriers between man and God were forever cast down.

May we never forget the practical lesson of the rent veil. To attempt to revive the Jewish ceremonial in the Church of Christ by returning to altars, sacrifices, and a priesthood is nothing better than closing up again the rent veil and lighting a candle at noonday.

May we never forget the practical lesson of the miraculous darkness. It should lead our minds on to that blackness of darkness which is reserved for all obstinate unbelievers. The darkness endured by our blessed Surety on the cross was only for three hours. The chains of darkness

which shall bind all who reject his atonement and die in sin shall be forevermore.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, how truly and really our Lord Jesus Christ was made a curse for us and bore our sins. We see it strikingly brought out in those marvelous words which he used at the ninth hour, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It would be useless to pretend to fathom all the depth of meaning which these words contain. They imply an amount of mental suffering such as we are unable to conceive. The agony of some of God's holiest servants has been occasionally very great under an impression of God's favor being withdrawn from them. What then may we suppose was the agony of the holy Son of God when all the sin of all the world was laid upon his head, when he felt himself reckoned guilty though without sin, when he felt his Father's countenance turned away from him? The agony of that season must have been something past understanding. It is a high thing; we cannot attain to a comprehension of it. We may believe it, but we cannot explain and find it out to perfection.

One thing, however, is very plain, and that is the impossibility of explaining these words at all except we receive the doctrine of Christ's atonement and substitution for sinners. To suppose, as some dare to do, that Jesus was nothing more than a man or that his death was only a great example of self-sacrifice, makes this dying cry of his utterly unintelligible. It makes him appear less patient and calm in a dying hour than many a martyr or even than some heathen philosophers. One explanation alone is satisfactory. That explanation is the mighty scriptural doctrine of Christ's vicarious sacrifice and substitution for us on the cross. He uttered his dying cry under the heavy pressure of a world's sin laid upon him and imputed to him.

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, that it is possible to be forsaken of God for a time and yet to be loved by him. We need not doubt this, when we read our Lord's dying words on the cross. We hear him saying to his Father, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" and yet addressing him as "my God." We know too, that our Lord was only forsaken for a season, and that even when forsaken he was the beloved Son in whom, both in his suffering and doing, the Father was "well pleased."

There is deep experimental instruction in this which deserves the notice of all true Christians. No doubt there is a sense in which our Lord's feeling of being forsaken was peculiar to himself, since he was suffering for our sins and not for his own. But still after making this allowance, there remains the great fact that Jesus was for a time forsaken of the Father and yet for all that was the Father's beloved Son. As it was with the great head of the church, so it may be in a modified sense with his members. They too, though chosen and beloved of the Father, may sometimes feel God's face turned away from them. They too, sometimes from illness of body, sometimes from peculiar affliction, sometimes for carelessness of walk, sometimes from God's sovereign will to draw them nearer to himself, may be constrained to cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

It becomes believers who feel forsaken to learn from our Lord's experience not to give way to despair. No doubt they ought not to be content with their position. They ought to search their own hearts and see whether there is not some secret thing there which causes their consolations to be small. But let them not write bitter things against themselves and hastily conclude that they are cast off forever, or are self-deceivers and have no grace at all. Let them still wait on the Lord and say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." Let them remember the words of Isaiah and David, "Who is among you that fears the Lord, that walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord and rely upon his God." "Why are you cast

down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him."

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 23

COUNTING THE COST

J. C. Ryle

"Which of you, intending to build a house, sits not down first and counts the cost?"

Luke 14:28

The text which heads this page is one of great importance. Few are the people who are not often obliged to ask themselves, "What does it cost?" There is one subject on which it is especially important to count the cost. That subject is the salvation of our souls. What does it cost to be a true Christian?

Let there be no mistake about my meaning. I am not examining what it costs to save a Christian's soul. I know well that it costs nothing less than the blood of the Son of God to provide an atonement and to redeem man from hell. We "are bought with a price." The point I want to consider is another one altogether. It is what a man must be ready to give up if he wishes to be saved. It is the amount of sacrifice a man must submit to if he intends to serve Christ.

I grant freely that it costs little to be a mere outward Christian. A man who only attends a place of worship on Sunday and is tolerably moral during the week has gone as far as thousands around him ever go in religion. All this is cheap and easy work; it entails no self-denial or self-sacrifice. If this is saving Christianity that will take us to heaven when we die, we must alter the description of the way of life and write, "Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to heaven!"

Let me try to show precisely and particularly what it costs to be a true Christian. Let us suppose that a man is disposed to take service with Christ and feels drawn and inclined to follow him. Let us suppose that some affliction, some sudden death, or an awakening sermon has stirred his conscience and made him feel the value of his soul and desire to be a true Christian. No doubt there is everything to encourage him. His sins may be freely forgiven, however many and great. His heart may be completely changed, however cold and hard. Christ and the Holy Spirit, mercy and grace, are all ready for him. But still he should count the cost. Let us see particularly, one by one, the things that his religion will cost him.

First, it will cost him his self-righteousness. He must cast away all pride, high thoughts, and conceit of his own goodness. He must be content to go to heaven as a poor sinner saved only by free grace and owing all to the merit and righteousness of another. He must be willing to give up all trust in his own morality, respectability, praying, Bible-reading, church-going, and sacrament-receiving, and trust in nothing but Jesus Christ.

Second, it will cost a man his sins. He must be willing to give up every habit and practice which is wrong in God's sight. He must set his face against it, quarrel with it, break off from it, fight with it, crucify it, and labor to keep it under, whatever the world around him may say or think. He must count all sins as his deadly enemies and hate every false way. They may struggle hard with him every day and sometimes almost get the mastery over him, but he must never give way to them. He must keep up a perpetual war with his sins.

Third, it will cost a man his love of ease. He must take pains and trouble if he means to run a

successful race toward heaven. He must daily watch and stand on his guard, like a soldier on enemy's ground. He must take heed to his behavior every hour of the day, in every company, and in every place whether public or private, among strangers as well as at home. He must be careful over his time, tongue, temper, thoughts, imaginations, motives, and his conduct in every relation of life. He must be diligent about his prayers, Bible reading, and his use of Sundays with all their means of grace. This sounds hard, for there is nothing we naturally dislike so much as "trouble" about our religion. We hate trouble. We secretly wish we could have a "vicarious" Christianity and could be good by proxy and have everything done for us. Anything that requires exertion and labor is entirely against the grain of our hearts.

In the last place, it will cost a man the favor of the world. He must be content to be thought ill of by man if he pleases God. He must count it no strange thing to be mocked, ridiculed, slandered, persecuted, and even hated. He must not be surprised to find his opinions and practices in religion despised and held up to scorn. He must submit to be thought by many a fool, an enthusiast, a fanatic, and to have his words perverted and his actions misrepresented.

I grant that it costs much to be a true Christian. But who in his sound senses can doubt that it is worth any cost to have the soul saved? When the ship is in danger of sinking, the crew think nothing of casting overboard the precious cargo. When a limb is mortified, a man will submit to any severe operation, even amputation, to save his life. Surely a Christian should be willing to give up anything which stands between him and heaven.

In conclusion, let every reader think seriously whether his religion costs him anything at present. Very likely it costs you nothing. Very probably it neither costs you trouble, time, thought, care, pains, self-denial, conflict, nor working of any kind. Now mark what I say: such a religion as this will never save your soul.

If you want stirring motives for serving God, think what it cost to provide a salvation for your soul. Think how the Son of God left heaven and became man, suffered on the cross, and lay in the grave to pay your debt to God and work out for you a complete redemption. Think of all this and learn that it is no light matter to possess an immortal soul.

If any reader feels that he has counted the cost and taken up the cross, I bid him persevere and press on. The time is very short. A few more years of watching and praying, a few more tossings on the sea of this world, a few more deaths and changes, a few more winters and summers and all will be over. We shall have fought our last battle and shall need to fight no more. The presence and company of Christ will make amends for all we suffer here below. Then we shall marvel that we made so much of our cross and thought so little of our crown.

Holiness

GROWTH
J. C. Ryle

"Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."
2 Peter 3:18

The subject of the text which heads this page is one which I dare not omit in this volume about holiness. It is one that ought to be deeply interesting to every true Christian. It naturally raises the question, "Do we grow in grace?" Let us consider the marks by which growth in grace may be known.

One mark of growth in grace is increased humility. The man whose soul is "growing," feels his own sinfulness and unworthiness more every year. He is ready to say with Job, "I am vile," and with Isaiah, "I am a man of unclean lips." The nearer he draws to God and the more he sees of God's holiness and perfections, the more thoroughly is he sensible of his own countless imperfections.

Another mark of growth in grace is increased faith and love toward our Lord Jesus Christ. The man whose soul is growing finds more in Christ to rest upon every year and rejoices more that he has such a Savior. He sees a thousand things in Christ which he never dreamed of at first. He discovers a suitableness in Christ for the needs of his soul of which the half had not been known.

Another mark is increased holiness of life and conversation. The man whose soul is growing gets more dominion over sin, the world, and the devil every year. He becomes more careful about his temper, words, and actions. He is more watchful over his conduct in every relation of life. He strives more to be conformed to the image of Christ in all things and to follow him as his example. He is not content with old attainments and former grace. He thirsts and longs to have a will more entirely in unison with God's will.

Another mark is increased spirituality of taste and mind. The man whose soul is growing takes more interest in spiritual things every year. He does not neglect his duty in the world, but the things he loves best are spiritual things. The way, fashion, amusements and recreations of the world have a continually decreasing place in his heart. He does not condemn them as downright sinful nor say that those who have anything to do with them are going to hell. He only feels that they have a constantly diminishing hold on his own affections and gradually seem smaller and more trifling in his eyes. Spiritual companions, spiritual occupations, and spiritual conversation appear of ever-increasing value to him.

Another mark is increased love. The man whose soul is growing is more full of love every year--love to all men, but especially toward the brethren. His love will show itself actively in a growing disposition to do kindnesses, take trouble for others, be good-natured to everybody, be generous, sympathizing, thoughtful, tender-hearted, and considerate. It will show itself passively in a growing disposition to be meek and patient toward all men, to put up with provocation and not stand upon rights, to bear and forbear much rather than quarrel. A growing soul will try to put the best construction on other people's conduct. There is no surer mark of backsliding and falling off in grace than an increasing disposition to find fault, pick holes, and see weak points in others.

One more mark of growth in grace is increased zeal and diligence in trying to do good to souls. The man who is really growing will take greater interest in the salvation of sinners every year. Missions at home and abroad, efforts of every kind to spread the Gospel, attempts of any sort to increase religious light and diminish religious darkness will have a greater place in his attention. He will not become weary in well-doing because he does not see every effort succeed. He will just work on, whatever the result may be, and count his work its own reward.

Holiness

Day 25

LOT: A BEACON

J. C. Ryle

"He lingered."

Genesis 19:16

The Holy Scriptures, which were written for our learning, contain beacons as well as patterns. They show us examples of what we should avoid as well as examples of what we should follow. The man who heads this page is set for a beacon to the whole Church of Christ. His character is put before us in the words, "He lingered."

Who is this man that lingered? He is the nephew of faithful Abraham. And when did he linger? The very morning Sodom was to be destroyed. And where did he linger? Within the walls of Sodom itself. And before whom did he linger? Under the eyes of the two angels who were sent to bring him out of the city. Even then "he lingered!"

What was Lot? This is an important point. Many, perhaps, would say that Lot was a bad man, an unconverted man, a child of this world. But Lot was nothing of the kind. He was a true believer, converted, justified, a righteous man. The Holy Ghost has placed the matter beyond controversy by calling him "just" and "righteous" (2 Pet. 2:7,8), and has given us good evidence of the grace that was in him.

One evidence is that he lived in a wicked place, "seeing and hearing" evil all around him, and yet was not wicked himself. He "vexed his soul with the unlawful deeds" he beheld around him. He was wounded, grieved, pained, and hurt at the sight of sin. He "vexed his soul from day to day" and did not at length become cool and lukewarm about sin, as many do. Familiarity and habit did not take off the fine edge of his feelings. Such a one was Lot--a just and righteous man, a man sealed and stamped as an heir of heaven by the Holy Ghost himself.

What does the text tell us about Lot's behavior? The words are astounding: "He lingered." Lot knew the fearful judgment coming down on all within the walls of Sodom. The angels had said plainly, "The Lord has sent us to destroy it." He believed there was danger, for he went to his sons-in-law and warned them to flee. "Up!" he said, "Get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city." He saw the angels of God standing by waiting for him and his family to go forth. He heard their voices ringing in his ears to hasten him: "Arise! Take your wife and your two daughters which are here; lest you be consumed in the iniquity of the city." And yet "he lingered."

As astounding as this may appear at first sight, I fear there are many of the Lord Jesus Christ's people very much like Lot. They appear to know far more than they live up to, see far more than they practice, and yet continue in this state for many years. They hold to Christ and love the truth, yet they are constantly doing things which disappoint the expectations of their ministers and more advanced Christian friends. They believe in heaven, but faint is their longing for it; they believe in hell, but little do they fear it. They love the Lord Jesus, but the work they do for Him is small. They hate the devil but often appear to tempt him to come to them. They know the time is short but live as if it were long. They know they have a race to run, yet they often look like people sitting still. These may be classed under one sweeping description: they are all brothers and sisters of Lot. They linger.

Let us consider the reasons that may account for Lot's lingering. To know the root of a disease is one step toward a remedy.

One thing I observe in Lot is that he made a wrong choice in early life. There was a time when Abraham and Lot lived together. They both became rich and thus could live together no longer. Abraham, in the true spirit of humility and courtesy, gave Lot the choice of the country, when they resolved to part company. And what did Lot do? We are told he saw that the plains of Jordan, near Sodom, were rich, fertile, and well-watered. It was a good land for cattle and full of pastures. It just suited his requirements, and this was the land he chose. It was near the town of Sodom, but he cared not for that. The men of Sodom, who would be his neighbors, were wicked, but it mattered not. They were sinners before God exceedingly, but it made no difference to him. Lot chose by sight and not by faith. He asked no counsel of God to preserve him from mistakes. He looked to the things of time and not to those of eternity. He thought of his worldly profit and not of his soul.

I observe also that Lot mixed with sinners when there was no occasion for his doing so. We are first told that he "pitched his tent toward Sodom." But the next time he is mentioned, we find him actually living in Sodom itself. The Spirit says expressly, "He dwelt in Sodom." He occupied a house in the very streets of that wicked town.

Make a wrong choice in life and settle yourself down unnecessarily in the midst of worldly people, and I know no surer way to damage your own spirituality and go backward about your eternal concerns. This is the way to make the edge of your feeling about sin become blunt and dull. This is the way to give the devil vantage ground in the battle, to tie your arms in fighting, to fetter your legs in running. I call on every reader to mark well what I am saying. If ever you would be safe from "lingering," beware of needless mingling with worldly people. It is not enough that the house is comfortable, the neighborhood pleasant, the living cheap. You must think of your immortal soul. Is the Gospel preached within an easy distance? Remember this in choosing a profession in life. It is not enough that the salary is high and the advantages numerous. Think of your immortal soul. Will you have your Sundays free and be able to have one day in the week for your spiritual business? Gold can be bought at too dear a price.

Let us now inquire what kind of fruit Lot's lingering spirit bore at last. There are not a few who will feel disposed to say, "After all, Lot was saved. He got to heaven. I want no more. If I do but get to heaven, I shall be content." I will always contend that eminent holiness and eminent usefulness are most closely connected, that happiness and following the Lord fully go side by side. If believers will linger, they must not expect to be useful in their day and generation or to be very saintly and Christlike.

Let us mark, then, for one thing, that Lot did no good among the inhabitants of Sodom. He probably lived in Sodom many years. He no doubt had many precious opportunities for speaking of the things of God and trying to turn away souls from sin. But Lot seems to have effected nothing at all. He appears to have had no weight or influence with the people who lived around him. He possessed none of that respect and reverence which even the men of the world will frequently concede to a bright servant of God. Not one righteous person could be found in all of Sodom outside the walls of Lot's home.

Let us mark, for another thing, that Lot helped none of his family, relatives, or connections

toward heaven. There was not one among them all that feared God. His wife left the city in his company, but she did not go far. She had not faith to see the need of such a speedy flight. She looked back in spite of the plainest command not to do so, and was at once turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's two daughters escaped, but only to do the devil's work. They became their father's tempters to wickedness and led him to commit the foulest of sins. In short, Lot was not the means of keeping one soul back from the gates of hell! And I do not wonder. Lingered souls are seen through by their own families, and when they are seen through, they are despised. Their nearest relatives understand inconsistency, if they understand nothing else in religion.

Lot left no evidences behind him when he died. We know but little about him after his flight from Sodom, and all that we do know is unsatisfactory. We are told of the last days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and David, but not one word about Lot. There is a painful silence about his latter end. He seems to go out like an expiring lamp and to leave an ill savor behind him. If we had not been specially told in the New Testament that Lot was "just" and "righteous," I truly believe we should have doubted whether he was a saved soul at all. But I do not wonder at his sad end. Lingered believers will generally reap according as they have sown.

We live in days when a lingering, Lot-like religion abounds. The stream of profession is far broader than it once was but far less deep in many places. To belong to a certain church, to buy popular religious books as fast as they come out, to attend meetings, to be enthusiastic and excited about every new form of sensational religion which crops up--all these are now comparatively easy and common attainments. They require little or no sacrifice. They entail no cross.

But to walk closely with God--to be really spiritually minded, to be distinct from the world in the use of our time, in conversation, in amusements and in dress--is a rare thing. To bear a faithful witness for Christ in all places, to leave a savor of our Master in every society, to be prayerful, humble, unselfish, good-tempered, quiet, easily pleased, charitable, patient, meek, jealously afraid of all manner of sin--these are not common among those who are called true Christians, and, worst of all, the absence of them is not felt and bewailed as it should be.

If you would be useful, if you would be happy, do not be a lingered soul. What do the times demand? The shaking of nations, the overturning of kingdoms. Would you be ready for Christ at his second coming? Would you enjoy strong assurance of your own salvation in the day of sickness and on the bed of death? Would you be useful to the world in your day and generation? Would you draw men from sin to Christ? Would you have a great crown in the day of Christ's appearing and not be the least and smallest star in glory and not find yourself the last and lowest in the kingdom of God? Then do not linger.

Does any reader feel that he is a lingerer? Think not for a moment that your case is past recovery. Think not that there is no hope of revival just because you have been living long in a dry, sleepy, and heavy state of soul. Is not the Lord Jesus Christ an appointed Physician for all spiritual ailments? Doubt not, but earnestly believe that he will yet revive his work within you. Confess your folly and come. Come at once to Christ and linger no more.

Holiness

Day 26

LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

J. C. Ryle

***"But I say unto you that hear, love your enemies, do good to them who hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them who despitefully use you. "* (Luke 6:27,28)**

The teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ, in these verses, is confined to one great subject. That subject is Christian love and charity. Charity, which is the grand characteristic of the Gospel, the bond of perfectness, without which a man is nothing in God's sight, is here fully expounded and strongly enforced. Well would it have been for the Church of Christ if its Master's precept in this passage had been more carefully studied and more diligently observed.

In the first place, our Lord explains the nature and extent of Christian charity. The disciples might ask, Whom are we to love? He bids them, "love your enemies, do good to them that hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you." Their love was to be like his own toward sinners--unselfish, disinterested, and uninfluenced by any hope of return. What was to be the manner of this love? the disciples might ask. It was to be self-sacrificing and self-denying. "Unto him that smites you on the one cheek, offer also the other." "He that takes away your cloak, forbid not to take your coat also." They were to give up much and endure much for the sake of showing kindness and avoiding strife. They were to forego even their rights and submit to wrong rather than awaken angry passions and create quarrels. In this they were to be like their Master--long-suffering, meek, and lowly of heart. Our Lord condemns everything like a revengeful, pugnacious, litigious, or quarrelsome spirit. He enjoins forbearance, patience, and longsuffering under injuries and insults. He would have us concede much, submit to much, and put up with much rather than cause strife. He would have us endure much inconvenience and loss, and even sacrifice some of our just rights rather than have any contention.

In the second place, our Lord lays down a golden principle for the settlement of doubtful cases. He knew well that there will always be occasions when the line of duty toward our neighbor is not clearly defined. He knew how much self-interest and private feelings will sometimes dim our perceptions of right and wrong. He supplies us with a precept for our guidance, in all such cases, of infinite wisdom. It is a precept which even infidels have been compelled to admire: "As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise." To do to others as they do to us and return evil for evil is the standard of the heathen. To behave to others as we should like others to behave to us, whatever their actual behavior may be, this should be the mark at which the Christian should aim. This is to walk in the steps of our blessed Savior. If he had dealt with the world as the world dealt with him, we should all have been ruined forever in hell.

In the third place, our Lord points out to his disciples the necessity of their having a higher standard of duty to their neighbor than the children of this world. He reminds them that to love those who love them and do good to those who do good to them and lend to those of whom they hope to receive, is to act no better than "the sinner" who knows nothing of the Gospel. The Christian must be altogether another style of man. His feelings of love and his deeds of kindness must be like his Master's--free and gratuitous. He must let men see that he loves others from higher principles than the ungodly do, and that his charity is not confined to those from whom he hopes to get something in return. Anybody can show kindness and charity when he hopes to gain something by it. But such charity should never content a Christian. The man who is content with it ought to remember that his practice does not rise an inch above the level of an old Roman

or Greek idolater.

In the fourth place, our Lord shows his disciples that in discharging their duty to their neighbors they should look to the example of God. If they called themselves "children of the Highest," they should consider that their Father is "kind to the unthankful and the evil," and they should learn from him to be merciful, even as he is merciful. The extent of God's unacknowledged mercies to men can never be reckoned up. Every year he pours benefits on millions who do not honor the hand from which they come or thank the giver of them. Yet every year these benefits are continued. "Seed time and harvest, summer and winter, never cease." His mercy endures forever. His loving kindness is unwearied. His compassions fail not. So ought it to be with all who profess themselves to be his children. Thanklessness and ingratitude should not make them slack their hands from works of love and mercy. Like their Father in heaven, they should never be tired of doing good.

In the last place, our Lord assures his disciples that the practice of the high standard of charity he recommends shall bring its own reward. "Judge not," he says, "and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned; forgive, and you shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given unto you." And he concludes with the broad assertion, "With the same measure that you mete withal, shall it be measured to you again." The general meaning of these words appears to be that no man shall ever be a loser, in the long run, by deeds of self-denying charity and patient long-suffering love. At times he may seem to get nothing by his conduct. He may appear to reap nothing but ridicule, contempt, and injury. His kindness may sometimes tempt men to impose on him. His patience and forbearance may be abused. But at the last he will always be found a gainer, and often, very often, a gainer in this life; certainly, most certainly, a gainer in the life to come.

Such is the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ about charity. Few of his sayings are so deeply heart-searching as those we have now been considering. Few passages in the Bible are so truly humbling as these eleven verses. How little of the type of charity which our Lord recommends is to be seen either in the world or in the Church! How common is an angry passionate spirit, a morbid sensitiveness about what is called *honor*, and a readiness to quarrel on the least occasion! How seldom we see men and women who love their enemies and do good hoping for nothing again, and bless those that curse them, and are kind to the unthankful and evil. Truly we are reminded here of our Lord's words, "Narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there be that find it." How happy the world would be if Christ's precepts were strictly obeyed. The chief causes of half the sorrows of mankind are selfishness, strife, unkindness, and lack of charity. Never was there a greater mistake than to suppose that vital Christianity interferes with human happiness. It is not having too much religion but too little that makes people gloomy, wretched, and miserable. Wherever Christ is best known and obeyed, there will always be found most real joy and peace.

Would we know anything by experience of this blessed grace of charity? Then let us seek to be joined to Christ by faith and to be taught and sanctified by his Spirit. Let us understand that real, genuine, self-denying love will never grow from any roots but faith in Christ's atonement and a heart renewed by the Holy Ghost. We shall never make men love one another unless we teach as St. Paul taught, "Walk in love as Christ has loved us." Teaching love on any other principle is, as a general rule, labor in vain.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 27

CHRIST'S COMPASSION

J. C. Ryle

"Now as he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation. Then he went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, It is written, My house is a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." (Luke 19.41-45)

We learn, firstly, how great is the tenderness and compassion of Christ toward sinners. We are told that when he came near Jerusalem for the last time, "He beheld the city and wept over it." He knew well the character of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Their cruelty, their self-righteousness, their stubbornness, their obstinate prejudice against the truth, their pride of heart were not hidden from him. He knew well what they were going to do to himself within a very few days. His unjust judgment, his delivery to the Gentiles, his suffering, his crucifixion, were all spread out distinctly before his mind's eye. And yet knowing all this, our Lord pities Jerusalem! "He beheld the city and wept over it."

We err greatly if we suppose that Christ cares for none but his own believing people. He cares for all. His heart is wide enough to take an interest in all mankind. His compassion extends to every man, woman, and child on earth. He has a love of general pity for the man who is going on still in wickedness, as well as a love of special affection for the sheep who hear his voice and follow him. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. Hardened sinners are fond of making excuses for their conduct. But they will never be able to say that Christ was not merciful, and was not ready to save.

We know but little of true Christianity if we do not feel a deep concern about the souls of unconverted people. A lazy indifference about the spiritual state of others may doubtless save us much trouble. To care nothing whether our neighbors are going to heaven or hell is no doubt the way of the world. But a man of this spirit is very unlike David who said, "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes because men keep not thy law." He is very unlike Paul who said, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart for my brethren." Above all, he is very unlike Christ. If Christ felt tenderly about wicked people, the disciples of Christ ought to feel likewise.

We learn, secondly, from these verses, that there is a religious ignorance which is sinful and blameworthy. We read that our Lord denounced judgments on Jerusalem, "because she knew not the time of her visitation." She might have known that the times of Messiah had fully come, and that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. But she would not know. Her rulers were willfully ignorant. They would not calmly examine evidences and impartially consider great plain facts. Her people would not see "the signs of the times." Therefore judgment was soon to come upon Jerusalem to the uttermost. Her willful ignorance left her without excuse.

The principle laid down by our Lord in this place is deeply important. It contradicts an opinion which is very common in the world. It teaches distinctly that all ignorance is not excusable, and

that when men might know truth but refuse to know it, their guilt is very great in the sight of God. There is a degree of knowledge for which all are responsible, and if from indolence or prejudice we do not attain that knowledge, the lack of it will ruin our souls.

Let us impress this great principle deeply on our own hearts. Let us urge it diligently on others when we speak to them about religion. Let us not flatter ourselves that ignorance will excuse everyone who dies in ignorance and that he will be pardoned because he knew no better. Did he live up to the light he had? Did he use every means for attaining knowledge? Did he honestly employ every help within his reach and search industriously after wisdom? These are grave questions. If a man cannot answer them, he will certainly be condemned in the judgment day. A willful ignorance will never be allowed as a plea in a man's favor. On the contrary, it will rather add to his guilt.

We learn, thirdly, from these verses, that God is sometimes pleased to give men special opportunities and invitations. We are told by our Lord that Jerusalem "knew not the day of her visitation." Jerusalem had a special season of mercy and privilege. The Son of God himself visited her. The mightiest miracles that man had ever seen were wrought around her. The most wonderful preaching that ever was heard was preached within her walls. The days of our Lord's ministry were days of the clearest calls to repentance and faith that any city ever received. They were calls so marked, peculiar, and unlike any previous calls Jerusalem had received that it seemed impossible they should be disregarded. But they were disregarded! And our Lord declares that this disregard was one of Jerusalem's principle sins.

The subject before us is a deep and mysterious one. It requires careful stating and delicate handling lest we should make one scripture contradict another. There seems no doubt that churches, nations, and even individuals are sometimes visited with special manifestations of God's presence and that their neglect of such manifestations is the turning point in their spiritual ruin. Why this should take place in some cases and not in others we cannot tell. Fact, plain facts in history and biography, appear to prove that it is so. The last day will probably show the world that there were seasons in the lives of many who died in sin when God drew very near to them, when conscience was peculiarly alive, when there seemed but a step between them and salvation. Those seasons will probably prove to have been what our Lord calls their "day of visitation." The neglect of such seasons will probably be at last one of the heaviest charges against their souls.

Deep as the subject is, it should teach men one practical lesson. That lesson is the immense importance of not quenching convictions and the workings of conscience. He that resists the voice of conscience may be throwing away his last chance of salvation. That warning voice may be God's "day of visitation." The neglect of it may fill up the measure of a man's iniquity and provoke God to let him alone forever.

We learn, lastly, from these verses, how much Christ disapproves of the profanation of holy things. We read that he cast the buyers and sellers out of the temple and told them that they had made God's house "a den of thieves." He knew how formal and ignorant the ministers of the temple were. He knew how soon the temple and its services were to be destroyed, the veil to be rent, and the priesthood to be ended. But he would have us know that a reverence is due to every place where God is worshiped. The reverence he claimed for the temple was not for the temple as the house of sacrifice, but as "the house of prayer."

Let us remember this conduct and language of our Lord whenever we go to a place of public worship. Christian churches no doubt are not like the Jewish temples. They have neither altars, priesthood, sacrifices, nor symbolic furniture. But they are places where God's word is read, where Christ is present, and where the Holy Ghost works on souls. These facts ought to make us grave, reverent, solemn and decorous, wherever we enter them. The man who behaves as carelessly in a church as he would in an inn or private dwelling has yet much to learn. He has not the "mind of Christ."

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 28

THE WIDOW'S MITES

J. C. Ryle

"And he looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in there two mites. And he said, Of a truth I say unto you that this poor widow has cast in more than they all; for all these have, of their abundance, cast in unto the offerings of God; but she, of her penury, has cast in all the living that she had." (Luke 21:1-4)

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, how keenly our Lord Jesus Christ observes the things that are done upon earth. We read that "He looked up and saw the rich men casting their gifts into the treasury. And he saw also a certain poor widow casting in thither two mites." We might well suppose that our Lord's mind at this season would have been wholly occupied with the things immediately before him. His betrayal, unjust judgment, cross, passion, death, were all close at hand; and he knew it. The approaching destruction of the temple, the scattering of the Jews, the long period of time before his second advent, were all things which were spread before his mind like a picture. It was but a few moments and he spoke of them. And yet at a time like this we find him taking note of all that is going on around him! He thinks it not beneath him to observe the conduct of a "certain poor widow."

Let us remember that the Lord Jesus never changes. The thing that we read of in the passage before us is the thing that is going on all over the world. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place." Nothing is too little to escape his observation. No act is too trifling to be noted down in the book of his remembrance. The same hand that formed the sun, moon, and stars was the hand that formed the tongue of the gnat and the wing of the fly with perfect wisdom. The same eye that sees the council chambers of kings and emperors is the eye that notices all that goes on in the laborer's cottage. "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." He measures littleness and greatness by a very different measure from the measure of man. Events in our own daily life to which we attach no importance are often very grave and serious matters in Christ's sight. Actions and deeds in the weekly history of a poor man, which the great of this world think trivial and contemptible, are often registered as weighty and important in Christ's book. He lives who marked the gift of one "poor widow" as attentively as the gifts of many "rich men."

Let the believer of low degree take comfort in this mighty truth. Let him remember daily that his Master in heaven takes account of everything that is done on earth, and that the lives of cottagers are noticed by him as much as the lives of kings. The acts of a poor believer have as much dignity about them as the acts of a prince. The little contributions to religious objects which the laborer makes out of his scanty earnings are as much valued in God's sight as a ten-thousand pound note from a peer. To know this thoroughly is one great secret of contentment. To feel that Christ looks at what a man is and not at what a man has will help to preserve us from envious and murmuring thoughts. Happy is he who has learned to say with David, "I am poor and needy; but the Lord thinks upon me."

We learn, for another thing, who they are whom Christ reckons most liberal in giving money to religious purposes. We read that he said of her who cast in two mites into the treasury, "She has cast in more than they all. All these of their abundance have cast in unto the offerings of God; but she of her penury has cast in all the living that she had." These words teach us that Christ

looks at something more than the mere amount of men's gifts in measuring their liberality. He looks at the proportion which their gifts bear to their property. He looks at the degree of self-denial which their giving entails upon them. He would have us know that some persons appear to give much to religious purposes who in God's sight give very little, and that some appear to give very little who in God's sight give very much.

The subject before us is peculiarly heart-searching. On no point perhaps do professing Christians come short so much as in the matter of giving money to God's cause. Thousands, it may be feared, know nothing whatever of "giving" as a Christian duty. The little giving that there is, is confined entirely to a select few in the churches. Even among those who give, it may be boldly asserted that the poor generally give far more in proportion to their means than the rich. These are plain facts which cannot be denied. The experience of all who collect for religious societies and Christian charities will testify that they are correct and true.

Let us judge ourselves in this matter of giving that we may not be judged and condemned at the great day. Let it be a settled principle with us to watch against stinginess, and whatever else we do with our money, to give regularly and habitually to the cause of God. Let us remember, that although Christ's work does not depend on our money, yet Christ is pleased to test the reality of our grace by allowing us to help him. If we cannot find it in our hearts to give anything to Christ's cause, we may well doubt the reality of our faith and charity. Let us recollect that our use of the money God has given us will have to be accounted for at the last day. The "Judge of all" will be he who noticed the widow's mite. Our incomes and expenditures will be brought to light before an assembled world. If we prove in that day to have been rich toward ourselves but poor toward God, it would be good if we had never been born. Not least, let us look around the world and ask, Where are the men that were ever ruined by liberal giving to godly purposes, and who ever found himself really poorer by lending to the Lord? We shall find that the words of Solomon are strictly true: "There is that scatters and yet increases; and there is that withholds more than is meet and it tends to poverty."

Finally, let us pray for rich men who as yet know nothing of the luxury of "giving" that their riches may not be their ruin. Hundreds of charitable and religious movements are standing still continually for lack of funds. Great and effectual doors are open to the church of Christ for doing good all over the world, but for lack of money few can be sent to enter in by them. Let us pray for the Holy Ghost to come down on all our congregations and teach all our worshipers what to do with their money. Of all people on earth, none ought to be such liberal givers as Christians. All that they have they owe to the free gift of God. Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Gospel, the Bible, the means of grace, the hope of glory, all are undeserved incomparable gifts which millions of heathen never heard of. The possessors of such gifts ought surely to be "ready to distribute" and "willing to communicate." Freely we have received; freely we ought to give.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

IN BETHANY

J. C. Ryle

"Then, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?' This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, 'Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.' Now a great many of the Jews knew that he was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also." (John 12:1-10)

The chapter we have now begun finishes a most important division of St. John's Gospel. Our Lord's public addresses to the unbelieving Jews of Jerusalem are here brought to an end. After this chapter, St. John records nothing but what was said in private to the disciples.

We see, for one thing, in this passage, what abounding proofs exist of the truth of our Lord's greatest miracles. We read of a supper at Bethany, where Lazarus sat at the table among the guests--Lazarus, who had been publicly raised from the dead after lying four days in the grave. No one could pretend to say that his resurrection was a mere optical delusion and that the eyes of the bystanders must have been deceived by a ghost or vision. Here was the very same Lazarus, after several weeks, sitting among his fellow men with a real material body and eating and drinking real material food. It is hard to understand what stronger evidence of a fact could be supplied. He that is not convinced by such evidence as this may as well say that he is determined to believe nothing at all.

It is a comfortable thought that the very same proofs which exist about the resurrection of Lazarus are the proofs which surround that still mightier fact, the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Was Lazarus seen for several weeks by the people of Bethany, going in and coming out among them? So was the Lord Jesus seen by his disciples. Did Lazarus take material food before the eyes of his friends? So did the Lord Jesus eat and drink before his ascension. No one, in his sober senses, who saw Jesus take "broiled fish and a honeycomb" and eat it before several witnesses would doubt that he had a real body.

We shall do well to remember this. In an age of abounding unbelief and scepticism, we shall find that the resurrection of Christ will bear any weight that we can lay upon it. Just as he placed beyond reasonable doubt the rising again of a beloved disciple within two miles of Jerusalem, so in a very few weeks he placed beyond doubt his own victory over the grave. If we believe that Lazarus rose again, we need not doubt that Jesus rose again also. If we believe that Jesus rose again, we need not doubt the truth of his Messiahship, the reality of his acceptance as our mediator, and the certainty of our own resurrection. Christ has risen indeed, and wicked men may well tremble. Christ has risen from the dead, and believers may well rejoice.

We see, for another thing, in this passage, what unkindness and discouragement Christ's friends sometimes meet with from man. We read that at the supper in Bethany, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed the feet of Jesus with precious ointment and wiped them with the hair of her head. This action was not an uncommon one in Eastern countries where the heat is very great, and the feet exposed to it by wearing sandals are liable to suffer much from dryness and scorching. Nor was this ointment poured on with a stingy hand. She did it so liberally and profusely that "the house was filled with the odor of the ointment." She did it under the influence of a heart full of love and gratitude. She thought nothing too great and good to bestow on such a Savior. Sitting at his feet in days gone by and hearing his words, she had found peace for her conscience and pardon for her sins. At this very moment she saw Lazarus alive and well, sitting by her Master's side. Greatly loved, she thought she could not show too much love in return. Having freely received, she freely gave.

But there were some present who found fault with Mary's conduct and blamed her as guilty of wasteful extravagance. One especially, an apostle, a man of whom better things might have been expected, declared openly that the ointment would have been better employed if it had been sold and the price given to the poor. This carping is a specimen of the way in which wicked men often try to depreciate a good action, and especially in the matter of giving money. The more wicked and graceless people are, the more ready they are to find fault and blame others, seeing no beauty in what they do. The heart which could conceive such thoughts must have had low views of the dignity of Christ's person, and still lower views of our obligations to him. A cold heart and a stingy hand will generally go together.

There are only too many professing Christians of a like spirit in the present day. Myriads of baptized people cannot understand zeal of any sort for the honor of Christ. Tell them of any vast outlay of money to push trade or to advance the cause of science, and they approve of it as right and wise. Tell them of any expense incurred for the preaching of the Gospel at home or abroad, for spreading God's Word, for extending the knowledge of Christ on earth, and they tell you plainly that they think it a waste. They never give a penny to such causes as these and count those people fools who do. Worst of all, they often cover over their own backwardness to help purely Christian causes by a pretended concern for the poor at home.

It is clear from our text that poverty will always exist: "The poor always will be with you." So long as human nature is what it is, some will always be rich and some poor, because some are diligent and some idle, some strong and some weak, and some wise and some foolish. We need never dream that by any arrangement, either civil or ecclesiastical, poverty can ever be entirely prevented. The existence of pauperism is no proof whatever that states are ill-governed or that churches are not doing their duty.

We must never allow ourselves to be moved from "patient continuance in well-doing" by the unkind remarks of such people. It is vain to expect a man to do much for Christ when he has no sense of debt to Christ. We must pity the blindness of our unkind critics and work on. He who pleaded the cause of loving Mary and said, "Let her alone," is sitting at the right hand of God and keeps a book of remembrance. A day is soon coming when a wondering world will see that every cup of cold water given for Christ's sake, as well as every box of precious ointment, was recorded in heaven and has its rewards. In that great day, those who thought that anyone could give too much to Christ will find that it were better if they had never been born.

We see, lastly, in this passage, what desperate hardness and unbelief there is in the heart of

man. Unbelief appears in the chief priests, who "consulted that they might put Lazarus to death." They could not deny the fact of his having been raised again. Living and moving, eating and drinking within two miles of Jerusalem after lying four days in the grave, Lazarus was a witness to the truth of Christ's Messiahship and one whom they could not possibly answer or put to silence. Yet these proud men would not give way. They would rather commit a murder than throw down the arms of rebellion and confess themselves in the wrong. No wonder that the Lord Jesus in a certain place "marveled" at unbelief. Well might he say, in a well-known parable, "If they believe not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

Hardness appears in Judas Iscariot, who, after being a chosen Apostle and a preacher of the kingdom of heaven, turns out at last a thief and a traitor. So long as the world stands, this unhappy man will be a lasting proof of the depth of human corruption. That any one could follow Christ as a disciple for three years, see all his miracles, hear all his teaching, receive at his hand repeated kindnesses, be counted an Apostle and yet prove rotten at heart in the end, appears incredible and impossible! Yet the case of Judas shows plainly that the thing can be. Few things, perhaps, are so little realized as the extent of the fall of man.

Let us thank God if we know anything of faith and can say with all our sense of weakness and infirmity, "I believe." Let us pray that our faith may be real, true, genuine, and sincere and not a mere temporary impression, like the morning cloud and the early dew. Not least, let us watch and pray against the love of the world. It ruined one who basked in the full sunshine of privileges and heard Christ himself teaching every day. Then "let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels

Day 30

MOSES: AN EXAMPLE

J. C. Ryle

"By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)

The eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews is a great chapter; it deserves to be printed in golden letters. I can well believe it must have been most cheering and encouraging to a converted Jew. I suppose no member of the early Church found so much difficulty in a profession of Christianity as the Hebrews did. The way was narrow to all, but preeminently so to them. The cross was heavy to all, but surely they had to carry double weight. And this chapter would refresh them like a cordial--it would be as "wine to those that are of heavy hearts."

The three verses I am going to explain are far from being the least interesting in the chapter. Indeed, I think few, if any, have so strong a claim on our attention. It seems to me that the work of faith described in the story of Moses comes home more especially to our own case. The men of God who are named in the former part of the chapter are all examples to us beyond question. But we cannot literally do what most of them did, however much we may drink into their spirit. We are not called upon to offer a literal sacrifice like Abel, or to build a literal ark like Noah, or to leave our country literally and dwell in tents and offer up our Isaac like Abraham. But the faith of Moses comes nearer to us. It seems to operate in a way more familiar to our own experience. It made him take up a line of conduct such as we must sometimes take up ourselves in the present day, each in our own walk of life, if we would be consistent Christians.

First, Moses gave up rank and greatness. "He refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." We all know his history. The daughter of Pharaoh had preserved his life when he was an infant; she had adopted him and educated him as her own son. Moses might have been, if he had pleased, a very great man. If he had been content with the position in which he found himself, he might easily have been among the first (if not the very first) in all the land of Egypt.

Let us think, for a moment, how great this temptation was. Here was a man of like passions with ourselves. He might have had as much greatness as earth can well give. Rank, power, place, honor, titles, dignities--all were before him and within his grasp. These are the prizes which there is an incessant race in the world around us to obtain. To be somebody, to be looked up to, to raise themselves in the scale of society, to get a handle to their names--these are the very things for which many sacrifice time, thought, health, and life itself. But Moses would not have them as a gift. He turned his back upon them, refused them, gave them up!

Moses refused pleasure. Pleasure of every kind, no doubt, was at his feet if he had liked to take it up--sensual, intellectual, social pleasure--whatever could strike his fancy. Egypt was a land of artists, a residence of learned men, a resort of every one who had skill or science of any description. There was nothing which could feed the "lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life," which one in the place of Moses might not easily have commanded and possessed as his own.

Pleasure, be it remembered, is the one thing for which millions live. Pleasure and enjoyment in

the holidays is the grand object to which a schoolboy looks forward. Pleasure and satisfaction in making himself independent is the mark on which the young man in business fixes his eye. Pleasure and ease in retiring from business with a fortune is the aim which the merchant sets before him. Pleasure and bodily comfort at his own home is the sum of the poor man's wishes. Pleasure is the shadow which all alike are hunting--high and low, rich and poor, old and young,--each, perhaps, despising his neighbor for seeking it, each in his own way seeking it for himself, each secretly wondering that he does not find it, each firmly persuaded that somewhere it is to be found. This was the cup that Moses had before his lips. He might have drunk as deeply as he liked of earthly pleasure, but he would not have it. He turned his back upon it.

Moses refused riches. "The treasures in Egypt" is an expression that seems to tell of boundless wealth which Moses might have enjoyed had he been content to remain with Pharaoh's daughter. We may well suppose these "treasures" would have been a mighty fortune. The pyramids, obelisks, temples, and statues are still standing there as witnesses.

Let us consider the power of money, the immense influence that "the love of money" obtains over men's minds. Let us look around and observe how men covet it, what amazing pains and trouble they will go through to obtain it. Tell them of an island many thousand miles away where something may be found that may be profitable, and at once a fleet of ships will be sent to get it. Show them a way to make one percent more on their money, and they will reckon you among the wisest of men. To possess money seems to hide defects, to cover faults, to clothe a man with virtues. But here is a man who might have been rich and would not. He would not have Egyptian treasures.

Add to all this that Moses did it deliberately. He did not refuse these things in a hasty fit of youthful excitement--he was forty years old, in the prime of life. He did not refuse them because he was obliged to. He was not like the dying man who tells us "he craves nothing more in this world;" and why?--because he is dying and cannot keep it. He was not like the pauper who makes a merit of necessity and says, "he does not want riches;" and why?--because he cannot get them. He was not like the old man who boasts that "he has laid aside worldly pleasures;" and why?--because he is worn out and cannot enjoy them. No! Moses refused what he might have enjoyed. Rank, pleasure, and riches did not leave him, but he left them. Others have refused much, but none, I think, so much as Moses. In the way of self-sacrifice and self-denial, he excels them all.

Now, I wish to consider what Moses chose. For one thing, he chose suffering and affliction. He left the ease and comfort of Pharaoh's court and openly took part with the children of Israel. They were an enslaved and persecuted people, an object of distrust, suspicion, and hatred. To the eye of sense, there seemed no chance of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage without a long and doubtful struggle. If ever man seemed to be choosing pain, trials, poverty, need, distress, anxiety--perhaps even death--with his eyes open, Moses was that man.

We draw back by a kind of instinct from suffering and avoid it if we can. We spend our days in fear and anxiety when we think affliction is coming near us and use every means to escape it. And when it does come, we often fret and murmur under the burden of it. And if we can only bear it patiently, we count it a great thing! Moses saw the cup of suffering that was before him if he left Pharaoh's court and chose it, preferred it, and took it up.

But more than this, Moses chose the company of a despised people. He left the society of the

great and wise among whom he had been brought up, and joined himself to the children of Israel--slaves, serfs, pariahs, bondservants, laborers in the brick kiln who were oppressed, destitute, afflicted, and tormented. Moses chose reproach and scorn. Men would tell him he was mad, foolish, weak, silly, out of his mind. He would lose his influence. He would forfeit the favor and good opinion of all among whom he had lived.

There are few things more powerful than ridicule and scorn. It can do far more than open enmity and persecution. Many a man who would march up to a cannon's mouth, lead a forlorn hope, or storm a breach, has found it impossible to face the mockery of a few companions--to be laughed at, made a joke of, sneered at!

Finally, let me speak of the principle which moved Moses and made him do as he did. We have the answer in the text: "Faith." He did it all because he believed. God set before his mind's eye his own will and purpose. God revealed to him that a Savior was to be born of the stock of Israel, that mighty promises were bound up in these children of Abraham and yet to be fulfilled, and that the time for fulfilling a portion of these promises was at hand. Moses put credit in this and believed. Faith was a telescope to Moses. It made him see the goodly land afar off--rest, peace, and victory, when dim-sighted reason could only see trial and barrenness, storm and tempest, weariness and pain. Faith told Moses that all the rank and greatness of the earth was a poor, vain, empty thing, fleeting and passing away; that there was no true greatness like that of serving God. Faith told Moses that worldly pleasures were "pleasures of sin," ruinous to the soul and displeasing to God. Faith told Moses that these pleasures, after all, were only for a "season." They would weary him soon; he must leave them all in a few years. Faith told Moses that there was a reward in heaven for the believer that was far richer than the treasures in Egypt: a crown incorruptible.

What has all this to do with me? someone will ask. For one thing, if you would ever be saved, you must make the choice that Moses made. You must choose God before the world. I do not mean that the statesman must leave his office or the rich man forsake his property. But I mean that if a man would be saved, whatever be his rank in life, he must be prepared for tribulation. He must make up his mind to choose much that seems evil and give up and refuse much that seems good.

Are you making any sacrifices? Does your religion cost you anything? Are you, like Moses, preferring God to the world? Is there any cross in your Christianity? Do you know anything of the afflictions of the Gospel? Is your faith and practice ever a subject of scorn and reproach? Many, I fear, would like glory who have no wish for grace. They would fain have the wages but not the work, the harvest but not the labor, the reaping but not the sowing, the reward but not the battle. But it may not be. As Bunyan says, "The bitter must go before the sweet." If there is no cross, there will be no crown.

Dear reader, would you be eminently holy and useful? Would you, like Moses, make it clear as noon day that you have chosen God before the world? Then take this advice: go and cry to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the disciples did, "Lord, increase our faith." Faith is the root of a real Christian's character. Let your root be right and your fruit will soon abound. Your spiritual prosperity will always be according to your faith.

Holiness

Day 31

THE GREAT COMMISSION

J. C. Ryle

"Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city and reported to the chief priests all the things that had happened. When they had assembled with the elders and consulted together, they gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, Tell them, His disciples came at night and stole him away while we slept. And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will appease him and make you secure. So they took the money and did as they were instructed, and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day. Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:11-20)

These verses 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 honor 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 has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name." It is a truth which in no wise 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. He is the Mediator between God and man, the great fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace. It was for this joy set before him that he endured the cross.

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 Savior who alone can give repentance and remission of sins. In him all fullness dwells. He is the way, the door, the light, the life, the Shepherd, the altar of refuge. He that has the Son has life, and he that has not the Son has not life. 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 bound 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 Lords, 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." 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.

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 shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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. "You are my friends," says Jesus, "if you do whatsoever I command you."

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 could be saved without

the work of all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and let us rejoice that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who cooperated to make man, do always cooperate 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 to 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, to sanctify and strengthen, to defend and keep, to lead and guide. He is with us in sorrow and in joy, in sickness and in health, in life and in death, in time and 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." Jesus has said it, and he will stand to it, "I am with you always, even to 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.

Expository Thoughts on the Gospels