

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS
MATTHEW

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J.C. RYLE

In this new edition (2021) spelling and text have been slightly edited and titles are printed above the sections.

John Charles Ryle (1816–1900) was the first Anglican bishop of Liverpool (1880-1900). He was a prolific writer, faithful pastor and preacher. His classic “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels” are among the finest expository writings ever written on the Gospels.
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PREFACE

IN sending forth the first volume of a new Expository work upon the Gospels, I feel it necessary, in order to prevent misunderstanding, to offer some explanation of the character and design of the work.

The "*Expository Thoughts*," which are now before the reader, are not a learned, critical commentary. I do not profess to expound every verse of the Gospels, to grapple with every difficulty, to attempt the solution of every hard text, and to examine every disputed reading or translation.

The "*Expository Thoughts*" are not a continuous and homiletic exposition, containing practical remarks on every verse, like the commentaries of Brentius and Gualter.

The plan I have adopted in drawing up the "*Expository Thoughts*" is as follows: I have divided the sacred text into sections or passages, averaging about twelve verses in each. I have then supplied a continuous series of short, plain "Expositions" of each of these passages. In each Exposition I have generally begun by stating as briefly as possible the main scope and purpose of the passage under consideration. I have then selected two, three, or four prominent points in the passage, singled them out from the rest, dwelt exclusively on them, and endeavored to enforce them plainly and vigorously on the reader's attention. The points selected will be found to be sometimes doctrinal, and sometimes practical. The only rule in selection has been to seize on the really leading points of the passage.

In style and composition I frankly avow that I have studied, as far as possible, to be plain and pointed, and to choose what an old divine calls "picked and packed" words. I have tried to place myself in the position of one who is *reading aloud to others*, and must arrest their attention, if he can. I have said to myself in writing each Exposition, "I am addressing a mixed company, and I have but a short time." — Keeping this in view, I have constantly left unsaid many things that might have been said, and have endeavored to dwell chiefly on the things needful to salvation. I have deliberately passed over many subjects of secondary importance, in order to say something that might strike and stick in consciences. I have felt that a few points, well-remembered and fastened down, are better than a quantity of truth lying loosely and thinly scattered over the mind.

A few footnotes, explaining difficult passages, have occasionally been added to the Exposition. I have thought it good to add these notes for the information of readers who may feel a wish to know what can be said about the "deep things" of Scripture, and may have

no commentary of their own.

I cannot, of course, expect that the opinions expressed in these Expositions, whether about doctrine, practice, or prophecy, will be satisfactory and acceptable to everyone. I can only say, I have spoken out freely, and kept back nothing that seemed to me true. I have set down nothing but what I conscientiously believe to be the real meaning of the inspired writer, and the mind of the Spirit. I have always held that truth is most likely to be reached, when men on all sides conceal nothing, but tell out all their minds. Right or wrong, I have endeavored to tell out my own mind. It is my firm conviction that I have said nothing in these Expositions which is not in perfect harmony with the thirty-nine Articles of my own Church, and does not agree in the main with all the Protestant Confessions of Faith. The words of an old divine will explain the kind of theology to which I ever desire to adhere and conform: "I know no true religion but Christianity; no true Christianity but the Doctrine of Christ; of His divine person (Col. 1:15), of His divine office (1 Tim. 2:5), of His divine righteousness (Jer. 23:6), and of His divine Spirit, which all that are His receive (Rom. 8:9). I know no true ministers of Christ but such as make it their business, in their calling, to commend Jesus Christ, in His saving fullness of grace and glory, to the faith and love of men. I know no true Christian but one united to Christ by faith, and abiding in Him by faith and love, to the glorifying of the name of Jesus Christ, in the beauties of Gospel holiness. Ministers and Christians of this spirit have for many years been my brethren and companions, and I hope ever shall be, whithersoever the hand of the Lord may lead me." (Trail's Preface to "*Throne of Grace*")

I am deeply sensible of the many imperfections and defects of the volume which is now sent forth. No one perhaps will see them more clearly than I do myself. At the same time, I think it only fair to say, that no Exposition in this volume has been composed without deliberate reflection, and laborious examination of other men's opinions. There are very few passages handled in these Expositions, concerning which I have not at least looked at the views of the following writers: Chrysostom, Augustine, Theophylact, Euthymius, Calvin, Brentius, Bucer, Musculus, Gualter, Beza, Bullinger, Pellican, Ferus, Calovius, Cocceius, Baxter, Poole, Hammond, Lightfoot, Hall, Du Veil, Piscator, Paraeus, Jansenius, Leigh, Ness, Mayer, Trapp, Henry, Whitby, Gill, Doddridge, Burkitt, Quesnel, Bengel, Scott, A. Clarke, Pearce, Adams, Watson, Olshausen, Alford, Barnes, Stier. I can truly say, that I have spent hours, days, and weeks in examining the opinions of these writers, and that when I differ from them it is not

because I do not know their views.

Commentaries and Expositions of Scripture are so numerous in the present day, that I feel it necessary to say something about the class of readers whom I have specially had in view in putting forth these *Expository Thoughts*.

In the first place, I indulge the hope that the work may be found *suitable for use at family prayers*. The supply of works adapted for this purpose has never yet been equal to the demand.

In the next place, I cannot help hoping that the work may prove *an aid to those who visit the sick and the poor*. The number of persons who visit hospitals, sick-rooms, and cottages, with an earnest desire to do spiritual good, is now very great. There is reason to believe that proper books for reading on such occasions are much wanted.

Last, but not least, I trust that the work may not be found *unprofitable for private reading, as a companion to the Gospels*. There are not a few whose callings and engagements make it impossible for them to read large commentaries and expositions of God's Word. I have thought that such may find it helpful to their memories to have a few leading points set before their minds, in connection with what they read.

I now send forth the volume, with an earnest prayer that it may tend to the promotion of pure and undefiled religion, help to extend the knowledge of Christ, and be a humble instrument in aid of the glorious work of converting and edifying immortal souls.

J.C. RYLE
Helmingham Rectory,
December, 1856.

TRAIL'S PREFACE TO "THRONE OF GRACE":

The words of an old divine will explain the kind of theology to which I ever desire to adhere and conform:

"I know no true religion but Christianity; no true Christianity but the Doctrine of Christ; of His divine person (Col. 1:15), of His divine office (1 Tim. 2:5), of His divine righteousness (Jer. 23:6), and of His divine Spirit, which all that are His receive (Rom. 8:9).

I know no true ministers of Christ but such as make it their business, in their calling, to commend Jesus Christ, in His saving fullness of grace and glory, to the faith and love of men. I know no true Christian but one united to Christ by faith, and abiding in Him by faith and love, to the glorifying of the name of Jesus Christ, in the beauties of Gospel holiness.

Ministers and Christians of this spirit have for many years been my brethren and companions, and I hope ever shall be, whithersoever the hand of the Lord may lead me."

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1 MATTHEW 1:1-17

THE GENEALOGY OF CHRIST

1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren;

3 And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram;

4 And Aram begat Aminadab; and Aminadab begat Naasson; and Naasson begat Salmon;

5 And Salmon begat Boaz of Rachab; and Boaz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse;

6 And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias;

7 And Solomon begat Roboam; and Roboam begat Abia; and Abia begat Asa;

8 And Asa begat Josaphat; and Josaphat begat Joram; and Joram begat Ozias;

9 And Ozias begat Joatham; and Joatham begat Achaz; and Achaz begat Ezekias;

10 And Ezekias begat Manasses; and Manasses begat Amon: and Amon begat Josias;

11 And Josias begat Jechonias and his brethren, about the time they were carried away to Babylon:

12 And after they were brought to Babylon, Jechonias begat Salathiel; and Salathiel begat Zorobabel;

13 And Zorobabel begat Abiud; and Abiud begat Eliakim; and Eliakim begat Azor;

14 And Azor begat Sadoc; and Sadoc begat Achim; and Achim begat Eliud;

15 And Eliud begat Eleazar; and Eleazar begat Matthan; and Matthan begat Jacob;

16 And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.

17 So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon to Christ are fourteen generations.

THESE verses begin the New Testament. Let us always read them with serious and solemn feelings. — The book before us contains “*not the word of men, but of God.*” Every verse in it was written *by inspiration of the Holy Ghost.* (1 Thess. 2:13)

Let us thank God daily for giving us the Scriptures. The poorest Englishman, who understands his Bible, knows more about religion than the wisest philosophers of Greece and Rome.

Let us never forget the deep *responsibility* which possession of the Bible entails on us. We shall be judged at the last day according to our light. To whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required.

Let us read the Bible reverently and diligently, with an honest determination *to believe and practice* all we find in it. It is no light matter how we use this book. Above all, let us never read the Bible without praying for the *teaching of the Holy Spirit*. He alone can apply truth to our hearts, and make us profit by what we read.

The New Testament begins with the history of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. No part of the Bible is so important as this, and no part is so full and complete. Four distinct Gospels tell us the story of Christ's doings and dying: four times we read the precious account of His works and words. How thankful we ought to be for this! To *know* Christ is life eternal; to *believe* in Christ is to have *peace* with God; to *follow* Christ is to be a true Christian; to be with Christ will be heaven itself. We can never hear too much about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel of St. Matthew begins with a long list of names. Sixteen verses are taken up with tracing a pedigree from Abraham to David, and from David to the family in which Jesus was born. Let no one think that these verses are useless. Nothing is useless in creation. The least mosses, and the smallest insects, serve some good end. — Nothing is useless in the Bible. Every word of it is inspired. The chapters and verses which seem at first sight unprofitable are all given for some good purpose. He that looks carefully at these sixteen verses will not fail to see in them useful and instructive lessons.

We learn, for one thing, from this list of names, that *God always keeps His word*. He had promised that "in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." He had promised to raise up a Savior of the family of David. (Gen. 12:3; Is. 11:1) These sixteen verses prove that Jesus was the son of David and the son of Abraham, and that God's promise was fulfilled. — Thoughtless and ungodly people should remember this lesson, and be afraid. Whatever they may think, God will keep His word. If they repent not they will surely perish. — True Christians should remember this lesson, and take comfort. Their Father in heaven will be true to all His promises. He has said that He will save all believers in Christ. If He has said it, He will certainly do it. "He is not a man that he should lie." — "He abides faithful: He cannot deny himself." (Num. 23:19; 2 Tim. 2:13)

We learn, for another thing, from this list of names, *the sinfulness and corruption of human nature*. It is instructive to observe how many godly parents in this catalogue had wicked and ungodly sons. The

names of Roboam, and Joram, and Amon, and Jechonias, should teach us humbling lessons. They had all pious fathers; but they were all wicked men. Grace does not run in families: it needs something more than good examples and good advice to make us children of God. They that are born again are not born of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:13) Praying parents should pray night and day that their children may be born of the Spirit.

We learn, lastly, from this list of names, *how great is the mercy and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Let us think how defiled and unclean human nature is, and then think what a condescension it was in Him to be born of a woman, and “made in the likeness of men.” (Phil. 2:7) Some of the names we read in this catalogue remind us of shameful and sad histories. Some of the names are those of persons never mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. But at the end of all comes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Though He is the eternal God, He humbled Himself to become man, in order to provide salvation for sinners. “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor.” (2 Cor. 8:9)

We should always read this catalogue with thankful feelings. We see here that no one who partakes of human nature can be beyond the reach of Christ’s sympathy and compassion. Our sins may have been as black and great as those of any whom St. Matthew names; but they cannot shut us out of heaven, if we repent and believe the Gospel. If the Lord Jesus was not ashamed to be born of a woman whose pedigree contained such names as those we have read today, we need not think that He will be ashamed to call us brethren, and to give us eternal life.

2 MATTHEW 1:18-25

THE INCARNATION AND NAME OF CHRIST

18 Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privately.

20 But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, Joseph, you son of David, fear not to take to you Mary your wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.

21 And she shall bring forth a son, and you shall call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.

22 Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the

Lord by the prophet, saying,

23 Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.

24 Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took to him his wife:

25 And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS.

THESE verses begin by telling us two great truths. They tell us how the Lord Jesus Christ took *our nature* upon Him, and became man. They tell us also that His birth was *miraculous*: His mother Mary was a virgin.

These are very mysterious subjects. They are depths which we have no line to fathom: they are truths which we have not mind enough to comprehend. Let us not attempt to explain things which are above our feeble reason: let us be content to *believe* with reverence, and let us not speculate about matters which we cannot understand. Enough for us to know that with Him who made the world nothing is impossible. We may safely rest in the words of the Apostles' Creed: "Jesus Christ was conceived by the Holy Ghost, and born of the Virgin Mary."

Let us observe *the conduct of Joseph* described in these verses. It is a beautiful example of godly wisdom, and tender consideration for others. He saw the "appearance of evil" in her who was his espoused wife. But he did nothing rashly: he waited patiently to have the line of duty made clear. In all probability he laid the matter before God in prayer. "He that believes shall not make haste." (Is. 28:16)

The patience of Joseph was graciously rewarded. He received a direct message from God upon the subject of his anxiety, and was at once relieved from all his fears. How good it is to wait upon God! Whoever cast his cares upon God in hearty prayer, and found Him fail? "In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." (Prov. 3:6)

Let us observe, in these verses, *the two names given to our Lord*. One is "Jesus," the other "Emmanuel." One describes His *office*: the other His *nature*. Both are deeply interesting.

The name *Jesus* means "Savior." It is the same name as Joshua, in the Old Testament. It is given to our Lord because "He saves his people from their sins." This is His special office. He saves them from the *guilt* of sin, by washing them in his own atoning blood; He saves them from the *dominion* of sin, by putting in their hearts the sanctifying Spirit. He saves them from the *presence* of sin, when He takes them out of this world to rest with Him. He will save them from all the consequences of sin, when He shall give them a glorious body at the last day. Blessed

and holy are Christ's people! From sorrow, cross, and conflict they are not saved; but they are "saved from sin" for evermore. They are cleansed from guilt by Christ's blood: they are made ready for heaven by Christ's Spirit. This is salvation! He who cleaves to sin is not yet saved.

"Jesus is a very encouraging name to heavy-laden sinners. He who is King of kings and Lord of lords might lawfully have taken some more high-sounding title. But He did not do so. The rulers of this world have often called themselves Great, Conqueror, Bold, Magnificent, and the like. The Son of God was content to call Himself "Savior." The souls which desire salvation may draw near to the Father with boldness, and have access with confidence through Christ. It is His office and His delight to show mercy. "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." (1 John 3:17)

Jesus is a name which is peculiarly sweet and precious to believers. It has often done them good, when the favor of kings and princes would have been heard of with unconcern. It has given them what money cannot buy, — even inward peace; it has eased their weary consciences, and given rest to their heavy hearts. The Song of Solomon speaks the experience of many, when it says, "Your name is as ointment poured forth." (Cant. 1:3) Happy is that person who trusts not merely in vague notions of God's mercy and goodness, but in "Jesus."

The name "*Emmanuel*" is seldom found in the Bible. But it is scarcely less interesting than the name "Jesus." It is the name which is given to our Lord from His nature as God-man, as "God manifest in the flesh." It signifies, "*God with us.*"

Let us take care that we clearly understand that there was a union of two natures, the divine and human, in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a point of the deepest importance. We should settle it firmly in our minds that our Savior is perfect man as well as perfect God, and perfect God as well as perfect man. If we once lose sight of this great foundation truth we may run into fearful heresies. The name Emmanuel takes in the whole mystery. Jesus is "God with us." He had a nature like our own in all things, sin only excepted. But though Jesus was "with us" in human flesh and blood, He was at the same time very God.

We shall often find, as we read the Gospels that our Savior could be weary and hungry and thirsty, — could weep and groan and feel pain like one of ourselves. In all this we see "*the man*" Christ Jesus: we see the nature He took on him when He was born of the Virgin Mary.

But we shall also find in the same Gospels that our Savior knew men's hearts and thoughts, — that He had power over devils, — that He could work the mightiest miracles with a word, — that He was ministered to by angels, — that He allowed a disciple to call Him "my God," — and that He said, "Before Abraham was I am," and "I and my Father are one." In all this we see "*the eternal God.*" We see Him "who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen." (Rom. 9:5)

If we would have a strong foundation for our faith and hope we must keep constantly in view our Savior's *divinity*. He in whose blood we are invited to trust is the Almighty God; all power is His in heaven and earth. None can pluck us out of His hand. If we are true believers in Jesus our heart need not be troubled or afraid.

If we would have sweet comfort in suffering and trial we must keep constantly in view our Savior's *humanity*. He is the Man Christ Jesus, who lay on the bosom of the Virgin Mary as a little infant, and knows the heart of a man. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, — He has Himself experienced Satan's temptations, — He has endured hunger, — He has shed tears, — He has felt pain. We may trust Him unreservedly with our sorrows: He will not despise us. We may pour out our hearts before Him in prayer boldly, and keep nothing back. He can sympathize with His people.

Let these thoughts sink down into our minds. Let us bless God for the encouraging truths which the first chapter of the New Testament contains: it tells us of One who "saves His people from their sins." But this is not all: it tells us that this Savior is "Emmanuel," — God Himself, and yet God with us. God manifest in human flesh like our own. This is glad tidings: this is indeed good news. Let us feed on these truths in our hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

3 MATTHEW 2:1-12

THE WISE MEN FROM THE EAST

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the King had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

5 And they said to him, In Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written by the prophet,

6 And you Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, are not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of you shall come a Governor that shall rule my people Israel.

7 Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

9 When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

11 And when they came into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented to him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

IT is not known who these wise men were: their names and dwelling-place are kept back from us; we are only told that they came "from the East." Whether they were Chaldeans or Arabians, we cannot say: whether they learned to expect Christ from the ten tribes who went into captivity, or from the prophecies of Daniel, we do not know. It matters little who they were. The point which concerns us most is the rich instruction which their history conveys.

These verses show us *that there may be true servants of God in places where we should not expect to find them*. The Lord Jesus has many "hidden ones" like these wise men: their history on earth may be as little known as that of Melchizedek, and Jethro, and Job; but their names are in the book of life, and they will be found with Christ in the day of His appearing. It is well to remember this. We must not look round the earth and say hastily, "All is barren." The grace of God is not tied to places and families. The Holy Ghost can lead souls to Christ without the help of many outward means. Men may be born in dark places of the earth, like these wise men, and yet like them be made "wise to salvation." There are some travelling to heaven at this moment, of whom the Church and the world know nothing: they flourish in secret places like the "lily among thorns," and seem to "waste their sweetness on the desert air; but Christ loves them, and they love Christ.

These verses show us, secondly, *that it is not always those who have most religious privileges who give Christ most honor*. We might have thought that the Scribes and Pharisees would have been the first to

hasten to Bethlehem, on the slightest rumor that the Savior was born: but it was not so. A few unknown strangers from a distant land were the first, except the shepherds mentioned by St. Luke, to rejoice at His birth. "He came to his own, and his own received him not." (John 1:11) What a mournful picture this is of human nature! How often the same kind of thing may be seen among ourselves! How often the very persons who live nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them most! There is only too much truth in the old proverb, "The nearer the church the further from God." Familiarity with sacred things has an awful tendency to make men despise them. There are many, who from residence and convenience ought to be first and foremost in the worship of God, and yet are always last. There are many, who might well be expected to be last, who are always first.

These verses show us, thirdly, *that there may be knowledge of Scripture in the head, while there is no grace in the heart.* We are told that king Herod sent to inquire of the priests and elders, "where Christ should be born." We are told that they returned a ready answer to him, and showed an accurate acquaintance with the letter of Scripture; but they never went to Bethlehem to seek for the coming Savior: they would not believe in Him when He ministered among them. Their heads were better than their hearts. Let us beware with resting satisfied with head-knowledge. It is an excellent thing when rightly used; but a man may have much of it, and yet perish everlastingly. What is the state of our hearts? This is the great question. A little grace is better than many gifts: gifts alone save no one but grace leads on to glory.

These verses show us, fourthly, *a splendid example of spiritual diligence.* What trouble it must have cost these wise men to travel from their homes to the house where Jesus was born. How many weary miles they must have journeyed! The fatigues of an Eastern traveler are far greater than we in England can at all understand. The time that such a journey would occupy must necessarily have been very great; the dangers to be encountered were neither few nor small. — But none of these things moved them: they had set their hearts on seeing Him "that was born King of the Jews;" and they never rested till they saw Him. They prove to us the truth of the old saying, "Where there is a will there is a way."

It would be well for all professing Christians if they were more ready to follow the example of these good men. — Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about means of grace? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? — These are serious questions: they deserve serious consideration. The

truly “wise,” it may be feared, are very few.

These verses show us, lastly, *a striking example of faith*. These wise men believed in Christ when they had never seen Him; but that was not all. They believed in Him when the Scribes and Pharisees were unbelieving; but that again was not all. They believed in Him when they saw Him a little infant on Mary’s knees, and worshipped Him as a King. This was the crowning point of their faith. — They saw no miracles to convince them; they heard no teaching to persuade them; they beheld no signs of divinity and greatness to overawe them; they saw nothing but a new-born infant, helpless and weak, and needing a mother’s care, like any one of ourselves. And yet when they saw that infant, they believed that they saw the Divine Savior of the world! “They fell down and worshipped him.”

We read of no greater faith than this in the whole volume of the Bible. It is a faith that deserves to be placed side by side with that of the penitent thief. The thief saw one dying the death of a malefactor, and yet prayed to Him, and “called him Lord;” the wise men saw a new-born babe on the lap of a poor woman, and yet worshipped Him, and confessed that He was Christ. Blessed indeed are they that can believe in this fashion!

This is the kind of faith that God delights to honor. We see the proof of that at this very day. Wherever the Bible is read the conduct of these wise men is known, and told as a memorial of them. Let us walk in the steps of their faith; let us not be ashamed to believe in Jesus and confess Him, though all around us remain careless and unbelieving. Have we not a thousand-fold more evidence than the wise men had, to make us believe that Jesus is the Christ? Beyond doubt we have. Yet where is our faith?

4 MATTHEW 2:13-23

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT AND SUBSEQUENT ABODE AT NAZARETH

13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be you there until I bring you word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

14 When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt:

15 And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

16 Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying,

18 In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

19 But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life.

21 And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

LET us observe, in this passage, how true it is that *the rulers of this world are seldom friendly to the cause of God*. The Lord Jesus comes down from heaven to save sinners, and at once we are told that Herod the king “seeks to destroy him.”

Greatness and riches are a perilous possession for the soul: those who seek to have them know not what they seek. They lead men into many temptations; they are likely to fill the heart with pride, and to chain the affections down to things below. “Not many mighty, not many noble are called.” “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.” (1 Cor. 1:26; Mark 10:23)

Do we envy the rich and great? Does our heart sometimes say, “Oh, that I had their place, and rank, and substance”? Let us beware of giving way to such feelings. The very wealth which we admire may be gradually sinking its possessors down into hell. A little more money might be our ruin. Like Herod, we might run into every excess of wickedness and cruelty. “Take heed, and beware of covetousness.” “Be content with such things as you have.” (Luke 12:15; Heb. 13:5)

Do we think that Christ's cause depends on the power and patronage of princes? We are mistaken. They have seldom done much for the advancement of true religion: they have far more frequently been the enemies of the truth. “*Put not your trust in princes.*” (Ps. 146:3) They who are like Herod are many: they who are like Josiah and Edward the Sixth of England are few.

Let us observe, for another thing, *how the Lord Jesus was “a man of*

sorrows” even from His infancy. Trouble awaits Him as soon as He enters into the world. His life is in danger from Herod’s hatred; His mother and Joseph are obliged to take Him away by night, and “flee into Egypt.” — It was only a type and figure of all His experience upon earth. The waves of humiliation began to beat over him, even when He was a sucking child.

The Lord Jesus is just the Savior that the suffering and sorrowful need. He knows well what we mean when we tell Him in prayer of our troubles. He can sympathize with us when we cry to Him under cruel persecution. Let us keep nothing back from Him. Let us make Him our bosom friend; let us pour out our hearts before Him. He has had great experience of affliction.

Let us observe, for another thing, how *death can remove the kings of this world, like other men.* The rulers of millions have no power to retain life when the hour of their departure comes. The murderer of helpless infants must himself die. Joseph and Mary hear the tidings that “Herod is dead;” and at once they return in safety to their own land.

True Christians should never be greatly moved by the persecution of man. Their enemies may be strong, and they may be weak; but still they ought not to be afraid. They should remember that “the triumphing of the wicked is but short.” (Job 10:5) What has become of the Pharaohs and Neros and Diocletians, who at one time fiercely persecuted the people of God? Where is the enmity of Charles the Ninth of France, and bloody Mary of England? They did their utmost to cast the truth down to the ground: but the truth rose again from the earth, and still lives; and they are dead and moldering in the grave. Let not the heart of any believer fail. Death is a mighty leveler, and can take any mountain out of the way of Christ’s Church. “The Lord lives” forever: His enemies are only men. The truth shall always prevail.

Let us observe, in the last place, *what a lesson of humility is taught us by the dwelling place of the Son of God,* when He was on earth. He dwelt with His mother and Joseph “in a city called Nazareth.”

Nazareth was a small town in Galilee. It was an obscure, retired place, not so much as once mentioned in the Old Testament. Hebron, and Shiloh, and Gibeon, and Ramah, and Bethel, were far more important places. But the Lord Jesus passed by them all, and chose Nazareth. This was humility!

In Nazareth the Lord Jesus lived thirty years. It was there He grew up from infancy to childhood, and from childhood to boyhood, and from boyhood to youth, and from youth to man’s estate. We know little of the manner in which those thirty years were spent. That He

was “subject to Mary and Joseph,” we are expressly told. (Luke 2:41) That He worked in the carpenter’s shop with Joseph, is highly probable. We only know that almost five-sixths of the time that the Savior of the world was on earth, was passed among the poor of this world and passed in complete retirement. Truly this was humility!

Let us learn wisdom from our Savior’s *example*. We are most of us far too ready to “seek great things in this world: let us “seek them not.” (Jer. 45:5) To have a place and a title and a position in society is not nearly so important as people think. It is a great sin to be covetous and worldly and proud: but it is no sin to be poor. It matters not so much what money we have, and where we live, as what we are in the sight of God. Where are we going when we die? Shall we live forever in heaven? These are the main things to which we should attend.

Above all, let us daily strive to copy our Savior’s *humility*. Pride is the oldest and commonest of sins: humility is the rarest and most beautiful of graces. For humility let us labor; for humility let us pray. Our knowledge may be scanty, our faith may be weak, our strength may be small; but if we are disciples of Him who “dwelt at Nazareth,” let us at any rate be humble.

5 MATTHEW 3:1–12

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea,

2 And saying, Repent you: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare you the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

4 And the same John had his raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his food was locusts and wild honey.

5 Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan.

6 And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

8 Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:

9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham.

10 And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees: therefore every tree which brings not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

11 I indeed baptize you with water to repentance: but he that comes after

me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:

12 Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner: but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.

THESE verses describe the ministry of John the Baptist, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a ministry that deserves close attention. Few preachers ever produced such effects as John the Baptist: "There went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and the entire region round about Jordan." — None ever received such praise from the great Head of the Church: Jesus called him "a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35); the great Bishop of souls Himself declared, that "among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist." Let us then study the leading features of his ministry.

John the Baptist spoke plainly *about sin*. He taught the absolute necessity of "repentance," before anyone can be saved; he preached that repentance must be proved by its "fruits;" he warned men not to rest on outward privileges, or outward union with the Church.

This is just the teaching that we all need. We are naturally dead, and blind, and asleep in spiritual things; we are ready to content ourselves with a mere formal religion, and to flatter ourselves that if we go to church we shall be saved: we need to be told, that except we "repent and are converted," we shall all perish.

John the Baptist spoke plainly *about our Lord Jesus Christ*. He taught people that One "mightier than himself" was coming among them. He was nothing more than a servant: the Coming One was the King. He himself could only "baptize with water:" the Coming One could "baptize with the Holy Ghost," take away sins, and would one day judge the world.

This again is the very teaching that human nature requires. We need to be sent direct to Christ. We are all ready to stop short of this. We want to rest in our union with the Church, our regular use of the sacraments, and our diligent attendance on an established ministry. We need to be told the absolute necessity of union with Christ Himself by faith. He is the appointed fountain of mercy, grace, life, and peace; we must each have personal dealings with Him about our souls. What do we know of the Lord Jesus? What have we got from Him? These are the questions on which our salvation hinges.

John the Baptist spoke plainly *about the Holy Ghost*. He preached that there was such a thing as the baptism of the Holy Ghost. He taught that it was the special office of the Lord Jesus to give this baptism to

men.

This again is a teaching which we greatly require. We need to be told that forgiveness of sin is not the only thing necessary to salvation. There is another thing yet; and that is the baptizing of our hearts by the Holy Ghost. There must not only be the work of Christ *for* us, but the work of the Holy Ghost *in* us; there must not only be a title to heaven purchased for us by the blood of Christ, but a preparedness for heaven wrought in us by the Spirit of Christ. Let us never rest till we know something by experience of the baptism of the Spirit. The baptism of water is a great privilege: but let us see to it that we have also the baptism of the Holy Ghost.

John the Baptist spoke plainly *about the awful danger of the impenitent and unbelieving*. He told his hearers that there was a “wrath to come:” he preached of an “unquenchable fire,” in which the “chaff” would one day be burned.

This again is a teaching which is deeply important. We need to be straightly warned that it is no light matter whether we repent or not; we need to be reminded that there is a hell as well as a heaven, and an everlasting punishment for the wicked as well as everlasting life for the godly. We are fearfully apt to forget this: we talk of the love and mercy of God, and we do not remember sufficiently His justice and holiness. Let us be very careful on this point. It is no real kindness to keep back the terrors of the Lord. It is good for us all to be taught that it is possible to be lost forever, and that all unconverted people are hanging over the brink of the pit.

In the last place, John the Baptist spoke plainly *about the safety of true believers*. He taught that there was “a garner” for all who are Christ’s “wheat,” and that they would be gathered together there in the day of His appearing.

This again is a teaching which human nature greatly requires. The best of believers need much encouragement. They are yet in the body; they live in a wicked world. They are often tempted by the devil. They ought to be often reminded that Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them. He will guide them safely through this life, and at length give them eternal glory. They shall be hid in the day of wrath; they shall be as safe as Noah was in the ark.

Let these things sink down deeply into our hearts. We live in a day of much false teaching. Let us never forget the leading features of a faithful ministry. Happy would it have been for the Church of Christ, if all its ministers had been more like John the Baptist!

6 MATTHEW 3:13-17

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to Jordan to John, to be baptized of him.

14 But John forbid him, saying, I have need to be baptized of you, and come you to me?

15 And Jesus answering said to him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becomes us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:

17 And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

WE have here the account of our Lord Jesus Christ's baptism. This was His first step when He entered on His ministry. When the Jewish priests took up their office they were washed with water (Ex. 29:4). When our great High Priest begins the great work He came into the world to accomplish He is publicly baptized.

We should notice, firstly, in these verses, *the honor placed upon the sacrament of baptism*. An ordinance of which the Lord Jesus Himself partook is not to be lightly esteemed; an ordinance to which the great Head of the Church submitted ought to be ever honorable in the eyes of professing Christians.

There are few subjects in religion on which greater mistakes have arisen than baptism. There are few which require so much fencing and guarding. Let us arm our minds with two general cautions.

Let us beware, on the one hand, that we do not attach a superstitious importance to the water of baptism. We must not expect that water to act as a charm. We must not suppose that all baptized persons, as a matter of course, receive the grace of God in the moment that they are baptized. To say that all who come to baptism obtain like and equal benefit, and that it matters not a jot whether they come with faith and prayer or in utter carelessness, — to say such things appears to contradict the plainest lessons of Scripture.

Let us beware, on the other hand, that we do not dishonor the sacrament of baptism. It is dishonored when it is hastily slurred over as a mere form, or thrust out of sight, and never publicly noticed in the congregation. A sacrament ordained by Christ Himself ought not to be treated in this way. The admission of every new member into the visible Church, whether young or grown up, is an event which ought to excite a lively interest in a Christian assembly. It is an event that ought to call forth the fervent prayers of all praying people. The more deeply

we are convinced that baptism and grace are not inseparably tied together, the more we ought to feel bound to join in prayer for a blessing, whenever anyone is baptized.

We should notice, secondly, in these verses, *the peculiarly solemn circumstances by which the baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ was attended*. Such a baptism never will be again, so long as the world stands.

We are told of the presence of all Three Persons of the blessed Trinity. God the Son, manifest in the flesh, is baptized; God the Spirit descends like a dove, and lights upon Him; God the Father speaks from heaven with a voice. In a word, we have the manifested presence of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We may regard this as a public announcement that the work of Christ was the result of the eternal counsels of all the Three Persons of the blessed Trinity. It was the whole Trinity, which at the beginning of the creation said, "Let us make man;" it was the whole Trinity again, which at the beginning of the Gospel seemed to say, "Let us save man."

We are told of "a voice from heaven" at our Lord's baptism: the "heavens were opened," and words were heard. This was a most significant miracle. We read of no voice from heaven before this, except at the giving of the law on Sinai. Both occasions were of peculiar importance; it therefore seemed good to our Father in heaven to mark both with peculiar honor. At the introduction both of the Law and Gospel He Himself spoke. "God spoke these words." (Exod. 20:1)

How striking and deeply instructive are the Father's words: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." He declares, in these words, that Jesus is the divine Savior sealed and appointed from all eternity to carry out the work of redemption. He proclaims that He accepts Him as the Mediator between God and man. He publishes to the world that He is satisfied with Him as the propitiation, the Substitute, the ransom-payer for the lost family of Adam, and the Head of a redeemed people. In Him He sees His holy "law magnified and made honorable:" through Him He can "be just and yet the justifier of the ungodly." (Is. 42:21; Rom. 3:26)

Let us carefully ponder these words. They are full of rich food for thought; they are full of peace, joy, comfort, and consolation, for all who flee for refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ, and commit their souls to Him for salvation. Such may rejoice in the thought, that though in themselves sinful, yet in God's sight they are counted righteous. The Father regards them as members of His beloved Son. He sees in them no spot, and for His Son's sake is "well pleased." (Eph. 1:6)