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WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

A CHRISTMAS QUESTION FOR 1863.

BY THE

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Their total cost will be not much less than £1,000. Of this sum, there is yet a deficiency of about £150.

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“WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?”

MATTHEW XXII. 42.

READER,

Christmas is a season which almost all Christians observe in one way or another. Some keep it as a religious season. Some keep it as a holiday. But all over the world, wherever there are Christians, in one way or another Christmas is kept.

Perhaps there is no country in which Christmas is so much observed as it is in England. Christmas holidays, Christmas parties, Christmas family-gatherings, Christmas services in churches, Christmas hymns and carols, Christmas holly and mistletoe,—who has not heard of these things? They are as familiar to English people as anything in their lives. They are among the first things we remember when we were children. Our grandfathers and grandmothers were used to them long before we were born. They have been going on in England for many hundred years. They seem likely to go on as long as the world stands.

But, reader, how many of those who keep Christmas ever consider *why Christmas is kept*? How many, in their Christmas plans and arrangements, give a thought to Him, without whom there would have been no Christmas at all? How many ever remember that the Lord Jesus Christ is the cause of Christmas? How many ever reflect that the first intention of Christmas was to remind Christians of Christ's birth and coming into the world? Reader, how is it with you? What do you think of at Christmas?

Bear with me a few minutes, while I try to press upon you the question which heads this tract. I do not want to make your Christmas merriment less. I do not wish to spoil your Christmas cheer. I only wish to put things in their right places. I want Christ Himself to be remembered at Christmas! Give me your attention while I unfold the question—"What think ye of Christ."

I. Let us consider, firstly, *why all men ought to think of Christ*.

II. Let us examine, secondly, *the common thoughts of many about Christ*.

III. Let us count up, lastly, *the thoughts of true Christians about Christ*.

Reader, I dare say the demands upon your time this Christmas are many. Your holidays are short. You have friends to see. You have much to talk about. But still, in the midst of all your hurry and excitement, give a little time to your soul. There will be a Christmas some year, when your place will be empty. Before that time comes, suffer me, as a

friend, to press home on your conscience the inquiry,
—“What think ye of Christ?”

I. First, then, *let us consider why all men ought to think of Christ.*

This is a question which needs to be answered at the very outset of this tract. I know the minds of some people when they are asked about such things as I am handling to-day. I know that many are ready to say, “Why should we think about Christ at all? We want meat, and drink, and money, and clothes, and amusements. We have no time to think about these high subjects. We do not understand them. Let parsons, and old women, and Sunday-school children mind such things if they like. We have no time in a world like this to be thinking of Christ.”

Such is the talk of thousands in this country. They never go either to church or chapel. They never read their Bibles. The world is their God. They think themselves very wise and clever. They despise those whom they call “religious people.” But whether they like it or not, they will all have to die one day. They have all souls to be lost or saved in a world to come. They will all have to rise again from their graves, and to have a reckoning with God. And shall their scoffing and contempt stop our mouths, and make us ashamed? No, indeed! not for a moment! Listen to me and I will tell you why.

All men ought to think of Christ, because of *the office Christ fills between God and man.* He is the eternal Son of God, through whom alone the Father can be known, approached, and served. He is the appointed Mediator between God and man, through whom alone we can be reconciled with God, pardoned, justified and saved. He is the Divine Person whom

God the Father has sealed to be the giver of everything that man requires for his soul. To Him are committed the keys of death and hell. In His favour is life. In Him alone there is hope of salvation for mankind. Without Him no child of Adam can be saved. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." And ought not man to think of Christ? Shall God the Father honour Him, and shall not man? I tell every reader of this tract that there is no person, living or dead, of such immense importance to all men as Christ. There is no person that men ought to think about so much as Christ.

All men ought to think of Christ, because of *what Christ has done for all men*. He thought upon man, when man was lost, bankrupt, and helpless by the fall, and undertook to come into the world to save sinners. In the fulness of time He was born of the Virgin Mary, and lived for man thirty-three years in this evil world. At the end of that time He suffered for sin on the cross, as man's substitute. He bore man's sins in His own body, and shed His own life-blood to pay man's debt to God. He was made a curse for man, that man might be blessed. He died for man that man might live. He was counted a sinner for man that man might be counted righteous. And ought not man to think of Christ? I tell every reader of this tract that if Christ had not died for us, we might all of us, for anything we know, be lying at this moment in hell.

All men ought to think of Christ, because of *what Christ will yet do to all men*. He shall come again one day to this earth with power and glory, and raise the dead from their graves. All shall come forth at His bidding. Those who would not move when they

heard the church-going bell, shall obey the voice of the Archangel and the trump of God. He shall set up His judgment-seat, and summon all mankind to stand before it. To Him every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord. Not one shall be able to escape that solemn assize. Not one but shall receive at the mouth of Christ an eternal sentence. Every one shall receive according to that he has done in the body, whether it be good or bad. And ought not men to think of Christ? I tell every reader of this tract, that whatever he may choose to think now, a day is soon coming when his eternal condition will hinge entirely on his relations to Christ.

But why should I say more on this subject? The time would fail me if I were to set down all the reasons why all men ought to think of Christ. Christ is the grand subject of the Bible. The Scriptures testify of Him.—Christ is the great object to whom all the Churches in Christendom profess to give honour. Even the worst and most corrupt branches of it will tell you that they are built on Christ.—Christ is the end and substance of all sacraments and ordinances.—Christ is the grand subject which every faithful minister exalts in the pulpit.—Christ is the object that every true pastor sets before dying people on their death-beds.—Christ is the great source of light and peace and hope. There is not a spark of spiritual comfort that has ever illumined a sinner's heart, that has not come from Christ. Surely it never can be a small matter whether we have any thoughts about Christ.

Reader, I leave this part of my subject here. There are many things which swallow up men's thoughts while they live, which they will think little of when they are dying. Hundreds are wholly absorbed in

political schemes, and seem to care for nothing but the advancement of their own party. Myriads are buried in business and money matters, and seem to neglect everything else but this world. Thousands are always wrangling about the forms and ceremonies of religion, and are ready to cry down everybody who does not use their shibboleths, and worship in their way. But an hour is fast coming when only one subject will be minded, and that subject will be Christ! We shall all find—and many perhaps too late—that it mattered little what we thought about other things, so long as we did not think about Christ.

Reader, I tell you this Christmas, that all men ought to think about Christ. There is no one in whom all the world has such a deep interest. There is no one to whom all the world owes so much. High and low, rich and poor, old and young, gentle and simple,—all ought to think about Christ.

II. Let us examine, secondly, *the common thoughts of many about Christ.*

To set down the whole list of thoughts about Christ, would indeed be thankless labour. It must content us to range them under a few general heads. This will save us both time and trouble. There were many strange thoughts about Christ when He was on earth. There are many strange and wrong thoughts about Christ now, when He is in heaven.

The thoughts of some people about Christ are simply *blasphemous*. They are not ashamed to deny His Divinity. They refuse to believe the miracles recorded of Him. They pretend to find fault with not a few of His sayings and doings. They even question the perfect honesty and sincerity of some things that He did. They tell us that He ought to

be ranked with great Reformers and Philosophers, like Socrates, Seneca, and Confucius, but no higher.—Thoughts like these are purely ridiculous and absurd. They utterly fail to explain the enormous influence which Christ and Christianity have had for eighteen hundred years in this world. There is not the slightest comparison to be made between Christ and any other teacher of mankind that ever lived. The difference between Him and others is a gulf that cannot be spanned, and a height that cannot be measured. It is the difference between gold and clay,—between the sun and a candle. Nothing can account for Christ and Christianity, but the old belief that Christ is very God. Reader, are the thoughts I have just described your own? If they are, take care!

The thoughts of some people about Christ are *vague, dim, misty, and indistinct*. That there was such a Person they do not for a moment deny. That He was the Founder of Christianity, and the object of Christian worship, they are quite aware. That they hear of Him every time they go to public worship, and ought to have some opinion or belief about Him, they will fully admit. But they could not tell you what it is they believe. They could not accurately describe and define it. They have not thoroughly considered the subject. They have not made up their minds!—Thoughts such as these are foolish, silly, and unreasonable. To be a dying sinner with an immortal soul, and to go on living without making up one's mind about the only Person who can save us, the Person who will at last judge us, is the conduct of a lunatic or an idiot, and not of a rational man. Reader, are the thoughts I have just described your own? If they are, take care!

The thoughts of some men about Christ are *mean*

and low. They have no doubt a distinct opinion about His position in their system of Christianity. They consider that if they do their best, and live moral lives, and go to church pretty regularly, and use the ordinances of religion, Christ will deal mercifully with them at last, and make up any deficiencies.—Thoughts such as these utterly fail to explain why Christ died on the cross. They take the crown off Christ's head, and degrade Him into a kind of make-weight to man's soul. They overthrow the whole system of the Gospel, and pull up all its leading doctrines by the roots. They exalt man to an absurdly high position; as if he could pay some part of the price of his soul!—They rob man of all the comfort of the Gospel; as if he must needs do something and perform some work to justify his own soul!—They make Christ a sort of Judge far more than a Saviour, and place the cross and the atonement in a degraded and inferior position! Reader, are the thoughts I have just described your own? If they are, take care!

The thoughts of some men about Christ are *dishonouring and libellous*. They seem to think that we need a mediator between ourselves and our Saviour! They appear to suppose that Christ is so high, and awful, and exalted a Person, that poor sinful man may not approach Him! They say that we must employ an Episcopally ordained minister as a kind of go-between, to stand between us and Jesus, and manage for our souls! They send us to saints, or angels, or the Virgin Mary, as if they were more kind and accessible than Christ!—Thoughts such as these are a practical denial of Christ's priestly office. They overthrow the whole doctrine of His peculiar business, as man's Intercessor. They hide and bury out of sight His especial love to sinners and His bound-

less willingness to receive them. Instead of a gracious Saviour, they make Him out an austere and hard King. Reader, are the thoughts I have just described your own? If they are, take care!

The thoughts of some men about Christ are *wicked and unholy*. They seem to think that they may live as they please, because Christ died for sinners! They will indulge every kind of wickedness, and yet flatter themselves that they are not blameworthy for it, because Christ is a merciful Saviour! They will talk complacently of God's election, and the necessity of grace, and the impossibility of being justified by works, and the fulness of Christ, and then make these glorious doctrines an excuse for lying, cheating, drunkenness, fornication, and every kind of immorality.—Thoughts such as these are as blasphemous and profane as downright infidelity. They actually make Christ the patron of sin. Reader, are the thoughts I have described your own? If they are, take care!

Reader, two general remarks apply to all these thoughts about Christ of which I have just been speaking. They all show a deplorable ignorance of Scripture. I defy any one to read the Bible honestly, and find any warrant for them in that blessed Book. Men cannot know their Bibles, when they hold such opinions.—They all help to prove the corruption and darkness of human nature. Man is ready to believe anything about Christ except the simple truth. He loves to set up an idol of his own, and bow down to it, rather than accept the Saviour whom God puts before him.

I leave this part of my subject here. It is a sorrowful and painful one, but not without its use. It is necessary to study morbid anatomy, if we would

understand health. The ground must be cleared of rubbish before we build.

III. Let us now count up, lastly, *the thoughts of true Christians about Christ.*

The thoughts I am going to describe are not the thoughts of many. I admit this most fully. It would be vain to deny it. The number of right thinkers about Christ in every age has been small. The true Christians among professing Christians have always been few. If it were not so, the Bible would have told an untruth. "Strait is the gate," says the Lord Jesus, "and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.—Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth unto destruction, and many there be that go in thereby." "Many walk," says Paul, "of whom I tell you, even weeping that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction." (Matt. vii. 13, 14. Phil. iii. 18, 19.)

True Christians have *high thoughts of Christ.* They see in Him a wondrous Person, far above all other beings in His nature,—a Person who is at one and the same time perfect God, mighty to save, and perfect man, able to feel.—They see in Him an All-powerful Redeemer, who has paid their countless debts to God, and delivered their souls from guilt and hell.—They see in Him an Almighty Friend, who left heaven for them, lived for them, died for them, rose again for them,—that He might save them for evermore.—They see in Him an Almighty Physician, who washed away their sins in His own blood, put His own Spirit in their hearts, delivered them from the power of sin, and gave them power to become God's children.—Happy are they who have such thoughts! Reader, have you?

True Christians have *trustful thoughts of Christ*. They daily lean the weight of their souls upon Him by faith, for pardon and peace. They daily commit the care of their souls to Him, as a man commits a treasure to a safe keeper. They daily cling to Him by faith, as a child in a crowd clings to its mother's hand. They look to Him daily for mercy, grace, comfort, help, and strength, as Israel looked to the pillar of cloud and fire in the wilderness for guidance. Christ is the Rock under their feet, and the staff in their hands, their ark and their city of refuge, their sun and their shield, their bread and their medicine, their health and their light, their fountain and their shelter, their portion and their home, their door and their ladder, their root and their head, their advocate and their physician, their captain and their elder brother, their life, their hope, and their all. Happy are they who have such thoughts! Reader, have you?

True Christians have *experimental thoughts of Christ*. The things that they think of Him, they do not merely think with their heads. They have not learned them from schools, or picked them up from others. They think them because they have found them true by their own heart's experience. They have proved them, and tasted them, and tried them. They think what they have felt out for themselves. There is all the difference in the world between knowing that a man is a doctor or a lawyer, while we never have occasion to employ him, and knowing him as "our own," because we have gone to him for medicine or law. Just in the same way there is a wide difference between head knowledge and experimental thoughts of Christ. Happy are they who have such thoughts! Reader, have you?

True Christians have *loving and reverent thoughts of Christ*. They love to do the things that please Him. They like in their poor weak way to show their affection to Him by keeping His words. They love everything belonging to Him, His day, His house, His ordinances, His people, His book. They never find His yoke heavy, or His burden painful to bear, or His commandments grievous. Love lightens all. They know something of the mind of Mr. Standfast, in "Pilgrim's Progress," when he said, as he stood in the river,—“I have loved to hear my Lord spoken of; and whenever I have seen the print of His shoe in the earth, then I have coveted to set my foot over it.” Happy are they who have such thoughts! Reader, have you?

True Christians have *hopeful thoughts of Christ*. They expect yet to receive far more from Him than they have ever received yet. They hope that they shall be kept to the end, and never perish. But this is not all. They look forward to Christ's second coming and expect that then they shall see far more than they have seen, and enjoy far more than they have yet enjoyed. They have the earnest of an inheritance now in the Spirit dwelling in their heart. But they hope for a far fuller possession when this world has passed away. They have hopeful thoughts of Christ's second Advent, of their own resurrection from the grave, of their re-union with all the saints who have gone before them, of eternal blessedness in Christ's kingdom. Happy are they who have such thoughts! They sweeten life, and lift men over many cares. Reader, have you such thoughts?

Reader, thoughts such as these are the property of all true Christians. Some of them know more of them and some of them know less. But all know something

about them. They do not always feel them equally at all times. They do not always find such thoughts equally fresh and green in their minds. They have their winter as well as their summer, and their low tide as well as their high water. But all true Christians are, more or less, acquainted with these thoughts. In this matter churchmen and dissenters, rich and poor, all are agreed, if they are true Christians. In other things they may be unable to agree and see alike. But they all agree in their thoughts about Christ. One word they can all say, which is the same in every tongue. That word is "Hallelujah," praise to the Lord Christ! One answer they can all make, which in every tongue is equally the same. That word is, "Amen," so be it!

And now, reader, I shall wind up my Christmas tract, by simply bringing before your conscience the question which forms its title. I ask you this day, "What think you of Christ?"

What others think about Him, is not the question now. Their mistakes are no excuse for you.—Their correct views will not save your soul. The point you have before you is simply this,—“What do you think yourself?”

Reader, this Christmas may possibly be your last. Who can tell but you may never live to see another December come round? Who can tell but your place may be empty, when the family party next Christmas is gathered together? Do not, I entreat you, put off my question or turn away from it. It can do you no harm to look at it and consider it. What do you think of Christ?

Begin, I beseech you, this day to have right thoughts of Christ, if you never had them before. Let the time past suffice you to have lived without

real and heartfelt religion.—Let this present Christmas be a starting point in your soul's history. Awake to see the value of your soul, and the immense importance of being saved. Break off sharp from sin and the world. Get down your Bible and begin to read it. Call upon the Lord Jesus Christ in prayer, and beseech Him to save your soul. Rest not, rest not till you have trustful, loving, experimental, hopeful thoughts of Christ.

Reader, mark my words! If you will only take the advice I have now given you, you will never repent it. Your life in future will be happier. Your heart will be lighter. Your Christmas gatherings will be more truly joyful. Nothing makes Christmas meetings so happy, as to feel that we are all travelling on towards an eternal gathering in heaven.

Reader, I say for the last time, if you would have a happy Christmas, have right thoughts about Christ.

I remain,

Your affectionate Friend,

J. C. RYLE.

Stradbroke Vicarage,

Suffolk, Dec., 1863.