

J. C. Ryle Tracts

These tracts are classics of Gospel Truth that readers of J. C. Ryle have come to expect from all his writings. His tracts are "pure gold." Many of these tracts, not published since the 19th Century, have come into my possession, and I offer you some of these inspiring works exactly word for word as they were first published by Drummond's Tract Depot, Stirling, Scotland.

"LOOKING UNTO JESUS."

Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.— Hebrews xii. 2.

THE text of Scripture which heads this page is well fitted to supply useful thoughts for Christmas. At a season like this, when we are specially invited to remember how our blessed Lord came into the world, and was born of the Virgin Mary, we surely cannot do better than ask ourselves what we know of "Looking unto Jesus." The Christianity which the world requires is a Christianity for everyday life. No other religion will ever receive much heart-felt attention from mankind. It may exist; but it will never strike deep root, and satisfy souls.

A mere Sunday religion is not enough. A thing put on and off with our Sabbath clothes is powerless. Thinking men feel and know that there are seven days in a week, and that life is not made up of Sundays.

A daily round of forms and ceremonies within consecrated buildings is not enough. Wise men remember that there is a world of duty and trial outside the walls of the church, in which they have to play their part. They want something that they can carry with them into that world.

A monastic religion will never do. A faith that cannot flourish except in an ecclesiastical hot-house, a faith which cannot face the cold air of worldly business, and bear fruit except behind the fence of retirement and private asceticism,— such a faith is a plant which our Heavenly Father has not planted, and it brings no fruit to perfection.

A religion of spasmodic and hysterical excitement will not do. It may suit weak and sentimental minds for a little season; but it rarely lasts, and does not meet the wants of many. It lacks bone and muscle, and too often ends in deadness, by the force of reaction. It is not the wind, nor the fire, nor the earthquake, but the still small voice, which shows the real presence of the Holy Ghost. (1 Kings xix. 12).

The Christianity which the world requires, and the Word of God reveals, is of a very different stamp. It is a useful everyday religion. It is a healthy, strong, manly plant, which can live in every position, and flourish in every atmosphere except that of sin. It is a religion which a man can carry with him wherever he goes, and never need leave behind him. In the army or in the navy, at the public school or at college, in the great hospital lecture-room and at the bar, on the farm or in the shop, in the market or 'change, in parliament or at court, true heaven-born Christianity will live

and not die. It will wear, and stand, and prosper in any climate, in winter and in summer, in heat and in cold. Such a religion meets the wants of mankind.

But where is such true Christianity to be found? What are its special ingredients? What is the nature of it? What are its peculiar characteristics? The answer to these questions is to be found in the three words of the text which form the title of this paper. The secret of a vigorous, powerful, everyday Christianity is to be ever "Looking unto Jesus." The glorious company of the Apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the saints who in every age and land have made their mark on mankind, and turned the world upside down,—all, all have had one common mint-stamp upon them. They have been men who lived "Looking unto Jesus." The expression of the text is one of those pithy golden sayings which stand out here and there on the face of the New Testament, and demand special attention. It is like "to me to live is Christ,"—"Christ is all and in all,"—"Christ, who is our life,"—"He is our peace,"—"I live by the faith of the Son of God." (Philip. i. 21 ; Colos. iii. 4, 11; Ephes. ii. 14; Gal. ii. 20.) To each and all of these sayings, one common remark applies. They are rich in thought and food for reflection. They contain far more than a careless eye can see on the surface.

In the phrase "looking unto Jesus," it is useful and interesting to remember that the Greek word which, in our English Bible, we render "*looking*," is only found here in the New Testament. Literally translated it means "looking off,"—looking away from other objects to one, only one, and looking on that one with a steady, fixed, intent gaze.

And the object we are to look at, you will observe, is a PERSON,—not a doctrine, not an abstract theological dogma, but a living Person; and that Person is Jesus the Son of God. How much matter for thought lies there! Creeds and confessions are the necessary invention of a comparatively modern age. The first and simplest type of an apostolic early Christian was a man who trusted, and loved, a living Divine Person. Of head knowledge, and accurate definitions, perhaps he had but little store. Very likely he would have passed a poor examination in a latter day theological school. But one thing he did know: he knew, believed, loved, and could have died for, a living Saviour, a real personal Friend in heaven, even Jesus, the crucified and risen Son of God. Well would it be for the Churches of the nineteenth century, if we had more of this simple Christianity among us, and could realize more the Person of Christ.

But, after all, the grand question which rises out of the text is this: What is it that we are to look at in Jesus? If we are to live habitually fixing the eyes of our mind on Christ, what are the special points to which we are to have regard? If "looking unto Jesus" is the real secret of a healthy, vigorous Christianity, what does the phrase mean?

I answer these questions without hesitation. I dismiss as insufficient and unsatisfactory the idea that the Lord Jesus is only set before us here as an "example, and nothing more." I hold with that great divine, John Owen, who was once Dean of my own college at Oxford, that "He is proposed to us as one in whom we are to place our faith, trust, and confidence, with all our expectation of success in our

Christian course." I consider there are four points of view in which we are intended to "look to Jesus," and I shall try, briefly, to put these four before you in order.

I. First, and foremost (yes! by far first), if we would look rightly to Jesus, *we must look daily at His death*, as the only source of inward peace.

We need inward peace. So long as our conscience is asleep, deadened by indulged sin, or dulled and stupefied by incessant pursuit of the things of this world, so long can man get on tolerably well without peace with God. But once let conscience open its eyes, and shake itself, and rise, and move, and it will make the stoutest child of Adam feel ill at ease. The irrepressible thought that this life is not all,—that there is a God, and a judgment, and a "something after death, an undiscovered bourne from which no traveller returns,"—that thought will come up at times in every man's mind, and make him long for inward peace. It is easy to write brave words about "eternal hope," and strew the path to the grave with flowers. Such theology is naturally popular: the world loves to have it so. But after all, there is something deep down in the heart of hearts of most men, which must be satisfied. The strongest evidence that old-fashioned creeds, as some are pleased to call them, are God's eternal truth, is the universal conscience of mankind.

Who is there among us all that can sit down and think over the days that are past,—school days, and college days, and days of middle life, their countless things left undone that ought to have been done, and done that ought not to have been done,—who, I say, can think over it all without shame, if indeed he does not turn from the review with disgust and terror, and refuse to think at all? *We all need peace.*

Where is the man in all England, the best and saintliest among us, whether old or young, who must not confess, if he speak the truth, that his best things now are full of imperfection, and his life a constant succession of shortcomings? Yes: the older we grow, and the nearer we draw to the light of perfect day, the more we see our own great darkness and multitudinous defilements, and the more disposed we feel to cry, "Unclean! unclean! God be merciful to me a sinner." *We need peace.*

Now, there is only one source of peace revealed in Scripture, and that is the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and the atonement which He has made for sin by that vicarious death on the cross. To obtain a portion in that great peace, we have only to "look" by faith to Jesus, as our Substitute and Redeemer, bearing our sin in His own body on the tree, and to cast all the weight of our souls on Him. To enjoy that peace habitually, we must keep "daily looking back" to the same wondrous point at which we began, daily bringing all our iniquity to Him, and daily remembering that "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah liii. 6). This, I am bold to say, is the Bible way of peace.

This is the old fountain of which all the true sheep of Christ have drunk for 1800 years, and have never found its waters fail. Holy fathers and holy school-men, holy reformers on both sides of the Channel and both sides of the Tweed, holy Nonconformists and holy Episcopalians in our own land,—all have agreed on one point, at least, in their respective creeds. And that point is this, that the only receipt for peace of conscience is to "look" by faith to Jesus suffering in our stead, the just for the unjust, paying our debt by that suffering, and dying for us on the cross.

The wisdom of these latter days entirely fails to find a better way of peace than the old path of "looking" to the vicarious death of Christ. Thousands are annually growing grey, and blistering their hands in hewing out cisterns,—broken cisterns, that can hold no water. They are vainly hoping that they will find some better way to heaven than the old-fashioned way of the cross. They will never find it. They will have to turn at last, if they love life, like many before them, to the brazen serpent. They must be content, like Israel in the wilderness, to look and live, and to be saved by the blood of the Lamb.

The words which Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote in A.D. 1093 upon this subject, are well worth noticing. They are to be found in his directions for the visitation of the sick. Quaint and old-fashioned as they sound, they are wiser, I fear, than many things written in our own times. He says:—

"Dost thou believe that thou canst not be saved but by the death of Christ?" The sick man answereth, Yes. Then let it be said unto him, Go to, then, and whilst thy soul abideth in thee, put all thy confidence in this death alone. Place thy trust in no other thing. Commit thyself wholly to this death. Wrap thyself wholly in this death. And if God would judge thee, say, 'Lord, I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and Thy judgment; and otherwise I will not contend with Thee.' And if He shall say unto thee that thou art a sinner, say, 'I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and my sins.' If He shall say unto thee that thou hast deserved damnation, say, 'Lord, I put the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between Thee and all my sins: and I offer His merits for my own, which I should have, and have not.' If He say that He is angry with thee, say, 'Lord, I place the death of our Lord Jesus Christ between me and Thy anger.'—*Quoted by Owen in his "Treatise on Justification:" (Johnstone's edition of Owen's works, vol. v., p. 17.)*

For ever let us keep to this old path of peace, and never be ashamed of it. While others go back, and barely conceal their contempt for the so-called blood theology, let us boldly go forward, "looking unto Jesus," and saying daily to Him, "Lord, I have sinned; but Thou hast suffered in my stead; I take Thee at Thy word, and rest my soul on Thee."

So much for the first "Look to Jesus." We must look back habitually to Christ's death for peace and pardon. This is what St. Paul meant the Hebrews to do. Let this be the first item in our creed.

II. In the second place, if we would look rightly to Jesus, we *must look daily to His life of intercession* in heaven, as our principal provision of strength and help.

We must surely feel that we need Almighty help every day we live, if we are true Christians. Even when started in the narrow way of life, with pardon, grace, and a new heart, we soon find that, left to ourselves, we shall never get safe home. Every returning morning brings with it so much to be done and borne and suffered, that we are often tempted to despair. So weak and treacherous are our hearts, so busy the devil, so persecuting and ensnaring the world, that we are sometimes half inclined to look back and return to Egypt. We are such poor, weak creatures, that we cannot do two things at once. It seems almost impossible to do our duty in that place of life to which God has called us, and not to be absorbed in it and forget our souls. The cares and business and occupations of life appear to drink up all our

thoughts, and swallow up all our attention. What are we to do? Where are we to look? How many are exercised with thoughts like these

I believe the great Scriptural remedy for all who feel such helplessness as I have faintly described, is to look upward to Christ in heaven, and to keep steadily before our eyes His intercession at the right hand of God. Like the sailor boy who goes aloft for the first time, we must learn to look UPWARD, away from ourselves and our weakness, and upward to Christ in heaven. We must try to realize daily that Jesus not only died for us and rose again, but that He also lives as our Advocate with the Father, and appears in heaven for us. This, surely, was the mind of St. Paul, when he said, "Being reconciled to God by the death of His Son, we shall be saved by His life." (Rom. v. 10). This, again, is what he meant when he gave that confident challenge, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." (Rom. viii. 34). This, above all, is what he had in view when he told the Hebrews, "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them." (Heb. vii. 25).

Now I venture boldly to express a doubt whether modern Christians "look to Jesus" in this point of view, and make as much as they ought of His life of intercession. It is too often a dropped link in our latter-day Christianity. We are apt to think only of the atoning DEATH and the precious blood, and to forget the LIFE and priestly office of our great Redeemer. It ought not to be so. We miss much by this forgetfulness of the whole truth as it is in Jesus. What a mine of daily comfort there is in the thought, that we have an Advocate with the Father, who never slumbers or sleeps, whose eye is always upon us, who is continually pleading our cause and obtaining fresh supplies of grace for us, who watches over us in every company and place, and never forgets us, though we, in going to and fro, and doing our daily business, cannot always think of Him. While we are fighting Amalek in the valley below, One greater than Moses is holding up His hands for us in heaven, and through His intercession we shall prevail. Surely, if we have been satisfied with half the truth about Jesus hitherto, we ought to say, 'I will live in such fashion no more.'

And here let me declare my own firm conviction, that the habit of daily looking to the intercession of Christ is one great safeguard against some modern superstitions. If Jesus did NOT live in heaven as our merciful and faithful High Priest, I could understand a little the craving that exists in many minds for that deadly opiate, which, nowadays, usurps the name and office of spiritual medicine: I mean, habitual confession to earthly priests, and habitual absolution. But I cannot understand it when I read the Epistle to the Hebrews, and see that we have a great High Priest in heaven, who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and who bids us pour out our hearts before Him, and come to Him for grace to help in time of need. In short, I do not hesitate to assert, that a right view of Christ's priestly office is the true antidote to some of the most dangerous errors of the Church of Rome.

So much for the second "look to Jesus." We ought to look habitually to His life and intercession.

III. In the third place, if we would look rightly to Jesus, we must *look daily at His example*, as our chief standard of holy living.

We must all feel, I suspect, and often feel, how hard it is to regulate our daily lives by mere rules and regulations. Scores of circumstances will continually cross our path, in which we find it difficult to see the line of duty, and feel perplexed. Prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and attention to the practical part of the Epistles, are, undoubtedly, primary resources. But surely it would cut many a knot, and solve many a problem, if we would cultivate the habit of studying the daily behaviour of our Lord, as recorded in the four Gospels, and striving to shape our own behaviour by its pattern. Yet this must have been what our Lord meant when He said, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." (John xiii. 15). And this is what St. Paul meant, when he wrote, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (1 Cor. xi; 1). And this is what St. John meant when he said, "he that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." (1 John ii. 6). This is the chief end for which any one is said to be predestinated; it is "to be conformed to the image of His Son." (Rom. viii. 29). This, says the 17th Article, with true wisdom, is the special character of God's elect,— "they be made like the image of God's only begotten Son, Jesus Christ." In the face of such evidence as this, I have a right to say that our "look" to Jesus is very imperfect, if we do not look at His example, and strive to follow it.

Let us consider for a moment what a beautifier and marvellous portrait the four Gospels hold up to our eyes of the Man Jesus Christ. It is a portrait that extorted the admiration even of a wretched sceptic like Rousseau. It is a portrait which, even to this day, is one of the cardinal difficulties of infidelity, for there never lived the infidel who could face the question, "Tell us, if you refuse to believe the Divine origin of Christianity, tell us who and what Christ was?" Let us Christians trace all the footsteps of our Master's career from the carpenter's shop at Nazareth to the cross of Calvary. See how in every company and position, by the Sea of Galilee, and in the Temple courts of Jerusalem, by the well of Samaria, in the house Bethany, amidst the sneering Sadducees, or the despised publicans, alone with His faithful disciples, or surrounded by bitter enemies, He is always the same,—always holy, harmless, undefiled; always perfect in word and deed. Mark what a wonderful combination of seemingly opposite qualifications is to be seen in His character. Bold and outspoken in opposing hypocrisy and self-righteousness, tender and compassionate in receiving the chief of sinners; profoundly wise in arguing before the Sanhedrin; simple, so that a child might understand Him, in teaching the poor; patient towards His weak disciples; unruffled in temper by the keenest provocation; considerate for all around Him; sympathizing, self-denying, prayerful, overflowing with love and compassion, utterly unselfish, always about His Father's business, ever going about doing good, continually ministering to others, and never expecting others to minister to Him,—what person born of woman ever walked on earth like Jesus of Nazareth? We may well be humbled and ashamed when we think how unlike the best of us are to our great Example, and what poor, blurred copies of His character we show to mankind. Like careless children at school, we are content to copy those around us, with all their faults, and do not look constantly

at the only faultless copy, the One perfect Man, in whom even Satan could find "nothing." (John xiv. 30). But one thing, at any rate, we must all admit. If Christians, during the last eighteen centuries, had been more like Christ, the Church would certainly have been far more beautiful, and would probably have done far more good to the world.

It is a sorrowful thought that Christ's example should be so little remembered or looked at in these latter days. It is a striking illustration of man's mental littleness and inability to grasp more than a portion of the truth. You may lay your hand on a hundred books which profess to grapple with points of doctrine, before you will find one which handles the mighty subject of the true pattern of Christian practice. Yet no part of God's truth can ever be neglected without the Church taking damages; and I believe the Church has suffered greatly by neglecting the point of which I now speak. The famous book of Thomas a Kempis may have many defects, I have no doubt, and to some it is even mischievous. But I am sure it would be well if we had many more Christlike Christian men and women, who strive at home and abroad to imitate Christ.

Let us beware of this error in these latter days. Let us cultivate the daily habit of "looking to Christ as our pattern," as well as our salvation. Let us not forget that a cunning artificer will tell you that he often learns more from a pattern in five minutes than from the best written rules and directions in an hour. We can never look too steadily at Christ's death and intercession. But we may easily look too little at the blessed steps of His most holy life. Let us shake off this reproach. Let us strive and pray that we may make the tone and temper of Jesus our model and standard in our daily behaviour. Let all men see that, as the poet says, "this example has a magnet force," and that we love to follow Him whom we profess to love. "My Master, my Master!" as George Herbert loved to say. "How would my Master have behaved in my position?" should be our constant cry. "Let me go and do likewise."

So much for the third "look" at Jesus. We ought to look habitually to His example.

IV. Fourthly and lastly, if we would "look" to Jesus rightly, *we must look forward to His second Advent*, as the truest fountain of hope and consolation.

That the early Christians were always looking forward to a second coming of their risen Master, is a fact beyond all controversy. You cannot read the Epistles and fail to see that one of their chief sources of comfort was the hope of His return. They clung tenaciously to the old promise, "This same Jesus shall come in like manner as ye have seen Him go." (Acts i. 11). In all their trials and persecutions, under Roman Emperors and heathen rulers, they cheered one another with the thought that their own King would soon come again, and plead their cause. Persecutors and oppressors would soon be swept away, and the great Shepherd of the sheep would gather them into a fold of safety. "We look for the Saviour." "We wait for the Son of God from heaven." "Yet a little time He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." "Be patient unto the coming of the Lord." (Philip. iii. 20; 1 Thess. i. 10; Heb. x. 37; James v.7). Many, no doubt, in their impatience, misunderstood the times and seasons, and thought that the kingdom of God would

immediately appear. But, for all that, it remains a fact that a second personal advent of Christ was the great hope of the early Church.

Now, I believe firmly that this same second advent was meant to be the hope of the Church in every age of the world. It ought to be the consolation of Christians in these latter days as much as it was in primitive times. And I doubt whether there ever was an era when it was so useful to keep the second advent of Christ steadily in view as it is just now.

Who can look abroad at public affairs all over the globe, and avoid the impression that this old, bankrupt world needs a new order of things? The cement seems to have fallen out of the walls of human society. On all sides we hear of restlessness, anarchy, lawlessness, envy, jealousy, distrust, suspicion, and discontent. The continuance of evils of every kind, physical, moral, and social,—the constantly recurring revolutions, and wars, and famines, and pestilences,—the never-ending growth of superstition, scepticism, and unbelief,—the bitter strife of political parties,—the divisions and controversies of Christians,—the overflowing of intemperance and immorality,—the boundless luxury and extravagance of some classes, and the grinding poverty of others,—the strikes of workmen,—the conflict of labour and capital,—the shiftless helplessness of statesmen to devise remedies,—the commercial dishonesty,—the utter failure of mere secular knowledge to regenerate mankind,—the comparative deadness of Churches,—the apparently small results of missions at home and abroad,—the universal "distress of nations with perplexity," and dread of something terrible coming,—these strange phenomena and symptoms, what do they all mean? Yes: what indeed! They all seem to tell us, with no uncertain voice, that the world is out of joint, and needs a new administration, and a new King. Like a crying infant in the arms of a stranger, the world is ever fretting, and wailing, and struggling, though it hardly knows why, and will never rest and be quiet till its rightful parent takes it in hand, and puts the stranger aside. As Plato makes Socrates say, in one of his dialogues, before the FIRST advent, "We must wait for some one, be he God, or inspired man, to give us light, and take away darkness from our eyes,"—even so we Christians must fix our hopes upon the SECOND advent, and look and long for the rightful King's appearing.

And who, again, can look round his own private circle, whether great or small, and fail to see many things which are most painful and distressing; things which, like a watcher by a dying pillow, he can only look on and feel deeply, but cannot mend? Think of the everflowing stream of sorrow arising from poverty, sickness, disease, and death,—from quarrels about money, from incompatibility of temper, from family misunderstandings, from failures in business, from disappointments about children, from separations of families in pursuit of callings. What hidden skeletons there are in many households! How many aching hearts! How many secret sorrows known only to God! How many Jacobs in the world, vexed by their children, and refusing to be comforted! How many Absaloms bowing down a father's head by their thanklessness and rebellion! How many Isaacs and Rebeccas daily grieved by self-willed sons! How many weeping widows of Nain! Where is the thoughtful Christian who does not often sigh for a better state of

things, and ask himself, "How long, O Lord, faithful and true, how long are we to go on weeping, and working, binding up wounds, and drinking bitter cups, and educating, and parting, and burying, and putting on mourning? When shall the end once be?"

Now, I believe that the true Scriptural source of consolation, in the face of all that troubles us, whether publicly or privately, is to keep steadily before our eyes the second coming of Christ. Once more I say, we must "look forward to Jesus." We must grasp and realize the blessed fact that the rightful King of the world is returning soon, and shall have His own again; that He shall put down that old usurper, the devil, and take away the curse from off the earth. Let us cultivate the habit of daily looking forward to the resurrection of the dead, the gathering together of the saints, the restitution of all things, the banishment of sorrow and sin, and the re-establishment of a new kingdom, of which the rule shall be righteousness. Anything may be borne, I believe, even hell itself, if men only have a hope of an end. All the sorrows of this world will be cheerfully borne, and we shall work on with a light heart, if we thoroughly believe that Christ is coming again without sin unto salvation.

After all, one principal cause of human unhappiness is the indulgence of unwarrantable expectations from anybody or anything here below. I ask my younger readers especially to remember THAT. The less we expect from statesmen, philosophers, men of money, men of science, ay, even from visible Churches, the happier we shall be. He that leans on staffs like these will find them pierce his hand. He that drinks only of these fountains shall thirst again. Let us learn to fix our chief hopes on the second coming of Christ, and work, and watch, and wait confidently, like those who wait for the morning, and know for a certainty that in the time appointed by the Father, the Sun of Righteousness will arise, with healing on His wings. Then, and then only, we shall not be disappointed.

So much for the fourth and last look to Jesus. We ought to look habitually to His second personal coming, as the hope of the Church and world. He that looks at the cross of Christ is a wise man; he that looks at the intercession and example is wiser still; but he that lives looking at all four objects,—the death, the priesthood, the pattern, the second advent of Jesus,—he is the wisest of all.

(a) And now let me wind up all by offering a word of friendly advice to all into whose hands this paper may fall. I offer it in all affection as one who longs to help you in the right way, who desires to promote in your heart a healthy, vigorous, everyday Christianity, and would gladly guard you against mistakes.

Our greatest poet truly says, "We know what we are; but we know not what we may be." All before us is dark and uncertain, and mercifully kept from our eyes. I cannot tell you where the lot of many of my readers may be finally cast on earth, or what they may be called to do and bear before the end comes. But one thing I say confidently,—let the keynote of your Christianity, in every quarter of the globe, be the phrase of my text,— "Looking to Jesus," Jesus dying, Jesus interceding, Jesus the example, Jesus coming again. Fix your eyes firmly on Him if you would so run as to obtain. Value the pure and reformed branch of Christ's Church, to which you belong, and all her many privileges. Love her services. Labour for her peace.

Contend for her prosperity. But for your own personal religion, the salvation of your own soul, take care that your ruling idea is, "Looking to Jesus."

(b) Together with friendly advice, let me offer a friendly warning. Beware, if you love life, beware of a Christless religion. A watch without a mainspring, a steam engine without a fire, a solar system without the sun,—all these are but faint and feeble images of the utter uselessness of a religion without Christ.

And next to a Christless religion, beware of a religion in which Christ is not the first, foremost, chief, principal object,—the very Alpha in the alphabet of your faith. He that enters upon a vast series of arithmetical calculations, requiring weeks and months of brain-exhausting toil, he knows well that his labour will be all in vain, and his conclusions faulty, if a single figure is wrong in his first line. And he that does not give Christ His rightful place and office in the beginning of his religion, must not be surprised if he never knows anything of joy and peace in believing, and goes cheerless and comfortless on his way to heaven, with "all the voyage of life bound in shallows and in misery."

(c) Finally, may I not say to all, both old and young, with this great text in view, that we shall do well to aim at greater SIMPLICITY in our own personal religion.

The early Christians lacked many privileges and advantages that we enjoy. They had no printed books. They worshipped God in dens and caves and upper chambers, had few and simple ecclesiastical garments, and often received the Lord's Supper in vessels of wood, and not of silver or gold. They had little money, no church endowments, no universities. Their creeds were short. Their theological definitions were scanty and few. But what they knew they knew well. They were men of one book. They knew Whom they believed. If they had wooden communion vessels, they had golden ministers and teachers. They "looked to Jesus" and realized intensely the personality of Jesus. For Jesus they lived, and worked, and died. But what are we doing? And where are we in the nineteenth century? And what deliverance are we working on earth? With all our countless advantages, our grand old cathedrals, our splendid libraries, our accurate definitions, our elaborate liturgies, our civil liberties, our religious societies, our numerous facilities, we may well doubt whether we are making such a mark on the world as Clement and Justin Martyr, and their companions, made 1700 years ago.

I know we cannot put the clock back, and return to the A B C of early Christianity. But one thing we can do: we can grasp more firmly, with every returning Christmas, the grand old primeval principles around which our modern Christianity has clustered, and swelled, and grown to its present proportions. Such a principle is that laid down in our text, "Looking unto Jesus." Then let us covenant with ourselves, that for the time to come we will try to run our race, fight our battles, fill our position, serve our generation, like men who are ever "looking to Jesus." So looking while we live, we shall see face to face when we die. And then when the last great Christmas gathering takes place, we shall joyfully exchange faith for sight, see as we have been seen, and know as we have been known.
