

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN XII. 12–19.

12 On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem,	remembered they that these things were written of him, and <i>that</i> they had done these things unto him.
13 Took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna; Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.	17 The people therefore that was with him when he called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record.
14 And Jesus, when he had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written,	18 For this cause the people also met him, for that they heard that he had done this miracle.
15 Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt.	19 The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.
16 These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then	

A CAREFUL reader of the Gospels can hardly fail to observe that our Lord Jesus Christ's conduct, at this stage of His earthly ministry, is very peculiar. It is unlike anything else recorded of Him in the New Testament. Hitherto we have seen Him withdrawing as much as possible from public notice, retiring into the wilderness, and checking those who would have brought Him forward and made Him a king. As a rule He did not court popular attention. He did not "cry or strive, or cause His voice to be heard in the streets." (Matt. xii. 19.) Here, on the contrary, we see Him making a public entry into Jerusalem, attended by an immense crowd of people, and causing even the Pharisees to say, "Behold, the world has gone after Him."

The explanation of this apparent inconsistency is not hard to find out. The time had come at last when Christ was to die for the sins of the world. The time had come when the true passover Lamb was to be slain, when the true blood of atonement was to be shed, when Messiah was to be "cut off" according to prophecy, (Dan. ix. 26,) when the way into the holiest was to be opened by the true High Priest to all mankind. Knowing all this, our Lord purposely drew attention to Himself. Knowing this, He placed Himself prominently under the notice of the whole Jewish nation. It was only meet and right that this thing should not be "done in a corner." (Acts xxvi. 26.) If ever there was a transaction in our Lord's earthly ministry which was public, it was the Sacrifice which He offered up on the cross of Calvary. He died at the time of year when all the tribes were assembled at Jerusalem for the passover feast. Nor was this all. He died in a week when, by His remarkable public entry into Jerusalem, He had caused the eyes of all Israel to be specially fixed upon Himself.

We learn, for one thing, in these verses, *how entirely voluntary the sufferings of Christ were.*

It is impossible not to see in the history before us that our Lord had a mysterious influence over the minds and wills of all around Him, whenever He thought fit to use it. Nothing else can account for the effect which His

approach to Jerusalem had on the multitudes which accompanied Him. They seem to have been carried forward by a secret constraining power, which they were obliged to obey, in spite of the disapproval of the leaders of the nation. In short, just as our Lord was able to make winds, and waves, and diseases, and devils obey Him, so was He able, when it pleased Him, to turn the minds of men according to His will.

For the case before us does not stand alone. The men of Nazareth could not hold Him when He chose to “pass through the midst of them and go His way.” (Luke iv. 30.) The angry Jews of Jerusalem could not detain him when they would have laid violent hands on Him in the Temple; but, “going through the midst of them, He passed by.” (John viii. 59.) Above all, the very soldiers who apprehended Him in the garden, at first “went backward and fell to the ground.” (John xviii. 6.) In each of these instances there is but one explanation. A Divine influence was put forth. There was about our Lord during His whole earthly ministry a mysterious “hiding of His power.” (Hab. iii. 4.) But He had almighty power when He was pleased to use it.

Why, then, did He not resist His enemies at last? Why did He not scatter the band of soldiers who came to seize Him, like chaff before the wind? There is but one answer. He was a willing Sufferer in order to procure redemption for a lost and ruined soul. He had undertaken to give His own life as a ransom, that we might live forever, and He laid it down on the cross with all the desire of His heart. He did not bleed and suffer and die because He was vanquished by superior force, and could not help Himself, but because He loved us, and rejoiced to give Himself for us as our Substitute. He did not die because He could not avoid death, but because He was willing with all His heart to make His soul an offering for sin.

Forever let us rest our hearts on this most comfortable thought. We have a most willing and loving Saviour. It was His delight to do His Father’s will, and to make a way for lost and guilty man to draw near to God in peace. He loved the work He had taken in hand, and the poor sinful world which He came to save. Never, then, let us give way to the unworthy thought that our Saviour does not love to see sinners coming to Him, and does not rejoice to save them. He who was a most willing Sacrifice on the cross is also a most willing Saviour at the right hand of God. He is just as willing to receive sinners who come to Him now for peace, as He was to die for sinners, when He held back His power and willingly suffered on Calvary.

We learn, for another thing, in these verses, *how minutely the prophecies concerning Christ’s first coming were fulfilled.*

The riding into Jerusalem on an ass, which is here recorded, might seem at first sight a simple action, and in no way remarkable. But when we turn to the Old Testament, we find that this very thing had been predicted by the Prophet Zechariah five hundred years before. (Zech. ix. 9.) We find that the

coming of a Redeemer some day was not the only thing which the Holy Ghost had revealed to the Fathers, but that even the least particulars of His earthly career were predicted and written down with precise accuracy.

Such fulfilments of prophecy as this deserve the special attention of all who love the Bible and read it with reverence. They show us that every word of Holy Scripture was given by inspiration of God. They teach us to beware of the mischievous practice of spiritualizing and explaining away the language of Scripture. We must settle it in our minds that the plain, literal meaning of the Bible is generally the true and correct meaning. Here is a prediction of Zechariah literally and exactly fulfilled. Our Lord was not merely a very humble person, as some spiritualizing interpreters would have explained Zechariah's words to mean, but He literally rode into Jerusalem on an ass. Above all, such fulfilments teach us what we may expect in looking forward to the second advent of Jesus Christ. They show us that we must look for a literal accomplishment of the prophecies concerning that second coming, and not for a figurative and a spiritual one. Forever let us hold fast this great principle. Happy is that Bible-reader who believes the words of the Bible to mean exactly what they seem to mean. Such a man has got the true key of knowledge in looking forward to things to come. To know that predictions about the second advent of Christ will be fulfilled literally, just as predictions about the first advent of Christ were fulfilled literally, is the first step towards a right understanding of unfulfilled prophecy.

NOTES. JOHN XII. 12-19.

12.—[*On the next day.*] This day must have been the Sunday before Easter, which is commonly known in England as "Palm Sunday," from the circumstance here related.

[*Much people...come to the feast.*] This must include many of the Jews who had come up to the passover from Galilee, and were doubtless well acquainted with our Lord's ministry and the numerous miracles He had wrought in Galilee. Some of them in all human probability had formed part of the multitude whom He fed with a few loaves in the wilderness.

[*When they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.*] We must suppose that by some means our Lord's intention of coming to Jerusalem must have become known, either by Himself communicating it, or by His disciples learning it and telling others. This information would be carried back to the city by those who came from thence to Bethany on Saturday. Bethany, however, was on the direct road from Jericho to Jerusalem, and the tidings of our Lord's approach may have travelled before Him for some days.

Rollock thinks this multitude must have been chiefly composed of Jews not residing in Jerusalem. The Jerusalem Jews, he thinks, are an instance of the old proverb, which he quotes, "The nearer the Church the further from God."

13.—[*Took branches of palm trees, and went...meet Him.*] The precise motive of this action we are left to conjecture. Palm branches were carried by processions attending kings or victorious generals on public occasions. The triumphant host in heaven, which John saw in vision, was composed of persons having "palms in their hands." (Rev. vii. 9.) It may be that some of the crowd on this occasion believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Others, we may be sure, did what the rest did, without any special motive at all. At most we can only suppose that

the multitude had a vague idea that Jesus was somebody very remarkable, a prophet, or someone raised up by God, and as such did Him honour.

Rollock thinks the custom of carrying branches at the feast of tabernacles, as the expression of joy, was the motive of the crowd here.

[*And cried, Hosanna.*] This Hebrew word is taken from Psalm cxviii. 25, and signifies “Save now, we beseech thee.”

Calvin thinks this phrase testified that they acknowledged Christ to be the Messiah, and considers that the Psalm cxviii. had special reference to Messiah’s coming.

[*Blessed...King of Israel that cometh...name...Lord.*] This sentence would be more literally rendered “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, the king of Israel.” It is partly taken from Psalm cxviii. 26; but there the words are simply “Blessed be He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” and no mention is made of “the king.”—We can only conjecture that some of the multitude had a vague idea that Jesus had come to be a temporal King, and a conquering Messiah, who would set Israel free from all foreign dominion. These few caught up the words of the Psalm, and their cry was taken up by the many around them, perhaps without knowing distinctly what they did or said. Nothing is so soon caught up as a popular cry. From “Hosanna” to “Crucify Him” there was only an interval of a very few days! Nothing is so worthless as popular applause.

Theophylact holds decidedly that the multitude honoured our Lord as God. But I cannot think it.

- 14.—[*And Jesus...found...ass, sat thereon.*] That there was no chance or accident in the ass being found, we know from St. Matthew’s Gospel, where we read that the disciples were sent to get the ass ready. (Matt. xxi. 7.) Every step of this triumphal progress into Jerusalem was prearranged.

To ride upon an ass, we must always remember, was not so low and ignominious a mode of travelling as it may seem to us. The Eastern ass is a very different creature to the English ass, larger, stronger, and far more valuable. Asses are specially named as part of the wealth of Abraham, Jacob, and Job. (Gen. xii. 16; xxx. 43; Job xlii. 12.) Solomon had an officer specially over the asses. (1 Chron. xxvii. 30.) Abraham, Balaam, Achsah, Abigail, and the Shunamite rich woman, all rode on asses. To ride on white asses was a mark of great men in the days of the Judges. (Judges v. 10.) The idea therefore of anything degrading in riding on an ass must be entirely dismissed from our minds.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the ass is not the animal that a king or ruler, in any age, has ever chosen to use, on public occasions, in heading a procession. The horse has always been preferred. The use of an ass, we cannot doubt, was meant to show that our Lord’s kingdom was utterly unlike the kingdoms of this world. No Roman soldier in the garrison of Jerusalem, who, standing at his post or sitting in his barrack-window, saw our Lord riding on an ass, could report to his centurion that He looked like one who came to wrest the kingdom of Judaea out of the hand of the Romans, drive out Pontius Pilate and his legions from the tower of Antonia, and achieve independence for the Jews with the sword!

The Greek word rendered “young ass” here, is a diminutive, and seems used intentionally to show that it was a very young or small ass.

[*As it is written.*] By riding on an ass our Lord had fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah, in which, 500 years before, the prophet had foretold that the King of Zion would one day appear “riding upon an ass.” At the time when he prophesied this, there were no kings in Jerusalem. The kingdom had ceased at the captivity. We cannot doubt that this prophecy was well known among the Scribes and Pharisees, and taken together with the fact that Daniel’s 70 weeks were expiring, our Lord’s entry into Jerusalem in this fashion must have

raised many thoughts in their hearts.

Let it be noted that many like events in our Lord's earthly ministry were foreknown and foretold long before they happened, and with increasing minuteness and particularity as the roll of prophecy drew near to an end.

- 15.—[*Fear not, daughter of Sion, etc.*] It will be observed, of course, that John does not quote literally and exactly all that Zechariah said. He omits several words. The explanation is simple.

He did not quote from memory only, and so forget part; but he purposely only quoted that part of the prediction which was now specially fulfilled; viz., "the riding on the ass." The object of the prophecy, when it was first delivered, was to comfort the Jews in their low and decayed state, after their return from Babylon, by a promise of Messiah. Therefore Zechariah was taught by the Holy Ghost to say things which may be paraphrased as follows: "Fear not; be not cast down or depressed, O daughter of Sion, or inhabitants of Jerusalem. Low and depressed as your condition may be now, there will be a day when you shall have a King again. There shall come One who will ride on a certain public occasion into thy gates,—a King on an ass's colt, not as a warrior, with a sword in hand, but as a peaceful Prince, a just and holy King, better even than David, Solomon, Hezekiah, or Josiah, and bringing with Him salvation for souls. Therefore think not thyself forsaken, because thou art poor now, and hast no king. Look forward to thy coming King."

Let it be noted that Christ's coming, first or second, is always the great topic of comfort in prophetic writings.

- 16.—[*These things understood not...disciples...first.*] It is clear from this and other kindred passages, that our Lord's own immediate followers had a very imperfect knowledge of our Lord's Person and work, and of the fulfilment of Scripture which was going on around them. Brought up amidst Jewish notions of a glorious temporal Messiah, they failed to see the full meaning of many of our Lord's doings.

Let us never forget that men may be true Christians, and right hearted, and yet be very ignorant on some points. "Faith," says Zwingli, on this verse, "admits of degrees and increase." In estimating others, we must make great allowance for early training and associations.

[*But when Jesus was glorified.*] This must mean, as Theophylact says, our Lord's ascension. After that time, and the day of Pentecost, the minds of the disciples were greatly enlightened. Compare John vii. 39: "The Holy Ghost was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

[*Then remembered...these things...written of Him.*] The power of memory to see things, long after they happen, in a new light, and then to recollect them vividly, is very remarkable. In no case does it appear more curiously than in the rising again in our minds of texts and sermons heard long ago, which at the time apparently left no impression on us. Preachers and teachers may take comfort in this. All is not lost that they say, although their hearers and scholars may seem at the time to pay no attention. Their words in many cases shall have a resurrection. One great cause of this is, that it is part of the Holy Ghost's office "to bring things to remembrance." (John xiv. 26.)

[*And...they...done these things...Him.*] The disciples found, long after the triumphant entry into Jerusalem, that they had been unconscious actors in a mighty accomplishment of Scripture. This is a thought for us all. We have not the least idea, during the greater part of our lives, how much of God's great purposes on earth are being carried on through us and by us, without our being conscious of it. The full extent to which they are carried on we shall never know till we wake up in another world. We shall then discern with wonder and

amazement the full meaning of many a thing in which we were unconscious agents during our lives.

Calvin remarks: "Then, after the ascension, did it occur to the disciples that Christ did not do these things rashly, and that these men were not employed in idle amusement, but that the whole transaction had been regulated by the providence of God."

Poole observes, that here St. John "confesseth his own ignorance." He was present, and saw all that was done, but did not understand it at the time.

17.—[*The people therefore...Lazarus...bare record.*] I feel no doubt that this verse describes one part of the multitude which met our Lord, and the following verse describes another part. One part, and of course a small one, consisted of those who had seen the raising of Lazarus. The other, and a much larger one, consisted of those who had only heard the report.

That there must have been a very large number of persons present at the miracle of Bethany is, I think, indirectly proved by the expression here used, "people that were with Him."

The words, "bare record," must mean that they testified that a great miracle really had been wrought, and that this same Jesus, now riding on an ass before the eyes of the people, was that very Person who had wrought it. I do not see that we can possibly get more out of the expression, and I cannot suppose that these people testified their belief in Christ's Messiahship.

The double expression, "called out of his grave," and "raised from the dead," deserves notice. It is doubtless meant to keep before our minds the mighty simplicity of the means used by our Lord. He spoke, and it was done. He "called" to Lazarus to come forth, and he was "raised" at once.

18.—[*For this cause...people met Him, etc.*] This verse describes the state of mind of the larger part of the multitude which surrounded our Lord at His entry into Jerusalem. It consisted of those who had heard the report of his raising Lazarus,—a story magnified, no doubt, in the telling. Strong curiosity to see the Person who had done such a miracle would call forth an immense crowd in any city. But among Jews, familiar with Old Testament miracles, assembled in enormous numbers for the Passover, excited by the rumour of Messiah coming,—among such we may well believe that the report of Jesus coming in from Bethany would draw together many myriads of spectators to meet Him.

The Greek words, "for this cause," here seem to refer forward to the latter part of the verse, and not backward to the preceding verse. Compare x. 17, where the same form of language is used.

19.—[*The Pharisees...said...prevail nothing.*] This is the language of men baffled, angry, and at their wits' end from vexation, to see their plans defeated. Instead of finding people willing to lay hands on Jesus as a malefactor, and to deliver Him up into their power, they beheld a large multitude surrounding Him with joyful acclamations, and saluting Him as a King! Of course they could do nothing but sit still and see it. The least attempt to use violence against our Lord would have raised a tumult, and endangered their own lives. So that they were obliged to see their most hated enemy entering Jerusalem in triumph, like Mordecai led by Haman. (Esther vi. 11.)

"Perceive ye," I believe, should be taken as an imperative, and not as an interrogative indicative. It sounds like the language of men looking on from the city walls or the temple courts, as the huge procession wound slowly through the gates of the city. "Behold this sight! Behold how you do nothing effectual to stop this fellow's course! Your order to denounce Him, and have Him apprehended, is utterly useless and unprofitable."

Chrysostom and Theophylact think that those who said this had some faith and felt rightly, but had not courage enough to confess Christ. But I cannot agree with them. Calvin and other reformers think, on the contrary, that it was the language of Christ's enemies.

Bullinger observes that wicked men show their wickedness especially by their dislike of true religion, and their annoyance when, as in the case before us, it seems to enjoy a temporary popularity. For neglect and contempt of religion they show no concern at all.

[*Behold...world...gone after Him.*] Some allowance of course must be made for the exaggerated language which angry and disappointed men use under the influence of passion. Nevertheless the word "world" may not be really so extravagant as it appears at first, when we consider the immense number of Jews who attended the passover feast. According to a computation made by Josephus there were nearly three millions of people assembled on such occasions at Jerusalem. At this rate we can understand that the crowd drawn together by our Lord's public entry might well be so large as to warrant the saying, "The world is gone after him." Most of the crowd, it may be remembered, were not dwellers in Jerusalem, but strangers, who were only visitors or sojourners, absent from home, and would materially swell a crowd.

In leaving this passage it is impossible not to feel that there must have been an overruling, constraining influence on the minds of the Jewish people on the occasion of our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. This, no doubt, was an influence miraculously exercised by our Lord in order to draw all men's attention to Himself, and to make His approaching Sacrifice on the cross as public an event as possible.

Rollock observes: "A secret power of royal authority stirred up the minds of the multitude to receive Christ as a king." He also observes that it is the same power which Christ will put forth when He comes at the last day to judge the world.