

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,  
And many Explanatory Notes.

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JOHN XVI. 25–33.

25 These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.

26 At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you:

27 For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

28 I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.

29 His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb.

30 Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou earnest forth from God.

31 Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?

32 Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the father is with me.

33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

THE passage we have now read is a very remarkable portion of Scripture, for two reasons. On the one hand, it forms a suitable conclusion to our Lord's long parting address to His disciples. It was meet and right that such a solemn sermon should have a solemn ending. On the other hand it contains the most general and unanimous profession of belief that we ever find the Apostles making:—"Now are we sure that Thou knowest all things by this we believe that Thou camest forth from God."

That there are things hard to be understood in the passage it would be useless to deny. But there lie on its surface three plain and profitable lessons, to which we may usefully confine our attention.

We learn, for one thing, that *clear knowledge of God the Father is one of the foundations of the Christian religion*. Our Lord says to His disciples, "The time cometh when I shall show you plainly of the Father." He does not say, we should mark, "I will show you plainly about myself." It is the Father whom He promises to show.

The wisdom of this remarkable saying is very deep. There are few subjects of which men know so little in reality as the character and attributes of God the Father. It is not for nothing that it is written, "No man knoweth the Father save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son shall reveal Him." (Matt. xi. 27.) "The only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." (John i. 18.) Thousands fancy they know the Father because they think of Him as great, and almighty, and all-hearing, and wise, and eternal, but they think no further. To think of Him as just and yet the justifier of the sinner who believes in Jesus,—as the God who sent His Son to suffer and die,—as God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself,—as God specially well-pleased with the atoning sacrifice of His Son, whereby His law is honoured; to think of God the Father in this way is not given to most men. No wonder that our Master says, "I will show you plainly of the

Father.”

Let it be part of our daily prayers, that we may know more of “the only true God,” as well as of Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Let us beware alike of the mistakes which some make, who speak of God as if there was no Christ; and of the mistakes which others make, who speak of Christ as if there was no God. Let us seek to know all three Persons in the blessed Trinity, and give to each One the honour due to him. Let us lay hold firmly of the great truth, that the Gospel of our salvation is the result of the eternal counsels of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and that we are as thoroughly debtors to the love of the Father, as to the love of the Spirit, or the love of the Son. No one has learned of Christ so deeply as the man who is ever drawing nearer to the Father through the Son,—ever feeling more childlike confidence in Him,—and ever understanding more thoroughly that in Christ God is not an angry judge, but a loving Father and Friend.

We learn, for another thing, in this passage, that *our Lord Jesus Christ makes much of a little grace, and speaks kindly of those who have it*. We see Him saying to the disciples: “The Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God.”

How weak was the faith and love of the Apostles! How soon, in a very few hours, they were buried under a cloud of unbelief and cowardice! These very men whom Jesus commends for loving and believing, before the morning sun arose forsook Him and fled. Yet, weak as their graces were, they were real and true and genuine. They were graces which hundreds of learned priests and scribes and Pharisees never attained, and, not attaining, died miserably in their sins.

Let us take great comfort in this blessed truth. The Saviour of sinners will not cast off them that believe in Him, because they are babes in faith and knowledge. He will not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. He can see reality under much infirmity, and where He sees it He is graciously pleased. The followers of such a Saviour may well be bold and confident. They have a Friend who despises not the least member of His flock, and casts out none who come to Him, however weak and feeble, if they are only true.

We learn, for another thing, in this passage, that the *best Christians know but little of their own hearts*. We see the disciples professing loudly, “Now Thou speakest plainly,—now we are sure,—now we believe.” Brave words these! And yet the very men that spoke them, in a very short time were scattered like timid sheep, and left their Master alone.

We need not doubt that the profession of the eleven was real and sincere. They honestly meant what they said. But they did not know themselves. They did not know what they were capable of doing under the pressure of the fear of men and of strong temptation. They had not rightly estimated the

weakness of the flesh, the power of the devil, the feebleness of their own resolutions, the shallowness of their own faith. All this they had yet to learn by painful experience. Like young recruits, they had yet to learn that it is one thing to know the soldier's drill and wear the uniform, and quite another thing to be steadfast in the day of battle.

Let us mark these things, and learn wisdom. The true secret of spiritual strength is self-distrust and deep humility. "When I am weak," said a great Christian, "then am I strong." (2 Cor. xii. 10.) None of us, perhaps, have the least idea how much we might fall if placed suddenly under the influence of strong temptation. Happy is he who never forgets the words, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;" and, remembering our Lord's disciples, prays daily: "Hold Thou me up and then I shall be safe."

We learn, lastly, from this passage, that *Christ is the true source of peace*. We read that our Lord winds up all His discourse with these soothing words: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye might have peace." The end and scope of His parting address, He would have us know, is to draw us nearer to Himself as the only fountain of comfort. He does not tell us that we shall have no trouble in the world. He holds out no promise of freedom from tribulation while we are in the body. But He bids us rest in the thought that He has fought our battle and won a victory for us. Though tried, and troubled, and vexed with things here below, we shall not be destroyed. "Be of good cheer," is His parting charge: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

Let us lean back our souls on these comfortable words, and take courage. The storms of trial and persecution may sometimes beat heavily on us; but let them only drive us closer to Christ. The sorrows, and losses, and crosses, and disappointments of our life may often make us feel sorely cast down; but let them only make us tighten our hold on Christ. Armed with this very promise let us, under every cross, come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Let us often say to our souls, "Why art thou cast down, and why art thou disquieted?" "And let us often say to our gracious Master,—“Lord, didst not Thou say, Be of good cheer? Lord, do as Thou hast said, and cheer us to the end.”"

#### NOTES. JOHN XVI. 25-33.

25.—[*These things...proverbs.*] Our Lord seems here to begin winding up and concluding His discourse. The expression "these things," seems to me to apply to all that He had been saying since Judas went out, and He was alone with the eleven. "All these things I have been saying to you in language which you have not been able fully to understand, inasmuch that I seem to have been speaking to you in parables or proverbs." The Greek word rendered "proverb" is only used five times in the New Testament, and in John x. 6 is trans-

lated parable.

Besser observes here, "From the very first words of our Lord's farewell discourse,—'In my Father's house are many mansions,'—up to the words concerning the travelling woman, the heavenly purport of the discourse is enwrapped in various similes and parables."

Do we not learn here that ministers must not refrain from telling their hearers many truths, which at the time they do not fully comprehend, in the hope that they will seek more knowledge, and comprehend afterwards the meaning of the things taught?

[*But the time cometh...Father.*] I believe the "time" here mentioned must be the time between our Lord's resurrection and ascension, the great forty days when He taught the eleven disciples more fully than He had taught them before, and spoke more openly of the things of His Father.—I say this with diffidence. But I can see no other time to which our Lord could refer excepting this. It is evidently some personal instruction that He means, and not instruction by the invisible agency of the Holy Ghost. "The time is very close at hand, when my sacrifice on the cross having been accomplished, and my resurrection having taken place, I will show you openly and plainly the things concerning my Father, who I am, and what my relation to Him, and will no longer use parables and figures to convey my meaning."

The promise MAY possibly include the continual teaching of the Holy Spirit, which our Lord would give His disciples after His ascension; but the language seems rather to point to direct teaching from our Lord's own mouth. Moreover, it is an "hour" that cometh in the Greek, and not a continuous period of time. So in ver. 39, "the hour" means a time close at hand.

26.—[*At that day...ask in my name.*] I believe this sentence must mean, "In the day following my resurrection, when the full nature of my mission and office is at last understood, you will begin to pray and ask in my name. Hitherto you have not done it. When I have risen from the dead, and opened your understandings, you will begin to do it."

I see insuperable objection to any other view. The "day" spoken of cannot be the day of Christ's second advent, because prayer will not be needed then. Nor yet can it be the whole period of time between Christ's first and second advent, because the passage which it is here bound up with belongs specially to the Apostles. (See ver. 27.) There remains, in my judgment, no reasonable explanation except the one already given.

[*And I say not...pray...Father...you.*] The meaning of this sentence seems to be, "It is not necessary to say that I will pray the Father to hear you and grant your requests. Not only shall I of course do this, but my Father also will willingly hear your prayer." This is the most natural meaning of the passage, in my judgment.

It is singular that the Greek word rendered "pray" at the end of the verse, is the same that is used to signify "ask questions," or "make inquiry," in ver. 23. But it is worth notice that the word seems specially used when our Lord is described as "praying" to the Father. (See John xvii. 9; xv. 20.)

27.—[*For the Father Himself, etc.*] This verse is a continuation of the encouragement contained in the verse before. "You need not doubt the Father doing for you all that you ask in my name, because he loveth you for having loved Me, and believed my divine mission. He loves all who love Me, and believe on Me." (See John xiv. 23.)

Anton paraphrases the verse, "ye need not so think of my intercession as if the Father were not Himself well disposed, but must first be coerced into kindness. No: He Himself loveth you, and Himself ordained my intercession."

We should notice here how graciously our Lord acknowledges the grace there was in the disciples, with all their weakness. When myriads of Jews regarded Jesus as an impos-

tor, the eleven loved Him and believed in Him. Jesus never forgets to honour true grace, however much it may be mingled with infirmity.

28.—[*I came forth, etc.*] This verse seems a farewell summary of the true nature of our Lord's office and mission. It grows out of the last clause of the preceding verse. "You have believed that I came out from God. In so believing you have done well, for so it is. For the last time I repeat that my mission is divine. I came forth from the Father, and came into the world to be man's Redeemer; and now, my work being finished, I am about to leave the world, and to go back again to my Father." This deep sentence contains more than at first sight appears. It points backward to our Lord's persecution; it points forward to His resurrection and ascension into glory.

Augustine, quoted by Burgon, remarks, "When Christ came forth from the Father, He so came into the world as never to leave the Father; and He so left the world and went unto the Father as never to leave the world."

29.—[*His disciples said, etc.*] The words of the disciples seem to be a reference to our Lord's statement in the twenty-fifth verse, that "the time was coming when He would no more speak in proverbs, but show them plainly concerning the Father." The eleven appear to catch at that promise. "Even now Thou art speaking to us more plainly that we have ever heard Thee speaking before, and not in figurative language."

30.—[*Now are we sure, etc.*] This is a peculiar verse. It is hard to see what there was in our Lord's statement in ver. 28, to carry such conviction to the minds of the eleven, and to make them see things about their Master so much more clearly than they had seen them before. But the precise reason why words affect men's minds, and lay hold on their attention at one time and not at another, is a deep mystery, and hard to explain. The very same truths which a man hears from one mouth and is utterly unimpressed, come home to him with such power from another mouth, that he will declare he never heard them before! Nay, more: the very same speaker who is heard without attention one day, is heard another day teaching the very same things with the deepest interest, by the same hearers, and they will tell you they never heard them before.

The words, "We are sure," are literally, "We know." They mean, "We know now that Thou knowest all things concerning Thyself, Thy mission, and the Father."

The words, "Thou needest not that any man should ask Thee," mean, "Thou hast told us so plainly who and what Thou art, that there is no need for anyone to ask Thee questions, or seek further explanation."

The words, "By this we believe," must mean, "We are convinced and persuaded by the statement Thou hast just made," in ver. 28.

31.—[*Jesus answered...now believe.*] In this verse our Lord warns the eleven of their self-ignorance. They thought they believed. They did not doubt their own faith. Let them not be too confident. They would soon find they had an evil root of unbelief within. Never do we find our Lord flattering His disciples. Warnings against self-confidence need to be continually pressed on believers. Nothing is so deceptive as feeling and excitement in religion. We know not the weakness of our hearts.

Alford thinks that "do ye now believe," should not be rendered as a question, but as an affirmation. "You now believe, I know." The Greek admits of either view. I prefer the question.

32.—[*Behold the hour...leave Me alone.*] In this sentence our Lord reveals to his confident hearers, the amazing fact that they, even they, would in a very short time forsake Him, desert Him, run away and fail in faith altogether. "Behold!" He begins, to denote how wonderful it was, "the hour cometh, yea, is now come. This very night, before the sun

risers, the thing is immediately going to take place. Ye shall be scattered, like sheep fleeing from a wolf, one running one way and another another, every man going off to his own things, his own friends, or his own house, or his own place of refuge. Ye shall leave Me alone. You will actually allow Me to be taken off by myself as a prisoner to the high priests and to Pontius Pilate, and not so much as one of you will stand by Me.”

How little the best of believers know of their own hearts, or understand how they may behave in times of trial. If any men were ever fully and fairly warned of their coming failure, the disciples were. We can only suppose that they did not understand our Lord, or did not realize the magnitude of the trial coming on them, or fancied that He would work some miracle at the last moment, for His deliverance.

The Greek phrase rendered “His own,” means literally, “His own things.” It may either be “His own business,” or as the margin renders it, “His own home.”

[*And yet...not alone... with Me.*] In this teaching and touching sentence, our Lord reminds His disciples that their desertion would not deprive Him of all comfort. “And yet, when you are scattered, and have left Me, I am not entirely alone, because the Father is always with Me.”

We need not doubt that one great need of the sentence was to teach the disciples where they must look themselves in their own future trials. They must never forget that God the Father would always be near them and with them, *even* in the darkest times. A sense of God’s presence is one great source of the comfort of believers. The last promise in Matthew, before the ascension, was, “I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.” (Matt. xxviii. 20.)

John Huss, the famous martyr, who was burned at Constance, is said to have drawn special comfort from this passage, during the lonely imprisonment which preceded his death.

33.—[*These things...peace.*] In this concluding verse our Lord sums up the reasons why He has spoken the things contained in this whole discourse. “All these things I have spoken for this one great end,—that you may have inward peace by resting your souls on Me, and keeping up close communion with Me.” It is one great secret in our religion to draw all our consolation from Christ, and live on Him. “He is our peace.” (Eph. ii. 14.)

[*In the world...tribulation.*] Here our Lord tells the eleven, plainly and honestly, that they must expect trouble and persecution from the world. He does not conceal that the way to heaven is not smooth and strewed with flowers. On the contrary, “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (2 Tim. iii. 12.) To keep back from young beginners in religion the cross and the battle, is not teaching as Christ taught.

[*But be...good cheer...overcome...world.*] Here our Lord winds up all by bidding the disciples take courage, cheer up, be confident, and go forward without fear. The world in which they lived was a vanquished enemy. He, their Master, had “overcome the world.” This means, I believe, not merely that He had given them an example of successful fighting by overcoming the fear of the world and the flattery of the world, but something far more important. He had overcome the Prince of this world, and was just about to win His final victory over him on the cross. Hence His disciples must remember that they were contending with an enemy already sorely beaten. “Ye need not fear the world, because I am just leading captive its King, and about to triumph over him on the cross.”

Luther, quoted by Besser, here remarks, “Thus is the ‘goodnight’ said, and the band shaken. But very forcibly does He conclude with that very thing around which His whole discourse has turned. Let not your heart be troubled. Be of good cheer.”

No devout commentator, I think, can leave this wonderful chapter without deeply feeling how little we understand of the depths of Scripture. There are many words and sen-

tences in it about which we can only give conjectures, and must admit our inability to speak positively. Nowhere in Scripture, I must honestly confess, do commentators appear to me to contribute so little light to the text, as in their interpretation of this chapter.