

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE X. 29–37.

29 But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?

30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded *him*, and departed, leaving *him* half dead.

31 And by chance there came down a certain Priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked *on him*, and passed by on the other side.

33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion *on him*,

34 And went to *him*, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave *them* to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him: and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

THESE words contain the well-known parable of the good Samaritan. In order to understand the drift of this parable, we must carefully remember the occasion on which it was spoken. It was spoken in reply to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked, “who is my neighbour?” Our Lord Jesus Christ answers that question by telling the story we have just read, and winds up the narrative by an appeal to the lawyer’s conscience. Let these things not be forgotten. The object of the parable is to show the nature of true charity and brotherly love. To lose sight of this object, and discover deep allegories in the parable, is to trifle with Scripture, and deprive our souls of most valuable lessons.

We are taught, first, in this parable, *how rare and uncommon is true brotherly love*. This is a lesson which stands out prominently on the face of the narrative before our eyes. Our Lord tells us of a traveller who fell among thieves, and was left naked, wounded, and half dead on the road. He then tells us of a priest and a Levite, who, one after the other, came travelling that way, and saw the poor wounded man, but gave him no help. Both were men, who from their office and profession, ought to have been ready and willing to do good to one in distress. But both, in succession, were too selfish, or too unfeeling to offer the slightest assistance. They doubtless reasoned with themselves, that they knew nothing of the wounded traveller,—that he had perhaps got into trouble by his own misconduct,—that they had no time to stop to help him,—and that they had enough to do to mind their own business, without troubling themselves with strangers. And the result was, that one after the other, they both “passed by on the other side.”

We have in this striking description, an exact picture of what is continually going on in the world. Selfishness is the leading characteristic of the great majority of mankind. That cheap charity which costs nothing more than a trifling subscription or contribution, is common enough. But that

self-sacrificing kindness of heart, which cares not what trouble is entailed, so long as good can be done, is a grace which is rarely met with. There are still thousands in trouble who can find no friend or helper. And there are still hundreds of “priests and Levites” who see them, but “pass by on the other side.”

Let us beware of expecting much from the kindness of man. If we do, we shall certainly be disappointed. The longer we live the more clearly we shall see that few people care for others except from interested motives, and that unselfish, disinterested, pure brotherly love, is as scarce as diamonds and rubies. How thankful we ought to be that the Lord Jesus Christ is not like man! His kindness and love are unfailing. He never disappoints any of His friends. Happy are they who have learned to say, “my soul, wait thou only upon God; my expectation is from him.” (Psalm lxii. 5.)

We are taught, secondly, in this parable, *who they are to whom we should show kindness, and whom we are to love as neighbours*. We are told that the only person who helped the wounded traveller, of whom we are reading, was a certain Samaritan. This man was one of a nation who had “no dealings” with the Jews. (John iv. 9.) He might have excused himself by saying that the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was through the Jewish territory, and that cases of distress ought to be cared for by the Jews. But he does nothing of the sort. He sees a man stripped of his raiment, and lying half dead. He asks no questions, but at once has compassion on him. He makes no difficulties, but at once gives aid. And our Lord says to us, “go and do thou likewise.”

Now, if these words mean anything, a Christian ought to be ready to show kindness and brotherly love to everyone that is in need. Our kindness must not merely extend to our families, and friends, and relations. We must love all men, and be kind to all, whenever occasion requires. We must beware of an excessive strictness in scrutinizing the past lives of those who need our aid. Are they in real trouble? Are they in real distress? Do they really want help? Then, according to the teaching of this parable, we ought to be ready to assist them. We should regard the whole world as our parish, and the whole race of mankind as our neighbours. We should seek to be the friend of every one who is oppressed, or neglected, or afflicted, or sick, or in prison, or poor, or an orphan, or a heathen, or a slave, or an idiot, or starving, or dying. We should exhibit such world-wide friendship, no doubt, wisely, discreetly, and with good sense, but of such friendship we never need be ashamed. The ungodly may sneer at it as extravagance and fanaticism. But we need not mind that. To be friendly to all men in this way, is to show something of the mind that was in Christ.

We are taught, lastly, in this parable, *after what manner, and to what extent we are to show kindness and love to others*. We are told that the Sa-

maritan's compassion towards the wounded traveller was not confined to feelings and passive impressions. He took much trouble to give him help. He acted as well as felt. He spared no pains or expense in befriending him. Stranger as the man was, he went to him, bound up his wounds, set him on his own beast, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Nor was this all. On the morrow he gave the host of the inn money, saying, "take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again I will repay thee." And our Lord says to each of us, "go and do thou likewise."

The lesson of this part of the parable is plain and unmistakeable. The kindness of a Christian towards others should not be in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth. His love should be a practical love, a love which entails on him self-sacrifice and self-denial, both in money, and time, and trouble. His charity should be seen not merely in his talking, but his acting,—not merely in his profession, but in his practice. He should think it no misspent time to work as hard in doing good to those who need help, as others work in trying to get money. He should not be ashamed to toil as much to make the misery of this world rather smaller, as those toil who hunt or shoot all day long. He should have a ready ear for every tale of sorrow, and a ready hand to help everyone in affliction, so long as he has the power. Such brotherly love the world may not understand. The returns of gratitude which such love meets with may be few and small. But to show such brotherly love, is to walk in the steps of Christ, and to reduce to practice the parable of the good Samaritan.

And now let us leave the parable with grave thoughts and deep searchings of heart.—How few Christians seem to remember that such a parable was ever written! What an enormous amount of stinginess, and meanness, and ill-nature, and suspicion there is to be seen in the Church, and that even among people who repeat the creed and go to the Lord's table!—How seldom we see a man who is really kind, and feeling, and generous, and liberal, and good-natured, except to himself and his children! Yet the Lord Jesus Christ spoke the parable of the good Samaritan, and meant it to be remembered.

What are we ourselves? Let us not forget to put that question to our hearts. What are we doing, each in our own station, to prove that this mighty parable is one of the rules of our daily life? What are we doing for the heathen, at home and abroad? What are we doing to help those who are troubled in mind, body, or estate? There are many such in this world. There are always some near our own doors. What are we doing for them? Anything, or nothing at all? May God help us to answer these questions! The world would be a happier world if there was more practical Christianity.

NOTES. LUKE X. 29–37.

29.—[*He willing to justify himself*] It may be doubted whether the word translated “willing,” would not have been better rendered “desiring.” It is so translated in the following passages in St. Luke, (Luke v. 39. viii. 20: x. 24: xx. 46: xxiii. 8.), as well as in other places in the New Testament.

The expression makes clear the true character of the lawyer. He was a self-righteous man, and flattered himself that he could deserve the eternal life he had inquired about by his own doings.

[*Who is my neighbour?*] The lawyer, no doubt, expected that our Lord would answer according to the narrow-minded prejudices of the Jewish nation at that time, that Jews alone were his neighbours. Major quotes two remarkable passages from Tacitus and Juvenal, proving that even among the heathen Romans the Jews were notorious for bitterness and ill-feeling towards all who were not of their own nation.

The feeling of the Jews towards other nations is a remarkable instance of man’s readiness to pervert and misapply God’s laws. The law of Moses about intercourse and intermarriage with foreigners, was undoubtedly meant for the good of the Jews, to keep them a separate people among the nations of the earth. But it was never meant to sanction unkindness and want of charity.

30.—[*From Jerusalem to Jericho.*] The road between these two places passed through a wild and rocky country, and was notorious for being infested by robbers. On this account, Jerome says, it was called “the bloody way.” It is a curious fact, that Dr. Bonar, one of the latest travellers in Palestine, mentions, that even now it is a dangerous road for people to travel alone, and that a lady in his company well-nigh “fell among thieves.”

31.—[*By chance.*] The Greek word so rendered is only found here in the New Testament. It means literally, “by coincidence,—as it happened.”

[*A certain Priest.*] There is a propriety in the mention of a Priest and a Levite on this road. Jericho was a city specially appointed for the residence of Priests and Levites. No less than 12,000 of them, according to Lightfoot, lived there. At Jerusalem was the temple, which Priests and Levites had to attend in monthly courses. These circumstances make it quite natural for a Priest and a Levite to be on the road.

[*Passed by on the other side.*] Parkhurst suggests that the Priest was afraid of being legally polluted by touching a dead carcass, and thinks that his conduct is an example of hypocritical pretence to excessive ceremonial purity, like that recorded in Matt. xxvii. 6; John xviii. 28.

32.—[*Came and looked on him.*] The conduct of the Levite, be it remarked, was worse than that of the Priest. Both “saw” the wounded man, but the Levite seems to have “come” to him, and then passed by.

33.—[*Came where he was.*] It may be doubted whether the Greek words here would not have been more literally rendered, “came unto him.”

34.—[*Pouring in oil.*] A note in Schoettgen throws light on this expression. He says, “Some one might naturally ask whence this traveller got his oil and wine on a journey? It has occurred to me that travellers in hot eastern countries made a point of carrying oil with them, that they might anoint and strengthen their limbs wearied with continual heat. We have an example in the case of Jacob, who, even when he slept on the bare ground in Bethel, and journeyed alone with only a staff, nevertheless had oil with him, with which he anointed the stone, and oil which he poured out to the glory of God.” (Gen. xxviii. 18.)

35.—[*Two pence.*] Let it be noted, that this sum was in reality much larger than it appears at first sight to an English reader. The value of money was very different then from what it is now. A “penny a day,” according to Matthew xx. 2, was a fair day’s wages.

36.—[*Thinkest thou, was.*] The Greek here is literally, “seems to thee to have been.”

Before leaving this parable, a question of some importance demands consideration:—“Is the parable of the good Samaritan an allegory or not? Is it meant to teach the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to man? Was the conduct of the good Samaritan intended to be interpreted by us as a type and figure of our Lord Jesus Christ’s great work of redemption?”—Let the question be rightly understood. The question is not whether the passage may be accommodated and fitted by man, so as to illustrate the work of Christ on behalf of sinners. The question is simply this:—“Did our Lord Jesus Christ speak the parable with this double meaning, and intend us to interpret it in this way?”

The question is one which the great majority of Commentators at once answer in the affirmative. According to them, the traveller represents human nature,—the falling among thieves, Adam’s fall,—the lying naked, wounded, and half dead, the condition of mankind,—and the failure of the priest and Levite to help, the inability of ceremonies and forms to raise man from his low estate. The good Samaritan is Jesus Christ. The oil and wine are the blood of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The inn is the Church. The host is the ministry. The two pence are the two sacraments. The promised coming again to repay what is spent more, the Lord’s second advent.

This, with some minor variations, is the sense which many Commentators, both ancient and modern, extract from the parable. Mr. Alford even speaks of those who cannot receive it, as “the superficial school of critics.”—There is no denying the praise of ingenuity to the interpretation. To many it is sure to appear very clever, just because it is not natural. But the serious question remains still to be answered: “Did our Lord Jesus Christ really intend this meaning to be placed upon the parable?”—My own conviction decidedly is, that He did not; and that the allegorical sense which has been placed on the parable, is a gratuitous invention of man.

My reasons for not holding the allegorical interpretation of the parable are three-fold.

1. I see nothing either in the passage, or in the context, to lead me to suppose that our Lord meant to convey more than one plain lesson by it. That lesson is the true nature of love to our neighbours.

2. I see much in the circumstances of the parable itself which appears to me to overthrow entirely the idea that it is an allegory of man’s redemption. Without twisting and straining it in the most violent and unwarrantable manner, the parable, upon the allegorical interpretation, involves manifest absurdities.—Grant that the traveller represents human nature. At best, it is an awkward figure. The traveller was an object of pity, and only half dead. Man is more than pitiable: he deserves blame, and is dead in sins. But who then can the priest and Levite be who fail to give aid? They are part of human nature themselves!—Grant, in order to avoid this awkwardness, that the traveller means the Gentile, and the failure of priest and Levite to help him, the weakness of the Mosaic law. Again, the question arises, what are we to make of the inn and the host, if they mean the Church and the ministry? At this rate, the Gentiles are handed over to the care of the Gentiles, since there was no Gentile Church till Christ called and formed it! All this may seem to some minds to admit of explanation. To my own it appears to involve inextricable confusion.

3. My third and last reason is this. I hold it to be a most dangerous mode of interpreting Scripture, to regard everything which its words may be tortured into meaning, as a lawful interpretation of the words. I hold undoubtedly that there is a mighty depth in all Scripture, and that in this respect it stands alone. But I also hold that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and that our first object should be to discover that sense, and adhere rigidly to it. I believe that, as a general rule, the words of Scripture are intended to have, like all other language, one plain definite meaning, and that to say that

words *do* mean a thing, merely because they *can* be tortured into meaning it, is a most dishonourable and dangerous way of handling Scripture.—If anyone wants to see to what absurdities such a mode of interpreting Scripture leads, he has only to read the commentaries of the Fathers. Hardly any, except perhaps Chrysostom, seem satisfactory and sound on this point.

I am quite aware that in holding the views which I have endeavoured to defend, about the parable of the good Samaritan, I hold the views of a small minority of commentators. But that those with whom I agree are not all “superficial,” I think the following five names prove,—Gualter, Baxter, Scott, Poole, and Adam Clarke. Even Stella, the Roman Catholic Spanish commentator, denounces the allegorical interpretation, and Maldonatus, is evidently unwilling to endorse it.

The question will probably never be settled as long as the world stands, but I have thought it right to bear my testimony fully and frankly to what I believe to be the truth.