EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE XI. 27–32.

27 And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain wo­man of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed *is* the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.

28 But he said, Yea rather, blessed *are* they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

29 And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet.

30 For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation.

31 The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and con­demn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here.

32 The men of Nineve shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas *is* here.

A WOMAN is brought before us in this passage of Scrip­ture of whose name and history we know nothing. We read that, as our Lord spake, “A certain woman of the company lifted up her voice and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee.” At once our Lord founds on her remark a great lesson. His perfect wisdom turned every incident within His reach to profit.

We should observe in these verses *how great are the privileges of those who hear and keep God’s Word.* They are regarded by Christ with as much honour as if they were His nearest relatives. It is more blessed to be a believer in the Lord Jesus than it would have been to have been one of the family in which He was born after the flesh. It was a greater honour to the Virgin Mary herself to have Christ dwelling in her heart by faith, than to have been the mother of Christ, and to have nursed Him on her bosom.

Truths like these we are generally very slow to receive. We are apt to fancy that to have seen Christ, and heard Christ, and lived near Christ, and been a relative of Christ according to the flesh, would have had some mighty effect upon our souls. We are all natur­ally inclined to attach great importance to a religion of sight, and sense, and touch, and eye, and ear. We love a sensuous, tangible, material Christianity, far better than one of faith. And we need reminding that seeing is not always believing. Thousands saw Christ contin­ually, while He was on earth, and yet clung to their sins. Even His brethren at one time “did not believe in him.” (John vii. 5.) A mere fleshly knowledge of Christ saves no one. The words of St. Paul are very instructive:—“Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” (2 Cor. v. 16.)

Let us learn from our Lord’s words before us that the highest privileges our souls can desire are close at hand, and within our reach, if we only believe. We need not idly wish that we had lived near Capernaum, or hard by Joseph’s house at Nazareth. We need not dream of a deeper love and a more thorough devotion if we had really pressed Christ’s hand, or heard Christ’s voice, or been numbered among Christ’s relatives. All this could have done nothing more for us than simple faith can do now. Do we hear Christ’s voice and follow Him? Do we take Him for our only Saviour and our only Friend, and forsaking all other hopes, cleave only unto Him? If this be so, all things are ours. We need no higher privilege. We can have no higher, until Christ comes again. No man can be nearer and dearer to Jesus than the man who simply believes.

We should observe, secondly, in these verses, *the desperate unbelief of the Jews in our Lord’s time.* We are told that though they “gathered thick together” to hear Christ preach, they still professed to be waiting for a sign. They pretended to want more evidence before they believed. Our Lord declares that the Queen of Sheba and the men of Nineveh would put the Jews to shame at the last day. The Queen of Sheba had such faith that she travelled a vast distance in order to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Yet Solomon, with all his wis­dom, was an erring and imperfect king. The Ninevites had such faith that they believed the message which Jonah brought from God, and repented. Yet even Jonah was a weak and unstable prophet. The Jews of our Lord’s time had far higher light and infinitely clearer teachings than either Solomon or Jonah could supply. They had amongst them the King of kings, the Prophet greater than Moses. Yet the Jews neither repented nor believed!

Let it never surprise us to see unbelief abounding, both in the Church and in the world. So far from wondering that there have been men like Hobbes, and Payne, and Rousseau, and Voltaire, we ought rather to wonder that such men have been so few. So far from marvelling that the vast majority of professing Christians remain un­affected and unmoved by the preaching of the Gospel, we ought to marvel that any around us believe at all. Why should we wonder to see that old disease, which began with Adam and Eve, infecting all their children? Why should we expect to see more faith among men and women now than was seen in our Lord’s time? The enormous amount of unbelief and hardness on every side may well grieve and pain us. But it ought not to cause surprise.

Let us thank God if we have received the gift of faith. It is a great thing to believe all the Bible. We do not sufficiently realize the corruption of human nature. We do not see the full virulence of the disease by which all Adam’s children are infected, and the small number of those who are saved. Have we faith, however weak and small? Let us praise God for the privilege. Who are we that God should have made us to differ? Let us watch against unbelief. The root of it often lies within us even after the tree is cut down. Let us guard our faith with a godly jealousy. It is the shield of the soul. It is the grace above all others which Satan labours to over­throw. Let us hold it fast. Blessed are they that believe!

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, *how our Lord Jesus Christ testifies to the truth of a resurrection and a life to come.* He speaks of the Queen of the South, whose name and dwelling-place are now alike unknown to us. He says “she shall rise up in the judgment.” He speaks of the men of Nineveh, a people who have passed away from the face of the earth. He says of them also, “they shall rise up.”

There is something very solemn and instructive in the language which our Lord here uses. It reminds us that this world is not all, and that the life which man lives in the body on earth is not the only life of which we ought to think. The kings and queens of olden time are all to live again one day, and to stand before the bar of God. The vast multitudes who once swarmed round the palaces of Nineveh are all to come forth from their graves, and to give an account of their works. To our eyes they seem to have passed away for ever. We read with wonder of their empty halls, and talk of them as a people who have completely perished. Their dwelling places are a desolation. Their very bones are dust. But to the eye of God they all live still. The Queen of the South and the men of Nineveh will all rise again. We shall yet see them face to face.

Let the truth of the resurrection be often before our minds. Let the life to come be frequently before our thoughts. All is not over when the grave receives its tenant, and man goes to his long home. Other people may dwell in our houses, and spend our money. Our very names may soon be forgotten. But still all is not over! Yet a little time and we all shall live again. “The earth shall cast out the dead.” (Isaiah xxvi. 19.) Many, like Felix, may well tremble when they think of such things. But men who live by faith in the Son of God, like St. Paul, should lift up their heads and rejoice.

NOTES. LUKE XI. 27–32.

27.—[A *certain woman.*]We are not told who this woman was. Her exclamation seems to have been the expression of mingled pleasure and wonder, such as the impressible heart of a Jewish woman would utter. It would be too much to conclude that she was a disciple and a believer.

[*Of the company.*]This expression would be more literally rendered, “out of the crowd, or multitude.”

28.—[*Yea*, *rather.*]The Greek word so translated is only found in three other places, and in each is variously rendered. “Nay, but.” (Rom. ix. 20.) “Yes, verily.” ‘(Rom. x. 18.) “Yea, doubtless.” (Phil. iii. 8.)

We cannot doubt that the words of this verse were spoken with a prophetic foresight of that unscriptural worship of the Virgin Mary which was one day to arise and prevail so exten­sively in the Church of Christ. By no ingenuity, or torturing process, can the words be made to bear any but one plain meaning. They declare, that to hear the Word of God and keep it, is to be more blessed than to be connected with Christ by the ties of flesh, and that to be the mother of Christ according to the flesh does not confer on anyone greater honour and privileges than to believe and obey the Gospel.

29*.—*[*Gathered thick together.*]The Greek word so rendered is only found here. Parkhurst says that it means “crowding upon.”

[*They seek a sign.*]The extraordinary perverseness of the Jews in ever wanting some sign to produce in them faith, is noteworthy. Heart unbelief always professes to want evidence. It is not evidence, but a right will which is need­ful, if a man’s soul is to be saved.

30.—[*Jonas* *was a sign.*]The likeness between Jonas and our Lord has been variously explained. The three days and nights during which Jonah was in the whale’s belly, and his coming forth alive at the end of them, are undoubtedly the principal point. They were a type of our Lord being in the grave, and rising again the third day.—The forty days after which Nineveh was to be destroyed are probably another point. They were a type of the forty years which elapsed between our Lord’s ministry and the destruction of Jerusalem.—The mighty fact of the resurrection is unquestionably the main point in the type. It was the hinge on which the whole Gospel turned, and the truth which the apostles constantly pressed on the Jews.

31*.—*[*The queen of the south.*]It need hardly be remarked that the person so described is the Queen of Sheba of the Old Testament. (1 Kings x. 1.) Her name is not known at all. Her dominions are not known with certainty. Some think that they were in Arabia. Some think they were in Ethiopia. “The utmost parts of the earth” must be interpreted with qualification, as a very distant land.

[*A greater than Solomon.*]Let it be noted, that both here and in the end of the following verses, the Greek word translated “a greater,” is literally “a greater thing.” It is not improbable that the “thing” referred to is “the sign.”—There is one here who is a sign of far greater moment than either Jonah or Solomon.

Let it be observed, that the point in which the Queen of the South surpassed the Jews of our Lord’s time and put them to shame, was “faith.” She had faith enough to come a long journey to hear a wise man. The Jews, on the other hand, had “the wisdom of God” actually in the midst of them, preaching and teaching for three years, and yet they would not believe.

Let it be observed, that the point in which the Ninevites surpassed the Jews and put them to shame, was repentance. They had among them for a short time a prophet, and a very weak and erring prophet too. Yet they repented and turned to God. The Jews had among them the mightiest and most faithful preacher that ever warned a people, and yet they would not repent.

In this, as well as in other passages, we should not fail to remark that our Lord speaks of the story of Jonah as an undoubtedly true story, and of Jonah himself and the Queen of Sheba as real persons. The modern theory which saysthat the histories of the Old Testament are nothing better than amusing fables, finds no countenance in the New Testament.

Here again, as well as elsewhere, we see the general judgment and the resurrection spoken of as events which will undoubtedly take place, and events in which the saints of the Old Testament are as much and really interested as those who lived after Christ’s ministry began.