

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

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LUKE XII. 13–21.

13 And one of the company said unto him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.

14 And he said unto him, Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?

15 And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

16 And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry.

20 But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So *is* he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

THE passage we have now read affords a singular instance of man's readiness to bring the things of this world into the midst of his religion. We are told that a certain hearer of our Lord asked Him to assist him about his temporal affairs. "Master," he said, "speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." He probably had some vague idea that Jesus was going to set up a kingdom in this world, and to reign upon earth. He resolves to make an early application about his own pecuniary matters. He entreats our Lord's interference about his earthly inheritance. Other hearers of Christ might be thinking of a portion in the world to come. This man was one whose chief thoughts evidently ran upon this present life.

How many hearers of the Gospel are just like this man! How many are incessantly planning and scheming about the things of time, even under the very sound of the things of eternity! The natural heart of man is always the same. Even the preaching of Christ did not arrest the attention of all His hearers. The minister of Christ in the present day must never be surprised to see worldliness and inattention in the midst of his congregation. The servant must not expect his sermons to be more valued than his Master's.

Let us mark, in these verses, what *a solemn warning our Lord pronounces against covetousness*. "He said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness."

It would be vain to decide positively which is the most common sin in the world. It would be safe to say that there is none, at any rate, to which the heart is more prone, than covetousness. It was this sin which helped to cast down the angels who fell. They were not content with their first estate. They coveted something better. It was this sin which helped to drive Adam and Eve out of paradise, and bring death into the world. Our first parents were not satisfied with the things which God gave them in Eden. They coveted, and so they fell.—It is a sin which, ever since the fall, has been the fertile cause of misery and unhappiness upon earth. Wars, quarrels, strifes, divi-

sions, envyings, disputes, jealousies, hatreds of all sorts, both public and private, may nearly all be traced up to this fountain-head.

Let the warning which our Lord pronounces, sink down into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Let us strive to learn the lesson which St. Paul had mastered, when he says, "I have learned in whatever state I am therewith to be content." (Phil. iv. 11.) Let us pray for a thorough confidence in God's superintending providence over all our worldly affairs, and God's perfect wisdom in all His arrangements concerning us. If we have little, let us be sure that it would not be good for us to have much. If the things that we have are taken away let us be satisfied that there is a needs be. Happy is he who is persuaded that whatever is, is best, and has ceased from vain wishing, and become "content with such things as he has." (Hebrews xiii. 5.)

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, *what a withering exposure our Lord makes of the folly of worldly mindedness*. He draws the picture of a rich man of the world, whose mind is wholly set on earthly things. He paints him scheming and planning about his property, as if he was master of his own life, and had but to say, "I will do a thing," and it would be done. And then he turns the picture, and shows us God requiring the worldling's soul, and asking the heart-searching question, "Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" "Folly," he bids us learn, nothing less than "folly," is the right word by which to describe the conduct of the man who thinks of nothing but his money. The man who "lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God," is the man whom God declares to be a "fool."

It is an awful thought that the character which Jesus brings before us in this parable is far from being uncommon. Thousands in every age of the world have lived continually doing the very things which are here condemned. Thousands are doing them at this very day. They are laying up treasure upon earth, and thinking of nothing but how to increase it. They are continually adding to their hoards, as if they were to enjoy them for ever, and as if there was no death, no judgment, and no world to come. And yet these are the men who are called clever, and prudent, and wise! These are the men who are commended, and flattered, and held up to admiration! Truly the Lord seeth not as man seeth! The Lord declares that rich men who live only for this world are "fools."

Let us pray for rich men. Their souls are in great danger. "Heaven," said a great man on his death-bed, "is a place to which few kings and rich men come." Even when converted, the rich carry a great weight, and run the race to heaven under great disadvantages. The possession of money has a most hardening effect upon the conscience. We never know what we may do when we become rich. "The love of money is the root of all evil. While some have coveted after it, they have erred from the faith and pierced them-

selves through with many sorrows.” (1 Tim. vi. 10.) Poverty has many disadvantages. But riches destroy far more souls than poverty.

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, *how important it is to be rich towards God*. This is true wisdom. This is true providing for time to come. This is genuine prudence. The wise man is he who does not think only of earthly treasure, but of treasure in heaven.

When can it be said of a man that he is rich towards God? Never till he is rich in grace, and rich in faith, and rich in good works? Never till he has applied to Jesus Christ, and bought of Him gold tried in the fire! (Rev. iii. 18.) Never till he has a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens! Never till he has a name inscribed in the book of life, and is an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ! Such a man is truly rich. His treasure is incorruptible. His bank never breaks. His inheritance fadeth not away. Man cannot deprive him of it. Death cannot snatch it out of his hands. All things are his already,—life, death, things present, and things to come. (1 Cor. iii. 23.) And, best of all, what he has now is nothing to what he will have hereafter.

Riches like these are within reach of every sinner who will come to Christ and receive them. May we never rest till they are our’s! To obtain them may cost us something in this world. It may bring on us persecution, ridicule, and scorn. But let the thought console us, that the Judge of all says, “Thou art rich.” (Rev. ii. 9.) The true Christian is the only man who is really wealthy and wise.

NOTES. LUKE XII. 13–21.

13.—[*One of the company said.*] We know nothing of this man. His question gave occasion for a striking lesson on covetousness. The number of instances in which our Lord turns a bystander’s remark to a spiritual use, in the Gospel of St. Luke, is well worthy of notice. It is probable that this man was filled with the common notion that Messiah was going to be a temporal ruler, and to set all things right in the world.

14.—[*Who made me a judge.*] The question here is equivalent to a strong negation.—“I am not come to be a judge of temporal matters.” The wisdom of our Lord’s line of conduct on this occasion deserves notice. The slightest interference with the office of the civil government would have given occasion to His enemies, and placed Him in their power.

Ministers of Christ would do well in modern times to mark our Lord’s conduct in this case, and, as far as possible, to walk in His steps. The less ministers have to do with secular things, and especially with the administration of law, the better. The magistrates’ bench, as a general rule, is not a fitting position for a minister of the Gospel to occupy. When the preacher of the Gospel undertakes any work except that of his calling, his proper work and business are usually neglected, or worse done than they would have been if he had confined himself exclusively to them, and been a man of one thing. “Give thyself wholly to these things,” is a sentence which should never be forgotten.

15.—[*Take heed and beware of covetousness.*] Those who possess Latimer’s works should read his sermon on this text. He begins by repeating the words three times, and then says, “And what if I should say nothing else?”

[*A man's life.*] The meaning of this must be, "A man's true interest;" the real end and object of man's being: the purpose for which God made him, and gave him breath. He was not made only to amass wealth, but to glorify God on earth, and enjoy Him hereafter in heaven.

17.—[*He thought within himself.*] The anxious thoughts, and scheming and planning, which increase of wealth always brings with it, are strikingly described in this verse. The more acres a man has, the more cares. The more his money increases, the more of his time is generally consumed and eaten up in thinking about it.

18.—[*My barns.*] It is doubtful whether the word translated "barns" exactly means what we understand by a barn in our language. It means literally a "repository." It is not improbable, as is often the case in some countries, that the rich man's barns were holes in the ground, or caves, prepared for the keeping of corn.

Let it be observed, that the rich man talks of "my" barns, "my" fruits, "my" goods, with all the self-sufficiency and petty importance of one who knows no will but his own, and no master but his own selfishness. It should remind us of Nabal's language, in 1 Sam. xxv. 11. Of him too it is written, "Fool is his name, and folly is with him." (1 Sam. xxv. 25.)

19.—[*I will say to my soul.*] This is the language of genuine worldliness. And yet he talks of his "soul!" He speaks of "goods laid up for many years," and yet ignores the eternity which must come at last, and the necessity of a hope laid up in heaven!

The secret thoughts and schemes of rich worldings are strikingly exposed in this verse. The Lord Jesus knows exactly what such men are thinking of.

Basil remarks, "If this man had only had the sense of a hog, what other thing could he have said?"

20.—[*But God said unto him.*] Our Lord does not inform us in what way God spoke to the rich man; whether directly or by a messenger, as He spake by Nathan to David. What He has not thought fit to explain, it is useless for us to conjecture.

[*Thou fool.*] The Greek word so translated means literally, without mind, or sense, or understanding. It is the same word as in Luke xi. 40. Let us mark, that just when the rich man was scheming cunningly, and thinking himself very wise, God says to him, "Thou fool."

[*Thy soul shall be required.*] The Greek words so translated would be literally rendered, "They shall require thy soul." It is an example of the indefinite use of "they," as already observed on verse 11.

Let it be noted, that this expression is one of those which show the separate existence of the soul when the body is dead.

[*Whose shall those things be.*] The argument here appears to be much the same as that in Eccles. v. 15, and Psalm xxxix. 6. A man cannot possess his property a moment after he is dead. Grace is the only lasting possession.

21.—[*Layeth up treasure for himself.*] This describes all who labour only for themselves, and the life that now is.

[*Is not rich toward God.*] This is the character of him who gives nothing to God's glory,—neither money, affection, thought, time, nor interest. There are thousands of this character. They are rich toward everything but God. They have plenty to give to the world, but nothing to give to God. Ask them to help a worldly scheme, and they can find money, time, and attention. Ask them to do something for God, and they have no money, or no time. Those are the truly rich who have property which will be recognized at the day of judgment. Many owners of millions of pounds are paupers before God. They are not rich either in grace, or faith, or good works.