EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE XII. 22–31.

22 And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on.

23 The life is more than meat, and the body *is more* than raiment.

24 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

25 And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit?

26 If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest?

27 Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

28 If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, how much more *will he clothe* you, O ye of little faith?

29 And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind.

30 For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things.

31 But rather seek ye the king­dom of God: and all these things shall be added unto you.

WE have in these verses *a collection of striking argu­ments against over-anxiety about the things of this world.*

At first sight they may seem to some minds simple and common place. But the more they are pondered, the more weighty will they appear. An abiding recol­lection of them would save many Christians an immense amount of trouble.

Christ bids us consider the ravens. “They neither sow nor reap. They have neither storehouse nor barn. But God feedeth them.” Now if the Maker of all things provides for the wants of birds, and orders things so that they have a daily supply of food, we ought surely not to fear that He will let his spiritual children starve.

Christ bids us look at the lilies. “They toil not, they spin not. Yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” Now if God every year provides these flowers with a fresh supply of living leaves and blossoms, we surely ought not to doubt His power and willingness to furnish His believing servants with all needful clothing.

Christ bids us remember that a Christian man should be ashamed of being as anxious as a heathen. The “nations of the world” may well be careful about food, and raiment, and the like. They are sunk in deep ignorance, and know nothing of the real nature of God. But the man who can say of God, “He is my Father,” and of Christ, “He is my Saviour,” ought surely to be above such anxieties and cares. A clear faith should produce a light heart.

Finally, Christ bids us think of the perfect knowledge of God. “Our Father knows that we have need” of food and raiment. That thought alone ought to make us content. All our wants are perfectly known to the Lord of heaven and earth. He can relieve those wants, when­ever He sees fit. He will relieve them, whenever it is good for our souls.

Let the four arguments now adduced sink deep into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Nothing is more common than a careful and troubled spirit, and nothing so mars a believer’s usefulness, and diminishes his inward peace. Nothing, on the contrary, glorifies God so much as a cheerful spirit in the midst of temporal troubles. It carries a reality with it which even the worldly can understand. It commends our Christianity, and makes it beautiful in the eyes of men. Faith, and faith only, will produce this cheerful spirit. The man who can say boldly, “The Lord is my shepherd,” is the man who will be able to add, “I shall not want.” (Psa xxiii. 1.)

We have, secondly, in these verses, *a* *high standard of living commended to all Christians.* Itis contained in a short and simple injunction, “Seek ye the kingdom of God.” We are not to give our principal thoughts to the things of this world. We are not so to live as if we had nothing but a body. We are to live like beings who have immortal souls to be lost or saved,—a death to die,—a God to meet,—a judgment to expect,—and an eternity in heaven or in hell awaiting us.

When can we be said to “seek the kingdom of God”? We do so when we make it the chief business of our lives to secure a place in the number of saved people,—to have our sins pardoned, our hearts renewed, and our­selves made meet for the inheritance of the saints inlight. We do so when we give a primary place in our minds to the interests of God’s kingdom,—when we labour to increase the number of God’s subjects,—when we strive to maintain God’s cause, and advance God’s glory in the world.

The kingdom of God is the only kingdom worth labouring for. All other kingdoms shall, sooner or later, decay and pass away. The Statesmen who rear them are like men who build houses of cards, or children who make palaces of sand on the sea shore. The wealth which constitutes their greatness is as liable to melt away as the snow in spring. The kingdom of God is the only kingdom which shall endure for ever. Happy are they who belong to it, love it, live for it, pray for it, and labour for its increase and prosperity. Their labour shall not be in vain. May we give all diligence to make our calling into this kingdom sure! May it be our constant advice to children, relatives, friends, servants, neighbours, “Seek the kingdom!” Whatever else you seek, “Seek first the kingdom of God!”

We have, lastly, in these verses, a *marvellous promise held out to those who seek the kingdom of God.* Our Lord Jesus declares, “All these things shall be added unto you.”

We must take heed that we do not misunderstand the meaning of this passage. We have no right to expect that the Christian tradesman who neglects his business under pretence of zeal for God’s kingdom, will find his trade prosper and his affairs do well. To place such a sense upon the promise would be nothing less than fanaticism and enthusiasm. It would encourage sloth­fulness in business, and give occasion to the enemies of God toblaspheme.

The man to whom the promise before us belongs is the Christian who gives to the things of God their right order and their right place. He does not neglect the worldly duties of his station, but he regards them as of infinitely less importance than the requirements of God. He does not omit due attention to his temporal affairs, but he looks on them as of far less moment than the affairs of his soul. In short, he aims in all his daily life to put God first and the world second,—to give the second place to the things of his body, and the first place to the things of his soul. This is the man to whom Jesus says, “All these things shall be added unto thee.”

But how is the promise fulfilled? The answer is short and simple. The man who seeks first God’s kingdom shall never lack anything that is for his good. He may not have so much health as some. He may not have so much wealth as others. He may not have a richly spread table, or royal dainties. But he shall always have *enough. “*Bread shall be given him. His water shall be sure.” (Isaiah xxxiii. 16.) “All things shall work together for good to them that love God.” (Rom. viii. 28.) “No good thing will the Lord withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Psalm lxxxiv. 11.) “I have been young,” said David, “and now am old, yet never have I seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread.” (Psalm xxxvii. 25.)

NOTES**.** LUKE XII. 22–31.

22.—[*He* *said unto His disciples.*]Let it be noted that our Lord in this passage addresses Himself especially to His disciples. He turns to them from the man for whom He had refused to be a judge and a divider, and from the mixed multitude to whom He had spoken the parable of the rich fool. He knew the readiness of a believer’s heart to be anxious about the things of this world, and supplied His followers with comforting arguments against care.

[*Take no thought.*]The same remark which has been already made on this expression may be repeated here. The meaning of the Greek word is, “Take no anxious thought: be not anxiously careful.”

[*Life...body.*]The maintenance of animal life and the cloth­ing of the body are the two primary objects of thought and care. St. Paul refers to this when he says, “Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.” (1 Tim. vi. 8.)

23.—[*More*.] This expression means “more excellent,—more valuable.” It is translated “greater” in Luke xi. 31, 32; and “more excellent” in Hebrews xi. 4.

24.—[*Ravens*.] Let it be noted that the ravens are specially mentioned in Psal. cxlvii. 9, and Job xxxviii. 41, as objects of God’s care. In the history of Elijah the Holy Ghost shows us the ravens providing for others, as well as providing for themselves. (1 Kings xvii. 6.)

25.—[*To* *his stature one cubit.*]It admits of grave doubt whether the Greek word which we translate “stature,” ought not to have been translated “life,” or “age.” It is so translated in John ix. 21 and 23, and Heb. xi. 11. The idea of a person being anxious to increase his stature is undoubtedly somewhat strange, and the addition of a cubit to it would hardly be called in the following verse “that thing which is least.”—Anxiety about a longer term of life is much more common and intelligible. The application of the word “cubit” to an in­crease of life, is quite justified by the expression in the Psalms: “Thou hast made my days as an handbreadth.” (Psal. xxxix. 5.) The figure is also used in classical writers.

27.—[*The* *lilies.*]It is not clear that the flowers which are translated “lilies,” are the lilies of our climate. Major quotes Sir J. E. Smith’s saying, “There is reason to suppose that the lily mentioned by our Saviour is the amaryllis lutea, or autumnal narcissus. The flower is described by travellers as appearing in profusion in the fields of countries in the Levant, and covering them in autumn with a vivid golden brilliancy, so as to admit of a peculiarly apt comparison with Solomon in all his glory.”

[*Solomon in all his glory.*]Let it be observed that the king­dom and glory of Solomon are spoken of here as real and true things, and not as mere myths and fables.

28*.—*[*The grass.*]The word so translated signifies herbage in general, including flowers.

29*.—*[*Neither be ye of doubtful mind.*]The Greek word so translated is only found here in the New Testament. Its meaning has been variously explained, and our own translators seem to have felt its difficulty by their marginal reading: “live not in careful suspense.”

According to Hammond, the idea is borrowed from clouds or birds, high in the air, and tossed to and fro by the wind.

The vulgate translation appears to regard the expression as a warning against high and ambitious thoughts: “be not lifted up on high.”

The true idea is probably that which is given by Suicer. The expression is one borrowed from ships out at sea, which, especially when seen from the shore, appear lifted up, tossed to and fro and restless. Thucydides has a similar expression, when describing the condition of men’s minds in *Greece,* just at the beginning of the Peloponnesian war. (Thuc. ii. 7.) It implies a state of suspense, doubt, and anxiety about the future.

30.—[*The nations.*]Doddridge paraphrases this sentence thus, “The Gentile nations of the world, who know little of Provi­dence or of a future state, seek after all these lower things with great solicitude; and they are more excusable in doing it.”