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.*

ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.

CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XII. 32–40.

32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to giveyou the kingdom.

33 Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which was not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.

34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

35 Let your loins be girded about, and *your* lights burning

36 And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immedi­ately.

37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

38 And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find *them* so, blessed are those servants.

39 And this know, that if the good man of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

40 Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.

LET us mark *what a gracious word of consolation this passage contains for all true believers.* The Lord Jesus knew well the hearts of His disciples. He knew how ready they were to be filled with fears of every description,—fears because of the fewness of their number, fears because of the multitude of their enemies, fears because of the many difficulties in their way, fears because of their sense of weakness and unworthiness. He answers these many fears with a single golden sentence: “Fear not, little flock: it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Believers are a “little flock.” They always have been, ever since the world began. Professing servants of God have sometimes been very many. Baptized people at the present day are a great company. But true Christians are very few. It is foolish to be surprised at this. It is vain to expect it will be otherwise until the Lord comes again. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. vii. 14.)

Believers have a glorious “kingdom” awaiting them. Here upon earth they are often mocked, and ridiculed, and persecuted, and, like their Master, despised and re­jected of men. But “the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.” “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (Rom. viii. 18; Coloss. iii. 4.)

Believers are tenderly loved by God the Father. It is “the Father’s good pleasure” to give them a kingdom. He does not receive them grudgingly, unwillingly, and coldly. He rejoices over them as members of His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. He regards them as His dear children in Christ. He sees no spot in them. Even now, when He looks down on them from heaven in the midst of their infirmities, He is well pleased, and hereafter when presented before His glory, He will wel­come them with exceeding joy. (Jude 24.)

Are we members of Christ’s little flock? Then surely we ought not to be afraid. There are given to us exceed­ing great and precious promises. (2 Pet. i. 4.) God is ours, and Christ is ours. Greater are those that are for us than all that are against us. The world, the flesh, and the devil, are mighty enemies. But with Christ on our side we have no cause to fear.

Let us mark, secondly, *what a striking exhortation these verses contain to seek treasure in heaven. “*Sell that ye have,” said our Lord, “and give alms.” “Provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which faileth not.” But this is not all. A mighty, heart-searching principle is laid down to enforce the exhortation: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

The language of this charge is doubtless somewhat figurative. Yet the meaning of it is clear and unmis­takeable. We are to *sell:* to give up anything, and deny ourselves anything which stands in the way of our soul’s salvation. We are to *give:* to show charity and kindness to everyone, and to be more ready to spend our money in relieving others, than to hoard it for our own selfish purposes. We are to *provide* ourselves treasures in heaven: to make sure that our names are in the book of life; to lay hold of eternal life; to lay up for ourselves evidences which will bear the inspection of the day of judgment. This is true wisdom. This is real prudence. The man who does well for himself is the man who gives up everything for Christ’s sake. He makes the best of bargains: he carries the cross for a few years in this world, and in the world to come has everlasting life. He obtains the best of possessions: he carries his riches with him beyond the grave. He is rich in grace here, and he is rich in glory hereafter. And, best of all, what he obtains by faith in Christ he never loses. It is “that good part which is never taken away.”

Would we know what we are ourselves? Let us see whether we have treasure in heaven, or whether all our good things are here upon earth. Would we know what our treasure is? Let us ask ourselves what we love most? This is the true test of character. This is the pulse of our religion. It matters little what we say, or what we profess, or what preaching we admire, or what place of worship we attend. What do we love? On what are our affections set? This is the great question. “Where our treasure is there will our hearts be also.”

Let us mark, lastly, what an *instructive picture these verses contain of the frame of mind which the true Christian should endeavour to keep up.* Our Lord tells us that we ought to be “like unto men that wait for their Lord.” We ought to live like servants who expect their Master’s return, fulfilling our duties in our several stations, and doing nothing which we would not like to be found doing when Christ comes again.

The standard of life which our Lord has set up here is an exceedingly high one,—so high, indeed, that many Christians are apt to flinch from it, and feel cast down. And yet there is nothing here which ought to make a believer afraid. Readiness for the return of Christ to this world implies nothing which is impossible and unattainable. It requires no angelical perfection. It requires no man to forsake his family, and retire into solitude. It requires nothing more than the life of repentance, faith, and holiness. The man who is living the life of faith in the Son of God is the man whose “loins are girded,” and whose “light is burning.” Such a man may have the care of kingdoms on him, like Daniel,—or be a servant in a Nero’s household, like some in Paul’s time. All this matters nothing. If he lives looking unto Jesus, he is a servant who can “open to Him immediately.” Surely it is not too much to ask Christians to be men of this kind. Surely it was not for nothing that our Lord said, “The Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not.”

Are we ourselves living as if we were ready for the second coming of Christ? Well would it be if this question were put to our consciences more frequently. It might keep us back from many a false step in our daily life. It might prevent many a backsliding. The true Christian should not only believe in Christ, and love Christ; he should also look and long for Christ’s appear­ing. If he cannot say from his heart, “Come, Lord Jesus,” there must be something wrong about his soul.

NOTES. LUKE XII. 32–40.

32*.—*[*Little flock.*]The Greek word which we render “flock,” is a diminutive, meaning literally “little flock.” The addition of the adjective which we translate “little,” increases the ten­derness of the whole expression.

[*It is your Father’s good pleasure.*]This would be rendered literally, “Your Father is well pleased.” It is the same ex­pression which is used in the well-known places, Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5; Mark i. 11; Luke iii. 22. Let it be noted that our Lord lays special stress in this passage on the Fatherly relation of God to all believers, as an antidote to over-carefulness and anxiety.

33.—[*Sell* *that ye have, &c.*]This expression, if not confined to the Apostles, but applied generally to all believers, must evidently be interpreted with some Scriptural limitation. There is no­thing in the Acts or the Epistles which shows that believers, in the primitive Church, were expected to sell all their pro­perty as soon as they were converted. On the contrary, St. Peter’s words to Ananias, seem to show that it was quite optional with converts to sell their property or keep it. (Acts v. 4.) St. Paul goes even further, and says that “if a *man* provides not for his own, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” (1 Tim. v. 8.)

The whole verse is a strong figurative exhortation to self-denial, liberality, and careful provision for the soul. An excessively literal interpretation lands us in insuperable difficulties. It will surely not be said that Christians ought literally to provide themselves “bags.” Once concede that a figure is used, and a figurative explanation of the whole verse must be reasonably conceded.

The “thief,” in the verse, represents sudden and violent loss; the “moth,” gradual and silent waste or exhaustion.

35*.—*[*Loins be girded.*]This is a figure drawn from the habits of dressing which prevailed in our Lord’s time, and which are general at the present day throughout the East. Long flowing garments were the ordinary attire that men wore. When anything was to be done requiring bodily exertion, the first thing needful was to gird up the loins, or tie the garments tightly round the waist.

36*.—*[*Your lights burning.*]To see the full force of this expression we should read the parable of the ten virgins. (Matt. xxv. 1.) Marriages often took place in the evening. It was the duty of the servants to meet the wedding party with lighted torches. The verse before us is an exhortation to be in an attitude of constant preparation to meet the Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, at His second advent.

37.—[*He* *shall gird himself, &c.*]This is perhaps one of the most wonderful promises which is made to believers anywhere in the New Testament. It must probably be interpreted figuratively. The meaning evidently is, that there is no degree of honour and glory which the Lord Jesus will not gladly bestow on those who are found ready to meet Him, in the day of His second advent. Some think that there will be, insome way, a literal fulfilment of this promise, and that our Lord refers to this, when he says at the last supper, “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.” (Luke xxii. 18.) A reference to the same literal fulfilment is also supposed to exist in Isaiah xxv. 6.

Pearce says, “We may gather from this verse that it was the custom in those days, as it was not long since among us, for the bridegroom at a wedding supper to wait upon the company as a servant.”

38*.—*[*Second watch …third watch.*]These expressions are figurative. The night was divided into four watches. The second watch was from nine to twelve, and the third from twelve to three. The uncertainty of the time of the Lord’s advent, and the duty of being always ready for it, are the lessons of the verse.

39*.—*[*What hour the thief would come.*]This is a parabolic sen­tence, intended to teach us that the “day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. v. 2); and that there is no safety for Christians, excepting in constant readiness for it.

40.—[*The Son of man cometh.*]Let it be noted that the coming here spoken of, is the second personal advent of our Lord Jesus Christ at the end of this dispensation. To apply the expression, as some do, to death, is an entire perversion of Scripture. The coming of the Lord is one thing, and death is another.