EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE XIII. 10–17.

10 And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

11 And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up *herself.*

12 And when Jesus saw her, he called *her* to *him,* and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

13 And he laid *his* hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

14 And the ruler of the syna­gogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

15 The Lord then answered him, and said, *Thou* hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead *him* away to water­ing?

16 And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

17 And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people re­joiced for all the glorious things that were done by him.

WE see in these verses a *striking example of diligence in the use of means of grace.* We are told of a “woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself.” We know not who this woman was. Our Lord’s saying that she was “a daughter of Abraham,” would lead us to infer that she was a true believer. But her name and history are hidden from us. This only we know, that when Jesus was “teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath,” this woman was there. Sickness was no excuse with her for tarrying from God’s house. In spite of suffering and infirmity, she found her way to the place where the day and the Word of God were honoured, and where the people of God met together. And truly she was blessed in her deed! She found a rich reward for all her pains. She came sorrowing, and went home rejoicing.

The conduct of this suffering Jewess may well put to shame many a strong and healthy professing Christian. How many in the full enjoyment of bodily vigour, allow the most frivolous excuses to keep them away from the house of God! How many are constantly spending the whole Sunday in idleness, pleasure-seeking, or business, and scoffing and sneering at those who “keep the Sabbath holy!” How many think it a great matter if they attend the public worship of God once on Sunday, and regard a second attendance as a needless excess of zeal akin to fanaticism! How many find religious services a weari­ness while they attend them, and feel relieved when they are over! How few know anything of David’s spirit, when he said, “I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord.”—“How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts “(Psalm cxxii. 1. Psalm lxxxiv. 1.)

Now what is the explanation of all this? What is the reason why so few are like the woman of whom we read this day? The answer to these questions is short and simple. The most have no heart for God’s service: they have no delight in God’s presence or God’s day. “The carnal mind is enmity against God.” The moment a man’s heart is converted, these pretended difficulties about attending public worship vanish away. The new heart finds no trouble in keeping the Sabbath holy. Where there is a will there is always a way.

Let us never forget that our feelings about Sundays are sure tests of the state of our souls. The man who can find no pleasure in giving God one day in the week, is manifestly unfit for heaven. Heaven itself is nothing but an eternal Sabbath. If we cannot enjoy a few hours in God’s service once a week in this world, it is plain that we could not enjoy an eternity in His service in the world to come. Happy are they who walk in the steps of her of whom we read today! They shall find Christ and a blessing while they live, and Christ and glory when they die.

We see, secondly, in these verses, *the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ.* We are told that when He saw the suffering woman of whom we are reading, “He called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her.” That touch was accompanied by miraculous heal­ing virtue. At once a disease of eighteen years standing gave way before the Lord of Life. “Immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.”

We need not doubt that this mighty miracle was in­tended to supply hope and comfort to sin-diseased souls. With Christ nothing is impossible. He can soften hearts which seem hard as the nether mill-stone. He can bend stubborn wills which “for eighteen years” have been set on self-pleasing, on sin, and the world. He can enable sinners who have been long poring over earthly things, to look upward to heaven, and see the kingdom of God. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. He can create, and transform, and renew, and break down, and build, and quicken, with irresistible power. He lives who formed the world out of nothing, and He never changes.

Let us hold fast this blessed truth, and never let it go. Let us never despair about our own salvation. Our sins may be countless. Our lives may have been long spent in worldliness and folly. Our youth may have been wasted in soul-defiling excesses, of which we are sorely ashamed. But are we willing to come to Christ, and commit our souls to Him? If so, there is hope. He can heal us thoroughly, and say “thou art loosed from thine infirmity.”—Let us never despair about the salva­tion of others so long as they are alive. Let us name them before the Lord night and day, and cry to Him on their behalf. We may perhaps have relatives whose case seems desperate because of their wickedness. But it is not really so. There are no incurable cases with Christ. If He were to lay His healing hand on them, they would be “made straight, and glorify God.” Let us pray on, and faint not. That saying of Job is worthy of all ac­ceptation: “I know that thou canst do everything.” (Job xlii. 2.) Jesus is “able to save to the uttermost.”

We see, lastly, in these verses, the *right observance of the Sabbath Day asserted and defended by our Lord Jesus Christ.* The ruler of the synagogue in which the infirm woman was healed, found fault with her as a breaker of the Sabbath. He drew down upon himself a stern but just rebuke: “Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering?” If it was allowable to attend to the wants of beasts on the Sabbath, how much more to human creatures? It was no breach of the fourth commandment to show kindness to oxen and asses, much less to show kindness to a daughter of Abraham.

The principle here laid down by our Lord is the same that we find elsewhere in the Gospels. He teaches us that the command to “do no work” on the Sabbath, was not intended to prohibit works of necessity and mercy. The Sabbath was made for man’s benefit, and not for his hurt. It was appointed to promote man’s best and highest interests, and not to debar him of anything that is really for his good. It requires nothing but what is reasonable and wise. It forbids nothing that is really necessary to man’s comfort.

Let us pray for a right understanding of the law of the Sabbath. Of all the commandments that God has given, none is more essential to the happiness of man, and none is so frequently misrepresented, abused, and trampled under foot. Let us lay down for ourselves two special rules for the observance of the Sabbath. For one thing let us do no work which is not absolutely needful.

For another, let us keep the day “holy,” and give it to God. From these two rules let us never swerve. Experience shows that there is the closest connection between Sab­bath sanctification and healthy Christianity.

NOTES. LUKE XIII. 10–17.

11*.—*[*Which had a spirit of infirmity.*]The nature of this woman’s disease we are left to conjecture. It seems to have been some ailment mysteriously connected with possession by an unclean spirit, and caused by it. There is no other case precisely like it in the New Testament.

12.—[*He* *called her to Him.*]Let it be noted that this miracle was one of those which our Lord worked unsolicited and unasked. The widow at Nain is another instance. In both cases the person to whom kindness was shown was a woman.

There are some beautiful remarks in Stella’s commentary on this passage. He observes that it is a striking instance of our Lord’s love and compassion towards sinners. If He does so much for a person when unsolicited, how much more will He do for those who call upon Him in prayer.

14*.—*[*There are six days, &c.*]The bitterness and sarcasm of this unhappy speech are very remarkable. The very sight of a miracle, which ought to have convinced the ruler of the syna­gogue that Jesus was the Messiah, seems to have called forth all the corruption of his heart. The same thing may often be remarked in some unconverted men. The nearer the kingdom of God comes to them, the more bitter and angry they are.

[*Men ought to work.*]Let it be noted that the Greek expres­sion so translated would be more literally rendered, “it is fit, or becoming to work.” The word “men” is not in the Greek.

Stella observes that there was a striking similarity between the character of this ruler of the synagogue and that of many of the prelates and judges of his own day. They often pre­tended great zeal for the cause of religion, and persecuted anyone who gave them offence. Yet this zeal in reality was only in behalf of their own dignity and office, and not for the glory of God.

16.—[*A* *daughter of Abraham.*]This expression certainly appears to me to make it highly probable that this woman whom our Lord healed was a true believer. When Zacchæus was con­verted our Lord said, “He also is a son of Abraham.” (Luke xix. 9.) To regard the expression as only meaning a “daughter of Abraham according to natural descent,—a Jewess,” seems to me a tame and unsatisfactory interpretation.

[*Whom Satan hath bound.*]This expression is remarkable. It would seem to imply that Satan has a permissive power to inflict bodily disease and infirmity. It should be compared with the two first chapters of Job, and with St. Paul’s ex­pression, “to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruc­tion of the flesh.” (1 Cor. v. 5.)