

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XIII. 22–30.

22 And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem.

23 Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them,

24 Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

25 When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are:

26 Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.

27 But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.

28 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you *yourselves* thrust out.

29 And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.

30 And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

WE see in these verses *a remarkable question asked*. We are told that a certain man said to our Lord, “Are there few that be saved?”

We do not know who this inquirer was. He may have been a self-righteous Jew, trained to believe that there was no hope for the uncircumcised, and no salvation for any but the children of Abraham. He may have been an idle trifler with religion, who was ever wasting his time on curious and speculative questions. In any case, we must all feel that he asked a question of deep and momentous importance.

He that desires to know the number of the saved, in the present dispensation, need only turn to the Bible, and his curiosity will be satisfied. He will read in the Sermon on the Mount these solemn words: “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. vii. 14.) He has only to look around him, and compare the ways of the many with the Word of God, and he will soon come to the conclusion, if he is an honest man, that the saved are few. It is an awful conclusion. Our souls naturally turn away from it. But Scripture and facts alike combine to shut us up to it. Salvation to the uttermost is offered to men. All things are ready on God’s part. Christ is willing to receive sinners. But sinners are not willing to come to Christ. And hence few are saved.

We see, secondly, in these verses, *a striking exhortation given*. We are told that when our Lord Jesus Christ was asked whether few would be saved, He said, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” He addressed these words to the whole company of His hearers. He thought it not good to gratify the curiosity of his questioner by a direct reply. He chose rather to press home on him, and all around him, their own immediate duty. In minding their own souls they would soon find the question answered. In striving to enter in at the strait gate they would soon see whether the saved were many or few.

Whatever others may do in religion the Lord Jesus would have us know that our duty is clear. The gate is strait. The work is great. The enemies of our souls are many. We must be up, and doing. We are to wait for nobody. We are not to inquire what other people are doing, and whether many of our neighbours, and relatives, and friends, are serving Christ. The unbelief and indecision of others will be no excuse at the last day. We must never follow a multitude to do evil. If we go to heaven alone we must resolve that by God's grace we will go. Whether we have many with us or a few, the command before us is plain: "Strive to enter in."

Whatever others may think in religion the Lord Jesus would have us know that we are responsible for exertion. We are not to sit still in sin and worldliness, waiting for the grace of God. We are not to go on still in our wickedness, sheltering ourselves under the vain plea that we can do nothing till God draws us. We are to draw near to Him in the use of means of grace. How we can do it is a question with which we have nothing to do. It is in obedience that the knot will be untied. The command is express and unmistakable: "Strive to enter in."

We see, thirdly, in these verses, a *day of awful solemnity described*. We are told of a time when "the master of the house shall rise and shut the door," when some shall "sit down in the kingdom of God," and others be "shut out" for evermore. About the meaning of these words there can be no doubt. They describe the second coming of Christ and the day of judgment.

A day is coming on the earth when the long-suffering of God towards sinners shall have an end. The door of mercy, which has been so long open, shall at last be shut. The fountain opened for all sin and uncleanness shall at length be closed. The throne of grace shall be removed, and the throne of judgment shall be set up in its place. The great assize of the world shall begin. All that are found impenitent and unbelieving shall be thrust out for ever from God's presence. Men shall find that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb." (Rev. vi. 16.)

A day is coming when believers in Christ shall receive a full reward. The Master of the great house in heaven shall call His servants together, and give to each a crown of glory, that fadeth not away. They shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and rest for ever from warfare and work. They shall be shut in with Christ, and saints, and angels, in the kingdom of heaven, and sin, and death, and sorrow, and the world, and the devil, shall be eternally shut out. Men shall see at last that "to him that soweth righteousness there is a sure reward." (Prov. xi. 18.)

We see, lastly, in these verses, a *heart-searching prophecy delivered*. Our Lord tells us that in the day of His second coming "many will seek to enter in at the strait gate, and shall not be able."—They will "knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us," but will find no admission.—They

will even plead earnestly, that “they have eaten and drunk in Christ’s presence, and that he has taught in their streets.”—But their plea will be unavailing. They will receive the solemn answer, “I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.” Religious profession, and formal knowledge of Christ will save none who have served sin and the world.

There is something peculiarly striking in our Lord’s language in this prophecy. It reveals to us the awful fact, that men may see what is right when it is too late for them to be saved. There is a time coming when many will repent too late, and believe too late,—sorrow for sin too late, and begin to pray too late, be anxious about salvation too late, and long for heaven too late. Myriads shall wake up in another world, and be convinced of truths which on earth they refused to believe. Earth is the only place in God’s creation where there is any infidelity. Hell itself is nothing but truth known too late.

The recollection of this passage should help us to set a right estimate on things around us. Money, and pleasure, and rank, and greatness, occupy the first place now in the world. Praying, and believing, and holy living, and acquaintance with Christ, are despised, and ridiculed, and held very cheap. But there is a change coming one day The last shall be first, and the first last. For that change let us be prepared.

And now let us ask ourselves whether we are among the many or among the few? Do we know anything of striving and warring against sin, the world, and the devil? Are we ready for the Master’s coming to shut the door? The man who can answer these questions satisfactorily is a true Christian.

NOTES. LUKE XIII. 22–30.

23.—[*Are there few that be saved?*] Whitby remarks, “This question seems to have been propounded agreeably to that sentiment of the Jews, that all Israelites should have their portion in the world to come.” Perhaps the question would be translated more literally, “Are the saved few?”

It may be well to remark here that we have no warrant for supposing that the aggregate number of those who are lost will prove finally to be greater than the number of the saved. When all the infants who die without knowing good from evil, and all the “nations of the saved,” who shall be converted after the calling in of the Jews, are added to the ranks of God’s elect under the present dispensation, they shall be a multitude that no man can number. They will probably far exceed in number those who are lost.

[*He said unto them.*] Let it be noted that our Lord’s answer was not directed only to the man who asked the question, but to all the people round Him. He probably knew that the question arose from a common opinion prevalent amongst all Jews, and that His questioner was only the mouth-piece of many. He therefore addresses His reply to all His hearers.

24, 25, &c.—[*Strive, &c.*] Major says, “In these verses allusion is made to nuptial feasts. These were celebrated by night. The house was filled with lights. Thus they who were admitted

have the benefit of light; but they who were excluded were in darkness outside the house,—‘outer darkness,’—which necessarily appeared more gloomy compared with the light within.” The guests entered by a narrow wicket gate, at which the porter stood to prevent the unbidden from rushing in. When all that had been invited were arrived, the door was shut, and not opened to those who stood without, however much they knocked.

[*Strive to enter in.*] The Greek word rendered “strive,” is that from which we take our English word “agonize.” It implies great exertion and conflict. It is elsewhere translated “labour fervently,” and “fight.” (Colos. iv. 12; 1 Tim. vi. 12.)

[*At the strait gate.*] The Greek preposition which we here render “at,” is almost always translated “through,” when found in sentences so constructed as the one before us.

[*Many...will seek...not be able.*] Stier labours to make out a distinction here between “seeking” to enter, and “striving” to enter. He appears to think that our Lord is speaking of things which happen while men are alive, and that the reason why many are not able to enter in is to be found in the defective manner of their attempts. They indolently “seek,” but do not earnestly “strive.”

This distinction appears to me over-refined and quite unnecessary. The time when men shall “seek to enter,” and “not be able,” seems to me, most plainly, to be at the last day, when the door of mercy is shut for ever. The whole context shows this, and the language used is parallel to that in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. (Matt. xxv. 11.)

Moreover the Greek word which we translate “seek” happens to be the very same which is used in the famous promise, “Seek and ye shall find: knock and it shall be opened unto you.” (Matt. vii. 7.) To argue therefore from this passage that men may seek to enter in at the gate of life and not be able, while they are alive, appears to me a harsh and needless straining of Scripture. That there is a state of mind to which some may come in which they shall seek God after a manner, and yet not find Him, I do not deny. It is taught in Prov. i. 28. All *I* maintain is that it is not taught here. The lesson taught here is simply this,—that there will be a time when men shall find the gate of life closed, and shall desire entrance in vain when it is too late.

It appears to me very doubtful whether there ought to be a “full stop” at the end of the 24th verse, and whether the sense does not indicate that a comma only is sufficient.

25.—[*When once the master.*] The language used in this verse is clearly that of parable.

[*I know you not.*] Let this expression be noted. It is again emphatically used in the 27th verse. It is not safe to lay too much stress on expressions used in parables in the establishment of doctrine. Nevertheless this repeated sentence, “I know you not,” appears hard to be reconciled with the opinion that saints may fall away and be lost. The lost in the passage before us are clearly people whom the Lord does not know, and never did know.

26.—[*We have eaten and drunk in thy presence.*] It does not appear that these words have any necessary reference to the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. The expression, “eat and drink” is frequently used in the New Testament to describe familiar intercourse. (See Luke v. 30, and xxii. 30.)

27.—[*Depart from me...iniquity.*] The similarity between this expression and Matt. xxv. 41, appears to show clearly that the time described is the second coming of Christ, and the judgment day.

28.—[*Ye shall see.*] This expression seems to prove that the lost shall see afar off the glory and blessedness of the saved, and that the sight shall add to their misery.

[*Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob ...in the kingdom of God.*] Let this expression be noted. It shows that Old Testament saints will share the glory of the kingdom of God with Gentile believers. There seems no room here for the opinion, which some hold, that Old Testament

saints and believers who have lived since the day of Pentecost shall not be together in glory;—and that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not members of that Church which is the Bride and the Lamb’s Wife. Both the present verse, and the one following, and the kindred passage in Matthew (Matt. viii. 11) appear distinctly to contradict this notion.

- 29.—[*They shall come.*] This verse describes the calling of the Gentiles of all nations, and people, and tongues into the Church. They are to sit down in the same kingdom with the patriarchs and prophets.

[*East...west...north...south.*] Bengel suggests the idea that these points of the compass are intentionally arranged thus, to show the order in which the Gentiles would be called in all over the world. It certainly is a fact that the Gospel first took root in Syria and Asia Minor, then spread on to the West of Europe and along the shores of the Mediterranean, then turned northward to the Scandinavian nations and Britain, and since that time has spread, wherever it has spread, toward the south, in Africa, Asia, South America, and the South Pacific Ocean.

- 30.—[*There are last...first...are first...last.*] This is a proverbial expression which was literally fulfilled when the Gospel was first preached, and has often been fulfilled since, both in Churches and individuals. The Jews who were first became last, and the Gentiles who were last became first. The Churches of Asia Minor and Africa were called first, and were famous when Britain was only a field for missionaries. But now those Churches have become last, and the British Churches fill the foremost position in Christendom. And they too, “if they continue not in God’s goodness, will be cut off.” (Rom. xi. 22.)