

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XIII. 31–35.

31 The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee.

32 And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third *day* I shall be perfected.

33 Nevertheless I must walk today, and tomorrow, and the *day* following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.

34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth *gather* her brood under *her* wings, and ye would not!

35 Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until *the time* come when ye shall say, Blessed *is* he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

LET us learn from these verses *how entirely our times are in God's hands*. Our Lord Jesus Christ teaches us this lesson by His reply to those who bade Him depart, because Herod would kill Him. He said, "I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow." His time was not yet come for leaving the world. His work was not yet finished. Until that time came it was not in the power of Herod to hurt Him. Until that work was finished no weapon forged against Him could prosper.

There is something in our Lord's words which demands the attention of all true Christians. There is a frame of mind exhibited to us which we should do well to copy. Our Lord, no doubt, spoke with a prophetic foresight of coming things. He knew the time of His own death, and He knew that this time was not yet come. Fore-knowledge like this, of course, is not granted to believers in the present day. But still there is a lesson here which we ought not to overlook. We ought, in a certain measure, to aim at having the mind that was in Christ Jesus. We ought to seek to possess a spirit of calm, unshaken confidence about things to come. We should study to have a heart "not afraid of evil tidings," but quiet, steady, and trusting in the Lord. (Psalm cxii. 7.)

The subject is a delicate one, but one which concerns our happiness so much that it deserves consideration. We are not intended to be idle fatalists, like the Mahometans, or cold, unfeeling statues, like the Stoics. We are not to neglect the use of means, or to omit all prudent provision for the unseen future. To neglect means is fanaticism, and not faith.—But still, when we have done all, we should remember that though duties are our's events are God's. We should therefore endeavour to leave things to come in God's hands, and not to be over-anxious about health, or family, or money, or plans. To cultivate this frame of mind would add immensely to our peace. How many of our cares and fears are about things which never come to pass! Happy is that man who can walk in our Lord's steps, and say, "I shall have what is good for me. I shall live on earth till my work is done, and not a moment longer. I shall be taken when I am ripe for heaven, and not a minute before. All the powers of the world cannot take away my life till God

permits. All the physicians on earth cannot preserve it when God calls me away.”

Is there anything beyond the reach of man in this spirit? Surely not. Believers have a covenant ordered in all things and sure. The very hairs of their heads are numbered. Their steps are ordered by the Lord. All things are working together for their good. When they are afflicted it is for their profit. When they are sick it is for some wise purpose. All things are said to be their's—life, death, things present, and things to come. (2 Sam. xxiii. 5; Matt. x. 30; Psalm xxxvii. 23; Rom. viii. 28; Heb. xii. 10; John xi. 4; 1 Cor. iii. 22.) There is no such thing as chance, luck, or accident, in the life of a believer. There is but one thing needful, in order to make a believer calm, quiet, unruffled, undisturbed in every position, and under every circumstance. That one thing is faith in active exercise. For such faith let us daily pray. Few indeed know anything of it. The faith of most believers is very fitful and spasmodic. It is for want of steady, constant faith, that so few can say with Christ, “I shall walk today, and tomorrow, and not die till my work is done.”

Let us learn, for another thing, from these verses, *how great is the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners*. We see this brought out in a most forcible manner by our Lord's language about Jerusalem. He knew well the wickedness of that city. He knew what crimes had been committed there in times past. He knew what was coming on Himself, at the time of His crucifixion. Yet even to Jerusalem He says, “How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not.”

It grieves the Lord Jesus Christ to see sinners going on still in their wickedness. “As I live,” are His words, “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” (Ezek. xxxiii. 11.) Let all unconverted people remember this. It is not enough that they grieve parents, and ministers, and neighbours, and friends. There is One higher than all these, whom they deeply grieve by their conduct. They are daily grieving Christ.

The Lord Jesus is willing to save sinners. “He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” “He would have all men saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Pet iii. 9; 1 Tim. ii. 4.) This is a mighty principle of the Gospel, and one which sorely perplexes narrow-minded and shallow theologians. But what says the Scripture? The words before us, no less than the texts just quoted, are distinct and express. “I would have gathered thy children,” says Christ, “and ye would not.” The will of poor hardened unbelieving man, and not the will of Christ, is the cause why sinners are lost for evermore. Christ “would” save them, but they will “not be” saved.

Let the truth before us sink down into our hearts, and bear fruit in our lives. Let us thoroughly understand that if we die in our sins and go to hell, our blood will be upon our own heads. We cannot lay the blame on God the Father, nor on Jesus Christ the Redeemer, nor on the Holy Ghost the Comforter. The promises of the Gospel are wide, broad, and general. The readiness of Christ to save sinners is unmistakably declared. If we are lost, we shall have none to find fault with but ourselves. The words of Christ will be our condemnation: "Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life." (John v. 40.)

Let us take heed, with such a passage as this before us, that we are not more systematic than Scripture. It is a serious thing to be "wise above that which is written." Our salvation is wholly of God. Let that never be forgotten. None but the elect shall be finally saved. "No man can come unto Christ except the Father draw him." (John vi. 44.) But our ruin, if we are lost, will be wholly of ourselves. We shall reap the fruit of our own choice. We shall find that we have lost our own souls. Linked between these two principles lies truth which we must maintain firmly, and never let go. There is doubtless deep mystery about it. Our minds are too feeble to understand it now. But we shall understand it all hereafter. God's sovereignty and man's responsibility shall appear perfectly harmonious one day. In the meantime, whatever we doubt, let us never doubt Christ's infinite willingness to save.

NOTES. LUKE XIII. 31-35.

31.—[*Then came certain...Herod will kill thee.*] It is thought by some that this message was an invention of the Pharisees, intended to alarm our Lord, and stop His preaching, and that Herod never really intended to kill our Lord. Yet it seems impossible to reconcile this theory with the message that our Lord in reply sends to Herod in the next verse. It is more probable that Herod wished to make away with One whose ministry reminded him of John the Baptist, and who publicly testified that John the Baptist, whom Herod had murdered, was a prophet. He had probably expressed this wish publicly to his courtiers, and the Pharisees came to repeat it to our Lord, hoping that the report would silence Him.

[*Depart hence: or Herod will kill thee.*] This expression shows that our Lord was in Galilee at this time. We are expressly told (Luke xxiii. 7) that Galilee belonged to Herod's jurisdiction.

Let it be noted that the literal translation of the Greek here would be, "Herod is willing, has a will, wishes, means, to kill thee." It is not a future tense merely. It is like "Ye will not come to me." (John v. 40.)

32.—[*That fox.*] This remarkable expression is variously interpreted. Some think that our Lord did not apply it to Herod at all, but to the Pharisee who brought the message. This, however, seems a very unnatural and forced application of the word. The most common opinion is, that our Lord applied it to Herod himself, in virtue of His office as a prophet. Whitby remarks, "To impose this ignominious name on Herod is not contrary to the command 'not to speak ill of the ruler of thy people.' It is the office of prophets not to spare kings when they expose their offences. (Jer. i. 10.) Christ, therefore, uses His prophetic power in giving this tyrant a name suitable to his actions." (Compare Zephan. iii. 3; Ezek. xxii. 27.)

Maldonatus thinks that our Lord purposely called Herod “that fox,” in order to show the Pharisees how little He feared him.

One word of caution is needful. The use of this expression by our Lord is no warrant to Christians to employ violent and contemptuous epithets in speaking of the wicked, and especially of the wicked in high places. He that would use such language about his ruler as Christ here used about Herod must first prove his prophetic commission, and satisfy us that he has a special mission from God.

[*Today, and tomorrow, and the third day.*] This is a difficult expression, and one which has received three different interpretations. The expression in the next verse is only another way of saying the same thing.

Some think that our Lord meant three literal days. Bishop Pearce says, “This, and what follows to the end of the chapter, seem to have been spoken about two or three days before Jesus was crucified.” This seems a very improbable and unsatisfactory interpretation.

Some think that by days our Lord meant years, according to the theory which makes prophetic days always mean years. This again seems an unsatisfactory view. According to it our Lord spoke these words in the first year of His three years ministry. Yet it appears more likely that He spoke them in the last.

Some think that this expression is indefinite, and a proverbial form of speech, signifying merely a short space of time: “I am yet a little time with you, and during that time I shall continue my work, notwithstanding Herod’s threats; and at the end of that time, and not before, I shall be perfected, or finish my course by death.” Similar modes of speaking occur in Hosea vi. 2; and in the marginal readings of Gen. xxx. 33; xxxi. 2; Exod. iv. 10; xiii. 14; Dent. vi. 20; xix. 6; Josh. iii. 5; iv. 6; xxii. 24; 1 Sam. xix. 7.

I am disposed to adhere to this last opinion, as on the whole the most probable one. Major gives quotations from Euripides and Arrian which justify the interpretation of the three days in a proverbial sense by the usage of profane writers.

[*I shall be perfected.*] This is a remarkable expression. In the Greek it is in the present tense. The meaning seems to be “I shall be perfected by my death: I shall finish the work which I came to do.” The same word is applied to our Lord in Heb. ii. 10, and v. 9.

33.—[*I must walk.*] The meaning of this expression seems to be, “I must continue in the course I have begun: I must go on, (to use a common English phrase) as I have hitherto.” It is the same word which is used in Luke i. 6; 1 Pet. iv. 3; 2 Pet. ii. 10; iii. 3; Jude 16. In each place it is rendered “walk,” and in each means “maintaining an habitual course of life.”

[*It cannot be that a prophet...Jerusalem.*] This is a peculiar expression. The Greek word rendered, “it cannot be,” is only found here in the New Testament, and means literally “it is impossible.” Yet it is clear that this cannot be our Lord’s literal meaning. John the Baptist, to say nothing of other prophets, did not die at Jerusalem. The sense must be, as Euthymius and Heinsius maintain,—“it would be an unusual thing,—an exception to a rule,—for a prophet to die in any place but Jerusalem. When I do die, it will be at Jerusalem. But I am not there yet, but in Galilee.”

Barradius thinks that our Lord meant, “it is not possible that I, the great prophet, foretold by Moses, can perish out of Jerusalem.” This however seems very improbable.

Drusius and A. Clarke say, that a man professing to be a prophet could be tried on that ground only by the great Sanhedrim, which always resided at Jerusalem.

34.—[*O Jerusalem, &c.*] This remarkable passage is found in St. Matthew’s Gospel (Matt. xxiii. 37), at the very end of our Lord’s ministry, in almost the same words. I cannot see any satisfactory explanation of this circumstance, excepting that our Lord must have twice used the same expression about Jerusalem in the course of His ministry on earth.

To suppose that our Lord was at the end of His ministry in this part of St. Luke’s Gospel is, on the face of the narrative, utterly improbable. To suppose that St. Luke thrust in this

remarkable saying about Jerusalem at this particular point of his Gospel, out of its place and order, and without any connection with the context, is equally improbable.

I see on the other hand no improbability whatever in the supposition that our Lord made use of this remarkable saying about Jerusalem on two distinct occasions during his ministry. I can quite understand that His mighty and feeling heart was deeply touched with sorrow for the sin and hardness of that wicked but privileged city. And it seems to me both likely and natural that language like that before us would fall from His lips on more than one occasion.

[*How often.*] I cannot think, as some do, that this expression refers to many visits which our Lord had made to Jerusalem during His ministry. I rather refer it to all the messages and invitations which for many centuries He had sent to Jerusalem by His servants, the prophets.

[*Would I...ye would not!*] The Greek word in both these phrases is stronger than appears from our English translation. It is literally, "I willed, and ye willed not."

Few passages in the Bible throw the responsibility of the loss of the soul so distinctly on those who are lost: "I would," "ye would not." Two wills are expressly mentioned: the will of Christ to do good, and the will of man to refuse good when offered.

Let it be noted that our Lord does not say, "thou wouldest not," but "ye would not."—By this mode of speaking He makes it plain that He charges the guilt of Jerusalem on its inhabitants, the men and women who dwelt there, and specially on the priests, and Scribes, and Pharisees who governed the city. They were neither willing to be gathered themselves, nor to let others round them be gathered. They neither entered in themselves into the kingdom, nor allowed others to enter. Christ was willing, but they were unwilling.

We must be careful, however, not to confine "ye would not," to the Scribes, Pharisees, and rulers. The verse which follows shows clearly that our Lord includes all the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

35.—[*Your house is left...desolate.*] These words mean, "Your temple, in which you glory, your holy and beautiful house, is now deprived of its glory. God has departed from it, and has no longer any pleasure in it."

[*Ye shall not see me until, &c.*] The meaning of these words, and the manner of their fulfilment, are points on which commentators are not agreed.

Some think that our Lord refers to His own triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when He rode in upon an ass just before His crucifixion, and all the city met Him, crying, "Hosanna!"

Some think that our Lord refers to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, when the fulfilment of all His predictions would oblige the Jews to confess that He was the Messiah. Bishop Pearce says, "They will then remember what they did to me when I was among them, and will acknowledge that I am the Christ, the person who came in the name of the Lord. Accordingly, Eusebius tells us, that upon seeing that destruction, vast multitudes came over to the faith of Christ."

Some think that our Lord's words are not yet fulfilled, and that they refer to the last times, when the Jews after their last tribulation shall "look on Him, whom they pierced," and believe, at the time of His second advent in glory.

I decidedly adhere to this last opinion. The triumphant entry into Jerusalem was a faint type, no doubt, of the honour which Christ will one day see in Jerusalem. But the Jewish nation, as a nation, never saw our Lord and honoured Him as the Messiah, during the whole period of His first advent. But "when he cometh with clouds every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him." (Rev. i. 7.)