

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XIV. 1–6.

1 And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.	4 And they held their peace. And he took <i>him</i> , and healed him, and let him go;
2 And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy.	5 And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?
3 And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day?	6 And they could not answer him again to these things.

LET us mark in this passage, *how our Lord Jesus Christ accepted the hospitality of those who were not His disciples*. We read that “He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread.” We cannot reasonably suppose that this Pharisee was a friend of Christ. It is more probable that he only did what was customary for a man in his position. He saw a stranger teaching religion, whom some regarded as a prophet, and he invited Him to eat at his table. The point that most concerns us, is this,—that when the invitation was given it was accepted.

If we want to know how our Lord carried Himself at a Pharisee’s table, we have only to read attentively the first twenty-four verses of this chapter. We shall find Him the same there that He was elsewhere,—always about His Father’s business. We shall see Him first defending the true observance of the Sabbath-day, then expounding to those who were bidden together with Him the nature of true humility, then urging on His host the character of true hospitality, and finally delivering that most apposite and striking parable, the parable of the great supper. And all this is done in the most wise, and calm, and dignified manner. The words are all words in season. The speech is “always with grace, seasoned with salt.” (Coloss. iv. 6.) The perfection of our Lord’s conduct appears on this, as on all other occasions. He always said the right thing, at the right time, and in the right way. He never forgot for a moment, who He was and where He was.

The example of Christ in this passage deserves the close attention of all Christians, and specially of ministers of the Gospel. It throws strong light on some most difficult points,—our intercourse with unconverted people,—the extent to which we should carry it,—the manner in which we should behave when we are with them. Our Lord has left us a pattern for our conduct in this chapter. It will be our wisdom to endeavour to walk in His steps.

We ought not to withdraw entirely from all intercourse with unconverted people. It would be cowardice and indolence to do so, even if it were possible. It would shut us out from many opportunities of doing good. But we ought to go into their society moderately, watchfully, and prayerfully, and with a firm resolution to carry our Master and our Master’s business with us. The house from which Christ is deliberately excluded, is not the house at

which Christians ought to receive hospitalities, and keep up intimacy.—The extent to which we should carry our intercourse with the unconverted is a point which each believer must settle for himself. Some can go much further than others in this direction, with advantage to their company, and without injury to themselves. “Every man hath his proper gift.” (1 Cor. vii. 7.) There are two questions which we should often put to ourselves, in reference to this subject. “Do I, in company, spend all my time in light and worldly conversation?—Or do I endeavour to follow, however feebly, the example of Christ?” The society in which we cannot answer these questions satisfactorily, is society from which we had better withdraw. So long as we go into company as Christ went to the Pharisee’s house, we shall take no harm.

Let us mark, secondly, in this passage, *how our Lord was watched by His enemies*. We read that when He went to eat bread on the Sabbath day, in the house of a Pharisee, “they watched him.”

The circumstance here recorded, is only a type of what our Lord was constantly subjected to, all through His earthly ministry. The eyes of His enemies were continually observing Him. They watched for His halting, and waited eagerly for some word or deed on which they could lay hold, and build an accusation. Yet they found none. Our blessed Lord was ever holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from evil. Perfect indeed must that life have been in which the bitterest enemy could find no flaw, or blemish, no spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing!

He that desires to serve Christ must make up his mind to be “watched” and observed, no less than his Master. He must never forget that the eyes of the world are upon him, and that the wicked are looking narrowly at all his ways. Specially ought he to remember this when he goes into the society of the unconverted. If he makes a slip there, in word or deed, and acts inconsistently, he may rest assured it will not be forgotten.

Let us endeavour to live daily as in the sight of a holy God. So living, it will matter little how much we are “watched” by an ill-natured and malicious world. Let us exercise ourselves to have a conscience void of offence toward God and man, and to do nothing which can give occasion to the Lord’s enemies to blaspheme. The thing is possible. By the grace of God it can be done. The haters of Daniel were obliged to confess, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (Dan. vi. 5.)

Let us mark, lastly, in this passage, *how our Lord asserts the lawfulness of doing works of mercy on the Sabbath day*. We read that he healed a man who had the dropsy on the Sabbath day, and then said to the lawyers and Pharisees, “Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day?” This was a home-

thrust, which could not be parried. It is written, "They could not answer him again."

The qualification which our Lord here puts on the requirements of the fourth commandment is evidently founded on Scripture, reason, and common sense. The Sabbath was made for man,—for his benefit, not for his injury,—for his advantage, not for his hurt. The interpretation of God's law respecting the Sabbath was never intended to be strained so far as to interfere with charity, kindness, and the real wants of human nature. All such interpretations only defeat their own end. They require that which fallen man cannot perform, and thus bring the whole commandment into disrepute. Our Lord saw this clearly, and laboured throughout His ministry to restore this precious part of God's law to its just position.

The principle which our Lord lays down about Sabbath observance needs carefully fencing with cautions. The right to do works of *necessity* and *mercy* is fearfully abused in these latter days. Thousands of Christians appear to have thrown down the hedge, and burst the bounds entirely with respect to this holy day. They seem to forget that though our Lord repeatedly explains the requirements of the fourth commandment, He never struck it out of the law of God, or said that it was not binding on Christians at all.

Can anyone say that Sunday travelling, except on very rare emergencies, is a work of *mercy*?—Will anyone tell us that Sunday trading, Sunday dinner parties, Sunday excursion-trains on railways, Sunday deliveries of letters and newspapers, are works of *mercy*?—Have servants, and shopmen, and engine-drivers, and coachmen, and clerks, and porters, no souls? Do they not need rest for their bodies and time for their souls, like other men?—These are serious questions, and ought to make many people think.

Whatever others do, let us resolve to "keep the Sabbath holy." God has a controversy with the Churches about Sabbath desecration. It is a sin of which the cry goes up to heaven, and will be reckoned for one day. Let us wash our hands of this sin, and have nothing to do with it. If others are determined to rob God, and take possession of the Lord's day for their own selfish ends, let us not be partakers in their sins.

NOTES. LUKE. XIV. 1–6.

- 1.—[*He went into...house...Pharisees.*] Inns and places of reception for travellers were doubtless far more uncommon in our Lord's time than they are now. The duty of entertaining strangers, in consequence, often devolved on the chief man in each village or town.

Stella thinks that one object that our Lord had in view in going to the Pharisee's house was to benefit the servants of the family, who had few opportunities of hearing truth. He remarks that in his own time, in Spain, servants had hardly any opportunity of hearing sermons, from the demands which their masters made upon their time on Sundays.

[*To eat bread on the Sabbath day.*] Lightfoot says that “the Jews’ tables were generally better spread on the Sabbath than on any other days; and that, as they themselves reckoned, on account of religion and piety.” He proves this by quotations from Rabbinical writers.

2.—[*Before Him.*] Some think that the dropsical man placed himself before Christ in faith, hoping that He would see and heal him. Others think that he was purposely placed there by our Lord’s enemies, in order to lay a trap in our Lord’s way, and procure an occasion of accusing Him as a Sabbath-breaker.

3.—[*Answering spake.*] Let it be noted here that we are told of nothing that was said, or spoken by the lawyers and Pharisees, and yet we read, both here and at verse 5, that our Lord “answered.” It is plain that He answered their thoughts.

Whitby observes, “In this and all similar cases, there is an answer to some inward conception or reasoning; or to some action expressive of their sentiments concerning Him.” The same remark applies to Matt. xxii. 1; Luke v. 22; Luke vii. 39, 40; Mark xiv. 48; Matt. xi. 25.

[*To heal on the Sabbath day.*] Let it be noted that our Lord seems frequently to have chosen the Sabbath day on purpose, as the day on which He would work miracles of mercy. See Mark i. 21; Luke vi. 6; Luke xiii. 10; John ix. 14.

5.—[*An ass or an ox.*] Stella makes some severe remarks, in his commentary on this verse, upon the prelates of his day. He charges them with caring more about the horses and mules which drew their equipages, than about the sick, the poor, and the needy in their diocese. He observes that they were not like Job, who did not rend his garments when he lost his oxen and camels, but when his sons and his daughters died.

[*Straightway.*] This word is more commonly rendered “immediately.” It signifies that there was no delay about saving the life of the ox and the ass, and so there ought to be no delay about healing a sick man, or doing a work of mercy on the Sabbath day.