EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE. XIV. 15–24.

15 And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed *is* he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

16 Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:

17 And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bid­den, Come; for all things are now ready.

18 And they all with one *consent* began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.

19 And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.

20 And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.

21 So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry, said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.

22 And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.

23 And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel *them* to come in, that my house may be filled.

24 For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

THE verses before us contain one of our Lord’s most instructive parables. It was spoken in consequence of a remark made by one who was sitting at meat with Him in a Pharisee’s house. “Blessed,” said this man, “is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.” The object of this remark we are left to conjecture. It is far from unlikely that he who made it was one of that class of people who wish to go to heaven, and like to hear good things talked of, but never get any further. Our Lord takes occasion to remind him and all the company, by means of the parable of the great supper, that men may have the kingdom of God offered to them, and yet may wilfully neglect it, and be lost forever.

We are taught, firstly, in this parable, that *God has made a great provision for the salvation of men’s souls.* This is the meaning of the words, “A certain man made a great supper, and bade many.” This is the Gospel.

The Gospel contains a full supply of everything that sinners need in order to be saved. We are all naturally starving, empty, helpless, and ready to perish. Forgive­ness of all sin and peace with God, justification of the person and sanctification of the heart, grace by the way and glory in the end,—are the gracious provision which God has prepared for the wants of our souls. There is nothing that sin-laden hearts can wish, or weary con­sciences require, which is not spread before men in rich abundance in Christ. Christ, in one word, is the sum and substance of the “great supper.” “I am the bread of life,” He declares: “he that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”—“My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”—“He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life.” (John vi. 35-55, 56.)

We are taught, secondly, in this parable, *that the offers and invitations of the Gospel are most broad and liberal.* We read that he who made the supper “sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come: for all things are now ready.”

There is nothing wanting on God’s part for the salva­tion of man. If man is not saved, the fault is not on God’s side. The Father is ready to receive all who come to Him by Christ. The Son is ready to cleanse all from their sins who apply to Him by faith. The Spirit is ready to come to all who ask for Him. There is an infinite willingness in God to save man, ifman is only willing to be saved.

There is the fullest warrant for sinners to draw near to God by Christ. The word “Come,” is addressed to all without exception.—Are men labouring and heavy-laden? “Come unto me,” says Jesus, “and I will give you rest.” (Matt. xi. 28.) Are men thirsting? “If any man thirst,” says Jesus, “let him come unto me and drink.” (John vii. 37.) Are men poor and hungry? “Come,” says Jesus, “buy wine and milk without money and without price.” (Isaiah lv. 1.) No man shall ever be able to say that he had no encourage­ment to seek salvation. That word of the Lord shall silence every objector: “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” (John vi. 37.)

We are taught, thirdly in this parable, that *many who receive Gospel invitations refuse to accept them.* We read that when the servants announced that all things were ready, those who were invited “all with one consent began to make excuse.” One had one trivial excuse, and another had another. In one point only all were agreed: they would not come.

We have in this part of the parable a vivid picture of the reception which the Gospel is continually meeting with wherever it is proclaimed. Thousands are continu­ally doing what the parable describes. They are invited to come to Christ, and they will not come.—It is not ignorance of religion that ruins most men’s souls. It is want of will to use knowledge, or love of this present world.—It is not open profligacy that fills hell. It is excessive attention to things which in themselves are lawful.—It is not avowed dislike to the Gospel which is so much to be feared. It is that procrastinating, excuse-making spirit, which is always ready with a reason why Christ cannot be served *today.—*Letthe words of our Lord on this subject sink down into our hearts. Infidelity and immorality, no doubt slay their thousands. But decent, plausible, smooth-spoken *excuses* slay their tens of thousands. No excuse can justify a man in refusing God’s invitation, and not coming to Christ.

We are taught, lastly, in this parable, that *God earnestly desires the salvation of souls, and would have all means used to procure acceptance for His Gospel.* We read that when those who were first invited to the sup­per refused the invitation, “the master of the house said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.” We read that when this was done, and there was yet room, “the lord said unto his servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”

The meaning of these words can admit of little dispute. They surely justify us in asserting the exceeding love and compassion of God towards sinners. His longsuffering is inexhaustible. If some will not receive the truth, He will have others invited in their stead. His pity for the lost is no feigned and imaginary thing. He is infinitely willing to save souls.—Above all, the words justify every preacher and teacher of the Gospel in employing all possible means to awaken sinners, and to turn them from their sins. If they will not come to us in public, we must visit them in private. If they will not attend our preaching in the congregation, we must be ready to preach from house to house. We must even not be ashamed to use a gentle violence. We must be instant in season, out of season. (2 Tim. iv. 2.) We must deal with many an unconverted man as one half-asleep, half out of his mind, and not fully conscious of the state he is in. We must press the Gospel on his notice again and again. We must cry aloud and spare not. We must deal with him as we would with a man about to commit suicide. We must try to snatch him as a brand from the burning. We must say, “I cannot, I will not, I dare not let you go on ruining your own soul.” The men of the world may not understand such earnest dealing. They may sneer at all zeal and fervour in religion as fanaticism. But the “man of God,” who desires to do the work of an evangelist, will heed little what the world says. He will remember the words of our parable. He will “compel men to come in.”

Let us leave this parable with serious self-inquiry. It ought to speak to us in the present day. To us this invitation of the Gospel is addressed as well as to the Jews. To us the Lord is saying constantly, “Come unto the supper,—Come unto me.” Have we accepted His invitation? Or are we practically saying, “I can­not come.” If we die without having come to Christ, we had better never have been born.

NOTES. LUKE XIV. 15–24.

15*.—*[*Blessed is he that shall eat bread, &c.*]The motive of this remark, and the real character of him who made it, we are left to conjecture.

Gill thinks it likely that the man was a Jew, who was imbued with the gross notions which were commonly held about feast­ing and banqueting in the kingdom of Messiah. He shows, from Rabbinical writers, that “the Jews suppose that God will then make a splendid feast, in which, beside bread, which they call the bread of the kingdom, there will be great variety of flesh, fish, and fowl, plenty of generous wine, and all sorts of delicious fruit. Particularly they speak of a great ox, which they suppose to be the Behemoth in Job, which will then be prepared; and of Leviathan, and his mate, which will there be dressed; and of a large fowl, called Ziz, of mountain bigness; and of old wine, kept from the creation of the world; and fruits of the garden of Eden, which will then be served up.”

I have given this quotation at length, as an instructive instance of the rubbish contained in Rabbinical writers.

I am myself unable to see, what some think, that this man was a believer, or even a pious-minded person. To me his remark appears nothing better than the indolent, vague wish of a man who thinks it proper to say something religious, when religion is spoken of in his company. This is well worked out by Stier. The whole tone of the parable which the remark called forth, appears to me irreconcilable with the idea that the remark was to be praised,

16*.—*[*A certain man made a great supper.*]There is a great similarity between this parable and the one reported by St. Matthew. (Matt. xxii. 2.) Yet it is clear that the two parables are distinct, and were spoken on different occasions.

The primary object of the parable, no doubt, is to show the wickedness and unbelief of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles in their stead. The Jews had the first offer of Christ. When they rejected it, they were cut off, and the offer was made to the Gentiles. Yet the parable is evidently meant to apply to the history of the Gospel offer, and the reception it meets with, in every age of the Church.

[*All things are now ready...Supper time.*]These expres­sions denote the completion of the whole work of redemption, which was announced to the Jews and Gentiles, after Christ rose again. Then and not till then, could it be said literally “all things are ready.”

18*.—*[*Began to make excuse, &c.*]The various excuses which those who were invited made are types of the various worldly reasons with which men excuse themselves from closing with the offer of Christ’s Gospel. Let it be noted that all the things mentioned were in themselves innocent and lawful.

[*Bought...and I must needs go and see*]Stella sees in this expression an intentional illustration of the folly of worldly men. They are spending their time, and thoughts, and strength, on things of which they do not know the real worth. If the man had been wise, he says, “he would first have seen the land, and afterwards bought it.”

20*.—*[*I have married a wife, &c.*]The Roman Catholic writers do not fail to draw from this expression arguments in favour of the unmarried estate. Yet they can make nothing of it. By parity of reasoning we might prove that buying oxen, or land, is more sinful than hoarding up money and not spending it. They over­look the beautiful point of this part of the parable, which is this: it is not so much the open breach of God’s law, as an excessive attention to lawful and innocent things which ruins many men’s souls. Few truths are so completely overlooked.

21*.—*[*Showed his lord.*]This seems to teach the duty of a minister. He must report to his Master in heaven what success he meets with.

[*Being angry.*]It is evident that this expression must not be strained into a proof that God is liable to the passion of anger, as the giver of a feast, whose feast is despised. Yet the words are meant to teach us that unbelief and rejection of the Gospel are very provoking to God. And there is a sense, we must never forget, in which “God is angry with the wicked every day.”

[*The poor...maimed...halt...blind.*]These words describe primarily the Gentiles, who were just in this miserable con­dition as compared to the Jews. Secondly, they describe all sinners to whom the Gospel is offered, who feel their sins, and acknowledge their own spiritual need and poverty.

22.—[*Yet* *there is room.*]This expression seems to show that there is more willingness on God’s part to save sinners than there is on the part of sinners to be saved, and more grace to be given than there are hearts willing to receive it.

Bengel remarks, “neither nature nor grace can endure a vacuum, or empty space.”

23*.—*[*Compel them to come in.*]This expression must be care­fully interpreted. It does not sanction any literal compulsion, or force, in pressing the Gospel on men’s acceptance. Least of all does it sanction the least approach to intolerance or persecution of men because of their religious opinions.

Bishop Pearce says, “Compel them by arguments, not by force. The nature of the parable shows this plainly. It was a feast to which they were invited.”

The word translated “compel,” is only used nine times in the New Testament. In four of the places it is rendered “constrain.” Matt. xiv. 22; Mark vi. 45; Acts xxviii. 19; Gal. vi. 12. It is evident from these passages, that the word does not necessarily imply any employment of force and violence.

Alford’s idea that in the words “compel them to come in,” there is possibly “an allusion to infant-baptism,” appears to me exceedingly improbable.

24*.—*[*None...bidden ...shall taste, &c.*]This expression primarily applies to the Jews. Rejecting Christ’s Gospel, they were cut off for a season, until it shall please God to graft them in again. (Rom. xi. 23.) Secondarily it illustrates a mournful truth about those who reject the Gospel among ourselves: they are sometimes let alone, and given over to a reprobate mind. To refuse truth brings down on man God’s heaviest displeasure. Our Lord’s words about Chorazin and Bethsaida should often be studied.