

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS. ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XIV. 7-14.

7 And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, 8 When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; 9 And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. 10 But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have	worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. 11 For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. 12 Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. 13 But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: 14 And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.
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LET us learn from these verses *the value of humility*. This is a lesson which our Lord teaches in two ways. Firstly, He advises those who are bidden to a wedding to “sit down in the lowest room.” Secondly, He backs up His advice by declaring a great principle, which frequently fell from His lips: “Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

Humility may well be called the queen of the Christian graces. To know our own sinfulness and weakness, and to feel our need of Christ, is the very beginning of saving religion.—It is a grace which has always been a distinguishing feature in the character of the holiest saints in every age. Abraham, and Moses, and Job, and David, and Daniel, and Paul, were all eminently humble men. —Above all, it is a grace within the reach of every true Christian. All have not money to give away. All have not time and opportunities for working directly for Christ. All have not gifts of speech, and tact, and knowledge, in order to do good in the world. But all converted men should labour to adorn the doctrine they profess by humility. If they can do nothing else, they can strive to be humble.

Would we know the root and spring of humility? One word describes it. The root of humility is right *knowledge*. The man who really knows himself and his own heart, who knows God and His infinite majesty and holiness, who knows Christ, and the price at which he was redeemed,—that man will never be a proud man. He will count himself, like Jacob, unworthy of the least of all God’s mercies. He will say of himself, like Job, “I am vile.” He will cry, like Paul, “I am chief of sinners.” (Gen. xxxii. 10; Job xl. 4; 1 Tim. i. 15.) He will think anything good enough for him. In lowliness of mind he will esteem everyone else to be better than himself. (Phil. ii. 3.) Ignorance, nothing but sheer ignorance, ignorance of self, of God, and of Christ, is the real secret of pride. From that miserable self-ignorance may we daily pray to

be delivered! He is the wise man who knows himself;—and he who knows himself, will find nothing within to make him proud.

Let us learn, secondly, from these verses, *the duty of caring for the poor*. Our Lord teaches this lesson in a peculiar manner. He tells the Pharisee who invited Him to his feast, that, when he made “a dinner or a supper,” he ought not to “call his friends,” or kinsmen, or rich neighbours. On the contrary, He says, “When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind.”

The precept contained in these words must evidently be interpreted with considerable limitation. It is certain that our Lord did not intend to forbid men showing any hospitality to their relatives and friends. It is certain that He did not mean to encourage a useless and profuse expenditure of money in giving to the poor. To interpret the passage in this manner would make it contradict other plain Scriptures. Such interpretations cannot possibly be correct.

But when we have said this, we must not forget that the passage contains a deep and important lesson. We must be careful that we do not limit and qualify that lesson till we have pared it down and refined it into nothing at all. The lesson of the passage is plain and distinct. The Lord Jesus would have us care for our poorer brethren, and help them according to our power. He would have us know that it is a solemn duty never to neglect the poor, but to aid them and relieve them in their time of need.

Let the lesson of this passage sink down deeply into our hearts. “The poor shall never cease out of the land.” (Deut. xv. 11.) A little help conferred upon the poor judiciously and in season, will often add immensely to their happiness, and take away immensely from their cares, and promote good feeling between class and class in society. This help it is the will of Christ that all His people, who have the means, should be willing and ready to bestow. That stingy, calculating spirit, which leads some people to talk of “the workhouse,” and condemn all charity to the poor, is exceedingly opposed to the mind of Christ. It is not for nothing that our Lord declares that He will say to the wicked in the day of judgment, “I was an hungered and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink.”—It is not for nothing that St. Paul writes to the Galatians, “They would that I should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.” (Matt. xxv. 42; Gal. ii. 10.)

Let us learn, lastly, from these verses, *the great importance of looking forward to the resurrection of the dead*. This lesson stands out in a striking manner in the language used by our Lord on the subject of showing charity to the poor. He says to the Pharisee who entertained Him, “The poor cannot recompense thee: thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”

There is a resurrection after death. Let this never be forgotten. The life that we live here in the flesh is not all. The visible world around us is not the only world with which we have to do. All is not over when the last breath is drawn, and men and women are carried to their long home in the grave. The trumpet shall one day sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible. All that are in the graves shall hear Christ's voice and come forth: they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation. This is one of the great foundation truths of the Christian religion. Let us cling to it firmly, and never let it go.

Let us strive to live like men who believe in a resurrection and a life to come, and desire to be always ready for another world. So living, we shall look forward to death with calmness. We shall feel that there remains some better portion for us beyond the grave.—So living, we shall take patiently all that we have to bear in this world. Trials, losses, disappointments, ingratitude, will affect us little. We shall not look for our reward here. We shall feel that all will be rectified one day, and that the Judge of all the earth will do right. (Gen. xviii. 25.)

But how can we bear the thought of a resurrection? What shall enable us to look forward to a world to come without alarm? Nothing can do it, but faith in Christ. Believing on Him, we have nothing to fear. Our sins will not appear against us. The demands of God's law will be found completely satisfied. We shall stand firm in the great day, and none shall lay anything to our charge. (Rom. viii. 33.) Worldly men, like Felix, may well tremble when they think of a resurrection. But believers, like Paul, may rejoice.

NOTES. LUKE XIV. 7-14.

7.—[*He marked.*] The Greek word so rendered is only used five times in the New Testament. It means literally "gave attention," or "observed." It is elsewhere translated "gave heed." (Acts iii. 5.)

[*The chief rooms.*] The Greek word so rendered does not literally mean "rooms," or "chambers," as if our Lord meant that the guests chose the best apartments in the house. It signifies the "best seats," or reclining places at table. Major gives a quotation, showing that "the most honourable station at an entertainment among the Romans was the middle part of the middle couch, each couch holding three."

9.—[*Give this man place...lowest room.*] It should be observed in this verse, that it is the same Greek word which is translated "place" and "room." The sentence should either have been translated, "give this man place," and "take the lowest place,"—or "give this man room," and "take the lowest room."

[*Begin.*] This shows the tardiness, and reluctance, and unwillingness with which the move would be made,

10.—[*Go and sit down in the lowest room.*] The following quotation from Paley is worth reading. "Some of the passages in the Gospels about humility, especially the Lord's advice to the guests at an entertainment, seem to extend His rules to what we call *manners*, which was both regular in point of consistency, and not so much beneath the dignity of our Lord's

mission, as may at first sight be supposed: for bad manners are bad morals." (Paley's Evidences. Part ii. chap. ii. 1.)

[*Worship.*] The Greek word so translated means literally "glory," or "honour." Our translation is unfortunate. It must however be remembered that the meaning of words changes with time. The word "worship" did not mean exclusively religious worship, when the last revision of the Bible took place in England. The sense in which the word is here used still lingers amongst us in the epithet "worshipful," applied to "mayors," and "worship" to magistrates. In the marriage service of the Church of England the word also occurs in the sense of "honour."

11.—[*Whosoever exalteth himself, &c.*] Let it be noted that hardly any saying of our Lord's is so frequently repeated as this sentence about humility.

12.—[*Call not thy friends, &c.*] This is a remarkable direction. There are few sayings of our Lord's in which we are so plainly required, by the equity of interpretation, to put a qualified sense on His command. Just as it is impossible to put a literal construction on His saying, "If any man come after me and *hate* not his father, &c., he cannot be my disciple," so it is impossible to put a literal sense on His words here.

Poole remarks, "Many things are delivered in Scripture, in the form of an universal and absolute prohibition, which must not be so understood, amongst which this is one instance. None must think that our Saviour doth here absolutely or universally forbid an invitation of brethren, kinsmen, rich neighbours, friends, to dine with us. There was nothing more ordinarily practised among the Jews, and Christ Himself was at divers meals. But Christ teacheth us here, (1) That inviting friends is no act of charity. It was a lawful act of humanity and civility, and of a good tendency to procure unity and friendship amongst neighbours and friends, but no such act of charity as they could expect a heavenly reward for. (2) That such feastings ought not to be upheld in prejudice to our duty in relieving the poor: that is, they ought not to be maintained in such excesses and immoderate degrees, as by them to disable us from that relief of the poor which God requireth of us as our duty."

The evil consequences of an excessively literal interpretation of this passage, may be seen in the well-meant but grossly abused charities to the poor, which were so prevalent in this country before the Reformation, and which are still to be seen in Roman Catholic countries on the Continent at the present day. It is notorious that profuse charity to the poor, given indiscriminately, and without inquiry, does no real good, fosters idleness, rears up a class of professional mendicants, promotes dissolute and profligate habits among beggars, and enormously increases the very evil which it is meant to relieve.

Such instances of literal obedience to our Lord's command in this passage, as Cornelius á Lapide quotes in his Commentary, are melancholy instances of useless and mischievous kindness. He tells us how St. Louis of France used daily to feed a hundred and twenty poor people, and how St. Hedwig, Duchess of Poland, used daily to feed nine hundred poor people! The slightest knowledge of human nature will tell us that such liberality would certainly be grossly abused, and could never have been meant by our Lord. The words of St. Paul are distinct and unmistakeable: "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. ii. 10.)

We must beware however in England that we do not go into the other extreme. There is a disposition in some quarters to discourage all charity and almsgiving whatsoever. There are many who say that to give relief checks exertion, and makes the poor do nothing for themselves. Such arguments no doubt have a grain of truth in them, and certainly save men's pockets. But we must be careful that we do not carry them too far. In a densely peopled country like England, there always will be many cases of real poverty and distress, which rich people ought to consider and relieve. Relief should of course be given judiciously, and

after due inquiry. But to say that nothing should ever be given to a poor person, under any circumstances, excepting what the law allows, is evidently contrary to the mind of Christ, and flatly contradictory to the spirit of the passage before us.

14.—[*Thou shalt be recompensed.*] This expression is worthy of notice. It confirms the doctrine of a reward according to works, though not on account of works, in the judgment day.

The similarity between the Lord's language in this place, and that used in the description of the judgment day, in the 25th chapter of St. Matthew, ought to be observed. It seems to contradict the opinion which some hold, that in St. Matthew our Lord is speaking only of the judgment of the heathen who never heard the Gospel. Some arguments by which this view is maintained would apply to the passage before us. Yet here it is plain that our Lord is speaking of His own hearers and disciples. It appears more probable that both here and in St. Matthew our Lord speaks of the general judgment, and that the importance of works as an evidence of faith is the truth which He desires to impress on our minds.

[*The resurrection of the just.*] This expression is remarkable. I cannot think that our Lord used it in deference to an opinion common among the Jews, that resurrection was the special privilege of the righteous. It seems to me far more probable that our Lord refers to the first resurrection, spoken of in the 20th chapter of Revelation. It is hard to put any other sense on the expression than this, that there is a resurrection of which none but the just shall be partakers,—a resurrection which shall be the peculiar privilege of the righteous, and shall precede that of the wicked.