EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

*Author of “Home Truths,” etc.*

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LUKE XV. 1–10.

1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiv­eth sinners, and eateth with them.

3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found *it,* he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Re­joice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek dili­gently till she find *it?*

9 And when she hath found *it,* she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbours together, saying, Re­joice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10 Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

THE chapter which begins with these verses is well known to Bible readers, if any is in the Scriptures. Few chap­ters perhaps have done more good to the souls of men. Let us take heed that it does good to us.

We should first observe in these verses the *striking testimony which was borne to our Lord by His enemies.* We read that when “all the publicans and sinners drew near to hear him, the Pharisees and scribes murmured, say­ing, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

These words were evidently spoken with surprise and scorn, and not with pleasure and admiration. These ignorant guides of the Jews could not understand a preacher of religion having anything to do with wicked people! Yet their words worked for good. The very saying which was meant for a reproach was adopted by the Lord Jesus as a true description of His office. It led to His speaking three of the most instructive parables which ever fell from His lips.

The testimony of the Scribes and Pharisees was strictly and literally true. The Lord Jesus is indeed one that “receiveth sinners.” He receives them to pardon them, to sanctify them, and to make them meet for heaven. It is His special office to do so. For this end He came into the world. He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. He came into the world to save sinners. What He was upon earth He is now at the right hand of God, and will be to all eternity. He is emphatically the sinner’s Friend.

Have we any sense of sin? Do we feel bad, and wicked, and guilty, and deserving of God’s anger? Is the remembrance of our past lives bitter to us? Does the recollection of our past conduct make us ashamed? Then we are the very people who ought to apply to Christ, just as we are, pleading nothing of our own, making no useless delay. Christ will receive us gra­ciously, pardon us freely, and give us eternal life. He is One that “receiveth sinners.” Let us not be lost for want of applying to Him that we may be saved.

We should observe, secondly, in these verses, the *remarkable figures under which our Lord describes His own love towards sinners.* We read that in reply to the taunting remark of His enemies He spoke three parables,—the parables of the lost sheep, the lost piece of silver, and the prodigal son. The two first of these parables are now before us. All three are meant to illustrate one and the same truth. They all throw strong light on Christ’s willingness to save sinners.

Christ’s love is an active, working love. Just as the shepherd did not sit still bewailing his lost sheep, and the woman did not sit still bewailing her lost money, so our blessed Lord did not sit still in heaven pitying sinners. He left the glory which He had with the Father, and humbled Himself to be made in the likeness of man. He came down into the world to seek and save that which was lost. He never rested till He had made atonement for our transgressions, brought in everlasting righteousness, provided eternal redemption, and opened a door of life to all who are willing to be saved.

Christ’s love is a self-denying love. The shepherd brought his lost sheep home on his own shoulders rather than leave it in the wilderness. The woman lighted a candle, and swept the house, and searched diligently, and spared no pains, till she found her lost money. And just so did Christ not spare Himself when He undertook to save sinners. He endured the cross, despising the shame.” He “laid down his life for his friends.” Greater love than this cannot be shown. (John xv. 13. Heb xii. 2.)

Christ’s love is a deep and mighty love. Just as the shepherd rejoiced to find his sheep, and the woman to find her money, so does the Lord Jesus rejoice to save sinners. It is a real pleasure to Him to pluck them as brands from the burning. It was His “meat and drink,” when upon earth, to finish the work which He came to do. He felt straitened in spirit till it was accomplished. It is still His delight to show mercy. He is far more willing to save sinners than sinners are to be saved.

Let us strive to know something of this love of Christ. It is a love that truly passeth knowledge. It is unspeak­able and unsearchable. It is that on which we must wholly rest our souls if we would have peace in time and glory in eternity. If we take comfort in our own love to Christ we are building on a sandy foundation. But if we lean on Christ’s love to us we are on a rock.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, *the wide encouragement which our Lord holds out to repentance.* We read these striking words: “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.” We read the same thought again after a few verses: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” The thing is doubled, to make doubt impossible. The idea is repeated, in order to meet man’s unbelief.

There are deep things in these sayings, beyond doubt. Our poor weak minds are little able to understand how the perfect joy of heaven can admit of increase. But one thing, at any rate, stands out clearly on the face of these expressions. There is an infinite willingness on God’s part to receive sinners. However wicked a man may have been, in the day that he really turns from his wickedness and comes to God by Christ, God is well-pleased. God has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, and God has pleasure in true repentance.

Let the man who is afraid to repent consider well the verses we are now looking at, and be afraid no more. There is nothing on God’s part to justify his fears. An open door is set before him. A free pardon awaits him. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to for­give our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John i. 9.)

Let the man who is ashamed to repent consider these verses and cast shame aside. What though the world mocks and jests at his repentance? While man is mock­ing angels are rejoicing. The very change which sinners call foolishness is a change which fills heaven with joy.

Have we repented ourselves? This, after all, is the principal question which concerns us. What shall it profit us to know Christ’s love if we do not use it? “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” (John xiii. 17.)

NOTES. LUKE XV. 1–10.

1.—[*Then drew near.*]The Greek words so translated do not literally mean a particular act at a particular time. They would be more closely rendered, “And there were drawing near.” Alford renders them, “were busied in drawing near:” “were continually about Him.” The beginning of this chapter, be it observed, is an unbroken continuation of the last.

Let us mark the accessibleness and affability of our Lord’s demeanour in this expression. He was one of whom people were not afraid. Such a demeanour is a great gift.

[*All the publicans and sinners.*]By the expression “all” we are evidently meant to understand “all” in that particular neighbourhood where our Lord at present was.

Let it be noted that no Gospel writer gives so many instances of our Lord’s mercy to sinners as St. Luke. It is supposed, with much reason, that this was intended for the encourage­ment of Gentile converts, for whom his Gospel was specially written. Observe, beside this chapter, Luke xviii. 10; xxiii. 34, 43. These passages are all peculiar to St. Luke.

2.—[*Murmured.*]The Greek word here is only used in one other place, Luke xix. 7. It means literally “murmured greatly,” or “were constantly murmuring” throughout the journey.

[*This man receiveth sinners.*]These words should be care­fully noted. They are the key note to the whole chapter. A constant recollection of them throws light on the interpretation of all the three parables which follow. The Pharisees found fault with our Lord for “inviting sinners.” Our Lord replies, in effect, that the thing which they found fault with was the very thing He came on earth to do, and a thing of which He was not ashamed. He came to do for sinners what the shepherd did for his lost sheep, the woman did for her lost money, and the father did for the prodigal son. As for His murmuring enemies, they were like the elder brother of the prodigal son.

I am persuaded that remembrance of this expression is of great importance in the chapter, and that many strange explanations of things in the chapter have been given by commentators, for want of observing the expression. The great object of all the three parables is one and the same. They all three exhibit the love and mercy of Christ towards sinners, but under three different aspects. I hold with Bengel, that the lost sheep represents the stupid, foolish sinner; the lost piece of money the sinner altogether ignorant of himself; and the younger son the daring and wilful sinner. But I also hold that the love which goes after the sheep, seeks the money, and runs to meet the prodigal, is all through intended to repre­sent the *love of Christ.* I cannot assent to the view that the three parables were meant to point to the work of the Three Persons of the Trinity. I cannot hold the view of Bengel, Alford, and Stier, that “the woman” represents the Holy Ghost; and the view of Ambrose and Wordsworth, that she represents the Church. All these ideas I believe to be foreign to our Lord’s intention when He spoke the three parables. I consider that the right way to view the three parables before us is to suppose that our Lord’s meaning was as follows: “You blame me for receiving sinners. I am not ashamed of it. I do receive them. I came on earth for that very purpose. If you would know my feeling towards sinners, mark the conduct of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep, a woman seeking a lost piece of money, and a kind father receiving a prodigal son. In the love exhibited in each of these three cases you have an emblem of my love to sinners.”

4.*—*[*What man of you, &c.*]Both in this and the two following verses, I must decline assigning the allegorical meanings to every part of the parable, which many commentators have discovered. The two numbers, hundred, and ninety-nine, the wilderness, the shepherd’s laying the lost sheep on his shoulders, the home, the friends and neighbours,—all appear to me to be subordinate circumstances of the parable, which were simply intended to illustrate one great leading truth,—the deep self-sacrificing love of Christ towards sinners, and the pleasure with which He saves them.

The beautiful fitness of the images chosen in the parable is very striking. Our Lord speaks of Himself, in the 10th chapter of St. John, as the good Shepherd. Isaiah says, in the 53rd chapter of his prophecy, “All we, like sheep, have gone astray.”

[*I say unto you.*]In this verse the Lord drops the language of parable and declares to us a great truth.

[*Likewise.*]The Greek word thus rendered here, and at the 10th verse, is more commonly translated “so,” or “even so.”

[*Joy shall be in heaven.*]The use of the future tense in this expression, has led some to think that our Lord is speaking of the day of judgment, when the saved souls shall be presented before the Father with exceeding joy. I cannot see this. I be­lieve that our Lord simply means that when any sinner shall repent, at any time in the history of the Church, his repentance will be regarded with gladness in heaven, whatever murmur­ing there may be among Pharisees on earth.

[*One sinner.*]The exceeding value of one soul, in God’s sight, appears in this expression. It also appears to overthrow the idea entertained by some,—that the lost sheep represents the whole Church of the elect, or the redeemed world.

Those who are cast down and dispirited in preaching and teaching, by apparently small success, should often think of this expression, and the parallel one in the 10th verse. The value of one soul is not enough considered.

[*Ninety and nine just...no repentance.*]This expression is remarkable, and has caused much difference of opinion among commentators. Five different explanations are given.

1. Some think that it means the angels who have never sinned.
2. Some think that it means the glorified saints who can sin no more.
3. Some think that it means living saints who have not lost baptismal purity.
4. Some think that it means the inhabitants of other worlds who have not fallen like man.
5. Some think that it means people who think themselves righteous and just, like the Pharisees, and fancy they need no repentance.

I believe the last to be the true view, and the others to be untenable. It is confirmed by Luke v. 32; xvi. 15; xviii. 9. Matt. ix. 13. Mark ii. 17.

8*.—*[*Either what woman.*]Let us note both here and in the last parable, how simple and familiar our Lord’s illustrations of truth were. A shepherd, and a woman, are his chosen vehicles to convey to our minds some idea of His care for sinners.

Both in this verse, and the following verse, I adhere to the view expressed in the comments on the preceding parable. I decline to assign allegorical meanings to the expressions used. The woman, the number ten, the candle lighting, the house, the sweeping, the friends and neighbours, all appear to me nothing more than subordinate circumstances in a story which is intended to teach one great truth,—Christ’s care for sinners, and pleasure in saving them.

Many commentators see much meaning in a “piece of silver” being the type of the sinner. They dwell upon the image stamped on the coin, as significant of the image of God, in which man was originally created. Those who wish to see how far this idea may be worked out will find it fully given in Ness’s “History and Mystery of the New Testament.”

10*.—*[*Joy...angels of God.*]This expression seems to show that the salvation of sinners is a matter of deep interest to the angels, and the recovery of each one carefully observed. This, be it remembered, is a very different thing from saying that angels can help our souls.