

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XVI. 19–31.

19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple, and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

24 And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

25 But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good

things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

26 And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would *come* from thence.

27 Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:

28 For I have five brethren: that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.

30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.

31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

THE parable we have now read, in one respect stands alone in the Bible: it is the only passage of Scripture which describes the feelings of the unconverted after death. For this reason, as well as for many others, the parable deserves especial attention.

We learn, firstly, from this parable, that a *man's worldly condition is no test of his state in the sight of God*. The Lord Jesus describes to us two men, of whom one was very rich, and the other very poor. The one "fared sumptuously every day." The other was a mere "beggar," who had nothing that he could call his own. And yet of these two, the poor man had grace, and the rich man had none. The poor man lived by faith, and walked in the steps of Abraham. The rich man was a thoughtless, selfish worldling, dead in trespasses and sins.

Let us never give way to the common idea that men are to be valued according to their income, and that the man who has most money is the one who ought to be the most highly esteemed. There is no authority for this notion in the Bible. The general teaching of Scripture is flatly opposed to it. "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called." (1 Cor. i. 26.) "Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he knoweth and understandeth me." (Jer. ix. 24.) Wealth is no mark of God's favour. Poverty is no mark of God's displeasure. Those whom God justifies and glorifies are seldom the rich of this world. If we

would measure men as God measures them, we must value them according to their grace.

We learn, secondly, from this parable, *that death is the common end to which all classes of mankind must come*. The trials of the “beggar,” and the sumptuous faring of the “rich man,” alike ceased at last. There came a time when both of them died. “All go to one place.” (Eccles. iii. 20.)

Death is a great fact that all acknowledge, but very few seem to realize. Most men eat, and drink, and talk, and plan, as if they were going to live upon earth for ever. The true Christian must be on his guard against this spirit. “He that would live well,” said a great divine, “should often think of his last day, and make it his company-keeper.” Against murmuring, and discontent, and envy, in the state of poverty,—against pride, and self-sufficiency, and arrogance, in the possession of wealth,—there are few better antidotes than the remembrance of death. “The beggar died,” and his bodily wants were at an end. “The rich man died,” and his feasting was stopped for evermore.

We learn, thirdly, from this parable, *that the souls of believers are specially cared for by God in the hour of death*. The Lord Jesus tells us that when the beggar died he “was carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom.”

There is something very comforting in this expression. We know little or nothing of the state and feelings of the dead. When our own last hour comes, and we lie down to die, we shall be like those who journey into an unknown country. But it may satisfy us to know that all who fall asleep in Jesus are in good keeping. They are not houseless, homeless wanderers between the hour of death and the day of resurrection. They are at rest in the midst of friends, with all who have had like faith with Abraham. They have no lack of anything. And, best of all, St. Paul tells us they are “with Christ.” (Phil. i. 23.)

We learn, fourthly, from this parable, *the reality and eternity of hell*. The Lord Jesus tells us plainly, that after death the rich man was “in hell,—tormented with flame.” He gives us a fearful picture of his longing for a drop of “water to cool his tongue,” and of “the gulf” between him and Abraham, which could not be passed. There are few more awful passages perhaps in the whole Bible than this. And He from whose lips it came, be it remembered, was one who delighted in mercy!

The certainty and endlessness of the future punishment of the wicked, are truths which we must hold fast and never let go: from the day when Satan said to Eve, “Ye shall not surely die,” there never have been wanting men who have denied them. Let us not be deceived: there is a hell for the impenitent, as well as a heaven for believers; there is a wrath to come for all who “obey not the Gospel of Christ.” (2 Thess. i. 8.) From that wrath let us flee betimes to the great hiding-place, Jesus Christ the Lord. If men find

themselves “in torment” at last, it will not be because there was no way to escape.

We learn, fifthly, from this parable, *that unconverted men find out the value of a soul, after death, when it is too late*. We read that the rich man desired Lazarus might be sent to his five brethren who were yet alive, “lest they also should come to the place of torment.” While he lived he had never done anything for their spiritual good. They had probably been his companions in worldliness, and, like him, had neglected their souls entirely. When he is dead he finds out too late the folly of which they had all been guilty, and desires that, if possible, they might be called to repentance.

The change that will come over the minds of unconverted men after death is one of the most fearful points in their future condition. They will see, and know, and understand a hundred things to which they were obstinately blind while they were alive. They will discover that, like Esau, they have bartered away eternal happiness for a mere mess of pottage. There is no infidelity, or scepticism, or unbelief after death. It is a wise saying of an old divine that “hell is nothing more than truth known too late.”

We learn, lastly, from this parable, that *the greatest miracles would have no effect on men’s hearts if they will not believe God’s Word*. The rich man thought that “if one went to his brethren from the dead they would repent.” He argued that the sight of one who came from another world must surely make them feel, though the old familiar words of Moses and the prophets had been heard in vain. The reply of Abraham is solemn and instructive: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.”

The principle laid down in these words is of deep importance. The Scriptures contain all that we need to know in order to be saved, and a messenger from the world beyond the grave could add nothing to them. It is not more evidence that is wanted in order to make men repent, but more heart and will to make use of what they already know. The dead could tell us nothing more than the Bible contains, if they rose from their graves to instruct us. After the first novelty of their testimony was worn away, we should care no more for their words than the words of any other. This wretched waiting for something which we have not, and neglect of what we have, is the ruin of thousands of souls. Faith, simple faith in the Scriptures which we already possess, is the first thing needful to salvation. The man who has the Bible, and can read it, and yet waits for more evidence before he becomes a decided Christian, is deceiving himself. Except he awakens from his delusion he will die in his sins.

19.—[*There was a certain rich man.*] The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus has occasioned some diversity of opinion among commentators, and called forth some strange allegorical interpretations.

From the very earliest days it has been matter of dispute whether it ought to be regarded as a parable or a real history. The truth seems to me to lie between the two extremes. I see no reason why it should not be regarded as a real history. And yet it may be a history employed to point a lesson, after the manner of all our Lord's parables. The whole subject will be found fully discussed in Suicer's "Thesaurus," under the word Lazarus.

I cannot see in it the allegorical meanings which some have discovered. I cannot hold, with Tertullian and Schleiermacher, that the Rich Man meant Herod Antipas, and Lazarus John the Baptist. I cannot see, with Vitringa, that the Rich Man represents the Jewish nation; Lazarus our Lord Jesus Christ; his sores the sins of man which He bore; the death of the Rich Man the downfall of the Jewish polity; the request for sending Lazarus the Jew's vain desire of a Messiah; the five brethren the Babylonish Jews; the licking of the dogs the conversion of the Gentiles. I cannot see, with Theophylact, that the Rich Man is a type of the proud and self-righteous Jewish nation, and Lazarus a type of the Gentile world. All such interpretations appear to me unsatisfactory.

I believe the parable was specially intended by our Lord for the benefit of the Pharisees, to whom He was speaking when He delivered it. I believe the connecting link is to be found in the 9th verse, where Jesus said, "Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness;" and in the 14th verse, where it is said, "The Pharisees, who were covetous, heard all these things, and derided him." And I believe that our Lord's principal object was to rebuke the selfishness, worldliness, want of charity, and general forgetfulness of their responsibilities, of which the Pharisees were guilty, and to expose the fearful end to which their unbelief and neglect of their own Scriptures were rapidly bringing them.

[*Clothed in purple.*] Purple was a peculiarly rich and expensive dye, and clothes dyed with it were worn by none but the rich and noble. Lydia, in the 16th chapter of Acts, is mentioned as a "seller of purple."

[*Fared sumptuously.*] The Greek word rendered "fared," is only translated so in this place in the New Testament. In other places the verb is rendered "to be merry, make merry, rejoice, or be glad."

Let it be noted, that we are not told that the Rich Man was an open breaker of any one of the ten commandments. It is not said that he was an idolater, blasphemer, murderer, adulterer, or thief. But he was one who lived only for himself. This was the ruin of his soul.

20.—[*A certain beggar named Lazarus.*] The Greek word rendered "beggar" does not necessarily mean what our English word implies,—a mendicant. In thirty-one out of thirty-two other places where it is used in the New Testament, beside this parable, it is translated "poor."

We know nothing of this Lazarus, excepting that he was not the brother of Martha and Mary. Several of the Fathers call attention to the fact that the beggar's name is given, but not the name of the Rich Man. It is thought to imply that the Rich Man's name was not in the book of life, while that of Lazarus was. Let us add to this, that to mention the name of the Rich Man in such a history as that before us would have been most invidious, and most offensive to his relatives and friends.

21.—[*Desiring to be fed.*] This does not imply that he was not fed, though he desired it. It rather signifies, as in the case of the prodigal son with the husks (Luke xv. 16), that he was "only too glad to have" the crumbs. That which fell from the Rich Man's table, as refuse, was food for Lazarus.

[The dogs came and licked...sores.] Some have thought that this is mentioned as an aggravation of Lazarus' misery, and that the dogs added to his sufferings. I cannot see this. To me it seems rather to imply that the dogs cared more for Lazarus than man did. It was an act of kindness.

22.—*[Into Abraham's bosom.]* This expression is most probably a proverbial one. It signifies the place of rest and safety to which all believing Jews were carried after death. Abraham was the father of the faithful, and the head of the whole Jewish family, and to be with him after death implied happiness. The expression, “to sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God,” is somewhat like it. (Matt. viii. 11.)

23.—*[In hell...in torments.]* In interpreting the expressions of this verse and several of those which follow, we must carefully remember that we are reading a parabolical narrative. Our Lord's language is adapted to our understandings. How a lost soul can be susceptible of *bodily* suffering before the resurrection of the body, we cannot explain. The whole subject of the sensations of a disembodied spirit is far too deep for us to dogmatize about it. Let it suffice us to believe that lost souls can suffer intensely before the resurrection, and that they are conscious of their own lost condition, and of the happier condition of those who are saved.

24.—*[Father Abraham, have mercy.]* It is highly probable that this description of the Rich Man crying to Abraham to help him, was intended to rebuke the superstitious reverence of the Jews, and specially of the Pharisees, for Abraham. “Think not,” says our Lord, in another place, “to say, We have Abraham to our father.” (Matt. iii. 9.) He would have them learn from this parable that Abraham himself could do nothing for those who died in sin, and that connection with Abraham would save no one from hell.

[Lazarus...water...cool my tongue.] The Fathers, and all commentators have justly dwelt here on the awful contrast between the state of the Rich Man before death and after death, and the complete change between his condition and that of Lazarus in another world.

[I am tormented in this flame.] Let that expression be noted. Few sayings in the Bible prove more strongly the reality of future punishment.

25.—*[But Abraham said, Son.]* In this, and the following verse, the dignity and solemnity of Abraham's language should specially be noted. On the one hand there is nothing about it of severity, harshness, or unkindness. On the other, there is nothing of affected pity or compassion.

[Remember.] This word should be noted. The recollection of former things will be one of the worst parts of hell.

[Thy good things.] This expression deserves notice. It is not merely “good things,” in contradistinction to “evil things,” which Lazarus received. It is “*thy* good things:” “things which thou didst consider good, and care for as thy only good, to the utter neglect of thy soul and its everlasting interests. Thou didst choose thy portion, and wast content with a mere earthly possession. Thou must now reap according as thou hast sown.”

26.—*[A great gulf fixed, &c.]* The language of this verse teaches plainly, if words have any meaning, that there is no hope of deliverance from hell for those who die in sin. Once in hell, men are in hell for ever. The doctrines of purgatory, or of a limited duration of punishment, are both incapable of reconciliation with this text.

27.—*[Send him to my father's house.]* It has been argued by some that the Rich Man's anxiety about his five brethren was a sign of improvement in him, and that his punishment had already purified his heart, and made him love his brethren, and that the notion of purgatory is consequently not without truth. Both these ideas appear to me destitute of foundation. That the Rich Man's state was hopeless is clear from the preceding verse. That he felt

anything like true love, or spiritual affection for his five brethren is mere gratuitous assumption. It might easily be argued that his desire to have Lazarus sent to them arose from a selfish dread of their following him to the place of torment. Their company would doubtless add greatly to his misery. But it must not be forgotten that we are reading a parable, and that particular expressions in parables must not be stretched too far.

28.—[*Testify.*] The Greek word so rendered is a very strong and intensive one. It is the same that is used in Acts ii. 40; xviii. 5; xx. 21; 1 Tim. v. 21.

29.—[*Moses and the prophets.*] This expression doubtless means the writings of Moses and the prophets, and the instruction contained in them. It is a strong evidence of the sufficiency of Scripture for man's salvation. If the Old Testament alone was better than a dead man's testimony, how much better must the whole Bible be!

30.—[*They will repent.*] This is the reasoning of ignorant natural man. He knows neither the difficulty of repentance, nor the foolishness of expecting results from miraculous visions which have not been produced by the Word.

31.—[*Though one rose from the dead*] Let the striking fact be noted that after this a man named "Lazarus" did rise from the dead, yet the Jews remained unbelieving! Above all let it be remembered that Christ Himself rose from the dead, and yet the Jewish nation would not believe!

Baxter remarks on this verse; "God will bless His own means. Affrighting men will not renew their natures and kindle in them a love to God and holiness. How little should we know whether one from the dead was a devil or a credible messenger? and whether he said true or false? Should he dwell with us as long as ministers, men would again despise and persecute him. Should he come but once, it would not equal the daily solicitations of God's ministers."

"Would not the Rich Man's guilty brethren accuse him of scandalizing and slandering the soul of their noble deceased brother, for telling them he was in hell; and persecute him, if he was within their power?"