

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.

ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XVII. 11–19.

11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee.

12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off:

13 And they lifted up *their* voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.

14 And when he saw *them*, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that as they went, they were cleansed.

15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God,

16 And fell down on *his* face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan.

17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where *are* the nine?

18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger.

19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

LET us mark, firstly, in this passage, *how earnestly men can cry for help when they feel their need of it*. We read that “as our Lord entered into a certain village there met him ten men that were lepers.” It is difficult to conceive any condition more thoroughly miserable than that of men afflicted with leprosy. They were cast out from society. They were cut off from all communion with their fellows. The men described in the passage before us appear to have been truly sensible of their wretchedness. They “stood afar off;”—but they did not stand idly doing nothing. “They lifted up their voices and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.” They felt acutely the deplorable state of their bodies. They found words to express their feelings. They cried earnestly for relief when a chance of relief appeared in sight.

The conduct of the ten lepers is very instructive. It throws light on a most important subject in practical Christianity, which we can never understand too well. That subject is prayer.

How is it that many never pray at all? How is it that many others are content to repeat a form of words, but never pray with their hearts? How is it that dying men and women, with souls to be lost or saved, can know so little of real, hearty, business-like prayer? The answer to these questions is short and simple: the bulk of mankind have no sense of sin; they do not feel their spiritual disease; they are not conscious that they are lost, and guilty, and hanging over the brink of hell. When a man finds out his soul’s ailment, he soon learns to pray. Like the leper, he finds words to express his want. He cries for help.

How is it, again, that many true believers often pray so coldly? What is the reason that their prayers are so feeble, and wandering, and lukewarm, as they frequently are? The answer once more is very plain: their sense of need is not so deep as it ought to be; they are not truly alive to their own weakness and helplessness, and so they do not cry fervently for mercy and grace. Let us remember these things. Let us seek to have a constant and abiding sense of our real necessities. If saints could only see their souls as the ten afflicted lepers saw their bodies, they would pray far better than they do.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, *how help meets men in the path of obedience*. We are told that when the lepers cried to our Lord, He only replied, "Go show yourselves to the priests." He did not touch them and command their disease to depart. He prescribed no medicine, no washing, no use of outward material means. Yet healing power accompanied the words which He spoke. Relief met the afflicted company as soon as they obeyed His command. "It came to pass that as they went they were cleansed."

A fact like this is doubtless intended to teach us knowledge. It shows us the wisdom of simple, childlike obedience to every word which comes from the mouth of Christ. It does not become us to stand still, and reason, and doubt, when our Master's commands are plain and unmistakable. If the lepers had acted in this way they would never have been healed. We must read the Scriptures diligently. We must try to pray. We must attend on the public means of grace. All these are duties which Christ requires at our hands, and to which, if we love life, we must attend, without asking vain and captious questions. It is just in the path of unhesitating obedience that Christ will meet and bless us. "If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine." (John vii. 17.)

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, *what a rare thing is thankfulness*. We are told that of all the ten lepers whom Christ healed, there was only one who turned back and gave Him thanks. The words that fell from our Lord's lips upon this occasion are very solemn: "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine?"

The lesson before us is humbling, heart-searching, and deeply instructive. The best of us are far too like the nine lepers. We are more ready to pray than to praise, and more disposed to ask God for what we have not than to thank Him for what we have. Murmurings, and complainings, and discontent abound on every side of us. Few indeed are to be found who are not continually hiding their mercies under a bushel, and setting their wants and trials on a hill. These things ought not so to be. But all who know the Church and the world must confess that they are true. The wide-spread thanklessness of Christians is the disgrace of our day. It is a plain proof of our little humility.

Let us pray daily for a thankful spirit. It is the spirit which God loves and delights to honour. David and St. Paul were eminently thankful men. It is the spirit which has marked all the brightest saints in every age of the Church. M'Cheyne, and Bickersteth, and Haldane Stewart, were always full of praise. It is the spirit which is the very atmosphere of heaven. Angels and "just men made perfect" are always blessing God. It is the spirit which is the source of happiness on earth. If we would be careful for nothing, we must

make our requests known to God not only with prayer and supplication, but with thanksgiving. (Phil. iv. 6.)

Above all, let us pray for a deeper sense of our own sinfulness, guilt, and undeserving. This, after all, is the true secret of a thankful spirit. It is the man who daily feels his debt to grace, and daily remembers that in reality he deserves nothing but hell,—this is the man who will be daily blessing and praising God. Thankfulness is a flower which will never bloom well excepting upon a root of deep humility.

NOTES. LUKE. XVII. 11–19.

- 11.—[*Passed...midst...Samaria...Galilee.*] There is some difficulty about this expression. The usual road in travelling from the north of Palestine to Jerusalem, would be through Galilee first and *then* through Samaria. The most probable solution is that our Lord travelled along the boundary between Samaria and Galilee, to the river Jordan, and then followed the course of that river down to Jericho, at which city we find Him in the next chapter.
- 12.—[*Lepers, which stood afar off.*] It should be remembered that, by the law of Moses, lepers were cast off from all society, and regarded as outcasts, who might not dwell with others. We read in Leviticus, “He shall dwell alone: without the camp shall his habitation be.” (Lev. xiii. 46.)
- 13.—[*Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.*] We know not what degree of knowledge or faith these lepers possessed. It is probable that they only knew our Lord as a worker of mighty miracles of healing, whose fame was spread over the land.
- 14.—[*Shew yourselves unto the priests.*] The meaning of this direction will be obvious to all who are familiar with the 13th and 14th chapters of Leviticus. The priests were specially appointed by God to be the judges of all leprous cases, and to decide whether the leper was clean or unclean, cured or uncured. Moreover there was a special injunction to attend to the rules laid down in Leviticus about leprosy, in the book of Deuteronomy: “Take heed in the plague of leprosy, that thou observe diligently, and do according to all that the priests the Levites shall teach you.” (Deut. xxiv. 8.)

A Jewish leper would doubtless catch at our Lord’s direction to “go to the priests,” and accept it as a hint that he would hear good tidings on showing himself to them.

It has been doubted whether our Lord meant only the Jewish priests, in giving this direction. Some have thought that He meant the Samaritan leper to go to the Samaritan priests on Mount Gerizim. This however appears exceedingly improbable. There is no clear proof that the Samaritan priests undertook the decision of leprous cases. Above all, there is nothing in the Gospels to show that our Lord ever recognized the Samaritan priests. His words addressed to the Samaritan woman, “Salvation is of the Jews: we know what we worship: ye worship ye know not what “(John iv. 22), appear to contradict the idea.

The Roman Catholic inference from this verse,—that our Lord intended there should be a Christian priesthood, and that sinners deriving spiritual relief were always meant to go to a priest, is utterly baseless. There is nothing whatever in the verse to warrant it. So long as the ceremonial law lasted, and the Levitical priesthood continued, all its requirements were to be observed. The veil was not yet rent. The true sacrifice was not yet offered. The Old Testament dispensation had not yet passed away. In commanding lepers to go to the priests, our Lord simply declared His respect for the ceremonial law, so long as it lasted.

- 15.—[*One of them...turned back...glorified God.*] Let the likeness between this man's conduct and that of Naaman the Syrian, when he was healed, be carefully noted. (2 Kings v.15.) Burgon gives the following apt quotation: "The nine others were already healed and hastening to the priests, that they might be restored to the society of men, and their life in the world: but the first thoughts of the Samaritan are turned to his deliverer. He had forgotten all, in the sense of God's mercy and of his own unworthiness."
- 16.—[*He was a Samaritan.*] Let it be noted that though a Samaritan, this man had been allowed to associate with Jewish lepers. Affliction, misfortune, and persecution drive men together, and make them forget points of difference, which in time of prosperity and ease are thought very important.
- 17.—[*But where are the nine?*] The Greek words so rendered might perhaps be translated more literally, "But the nine,—where are they?"
- 18.—[*This stranger.*] The Greek word used here means literally "one of another nation," and only occurs here. It is a strong expression, and shows clearly that our Lord did not recognize the Samaritans as anything more than Gentiles.
- 19.—[*Thy faith hath made thee whole.*] Alford remarks here, that this making whole was "in a higher sense than the mere cleansing of his leprosy. The making whole of the nine was merely the beholding of the brazen serpent with the outward eye. He beheld with the eye of inward faith. This faith saved him: not only healed his body, but his soul."