

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XVII. 20–25.

20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:	one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see <i>it</i> .
21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.	23 And they shall say to you, See here; or, <i>see</i> there: go not after <i>them</i> , nor follow <i>them</i> .
22 And he said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see	24 For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one <i>part</i> under heaven, shineth unto the other <i>part</i> under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.
	25 But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation.

WE are taught, firstly, in this passage that the *kingdom of God is utterly unlike the kingdoms of this world*. The Lord Jesus tells the Pharisees that “it cometh not with observation.” He meant by this that its approach and presence were not to be marked by outward signs of dignity. Those who expected to observe anything of this kind would be disappointed. They would wait and watch for such a kingdom in vain, while the real kingdom would be in the midst of them without their knowing it. “Behold,” He says, “the kingdom of God is within you.”

The expression which our Lord here uses describes exactly the beginning of His spiritual kingdom. It began in a manger at Bethlehem, without the knowledge of the great, the rich, and the wise. It appeared suddenly in the temple at Jerusalem, and no one but Simeon and Anna recognized its King. It was received thirty years after by none but a few fishermen and publicans in Galilee. The rulers and Pharisees had no eyes to see it. The King came to His own, and His own received Him not. All this time the Jews professed to be waiting for the kingdom. But they were looking in the wrong direction. They were waiting for signs which they had no warrant for expecting. The kingdom of God was actually in the midst of them! Yet they could not see it!

The literal kingdom which Christ shall set up one day will begin in some respects very like His spiritual one. It will not be accompanied by the signs, and marks, and outward manifestations which many are expecting to see. It will not be ushered in by a period of universal peace and holiness. It will not be announced to the Church by such unmistakeable warnings, that everybody will be ready for it, and prepared for its appearing. It shall come suddenly, unexpectedly, and without note of warning to the immense majority of mankind. The Simeons and Annas will be as few in the last day as they were at the beginning of the Gospel. The most shall awake one day, like men out of sleep, and find, to their surprise and dismay, that the kingdom of God is actually come.

We shall do well to lay these things to heart, and ponder them well. The vast majority of men are utterly deceived in their expectations with respect to the kingdom of God. They are waiting for signs which will never appear.

They are looking for indications which they will never discover. They are dreaming of universal conversion in the day of election. They are fancying that missionaries, and ministers, and schools, will change the face of the world before the end comes. Let us beware of such mistakes. Let us not sleep as do others. The kingdom of God will be upon men much sooner than many expect. "It cometh not with observation."

We are taught, secondly, in this passage, that *the second coming of Jesus Christ will be a very sudden event*. Our Lord describes this by a striking figure. He says, "As the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven: so shall also the Son of man be in his day."

The second personal advent of Christ is the real fulfilment of these words. Of the precise day and hour of that advent we know nothing. But whenever it may take place, one thing at least is clear,—it will come on the Church and the world suddenly, instantaneously, and without previous notice. The whole tenor of Scripture points this way. It shall be "in such an hour as ye think not."—It shall come "as a thief in the night." (Matt. xxiv. 44; 1 Thess. v. 2.)

This suddenness of Christ's second advent is a solemn thought. It ought to make us study a continual preparedness of mind. Our heart's desire and endeavour should be to be always ready to meet our Lord. Our life's aim should be to do nothing, and say nothing, which could make us ashamed if Christ were suddenly to appear. "Blessed," says the Apostle John, "is he who watcheth and keepeth his garments." (Rev. xvi. 15.) Those who denounce the doctrine of the second advent as speculative, fanciful, and unpractical, would do well to reconsider the subject. The doctrine was not so regarded in the days of the Apostles. In their eyes patience, hope, diligence, moderation, personal holiness, were inseparably connected with an expectation of the Lord's return. Happy is the Christian who has learned to think with them! To be ever looking for the Lord's appearing is one of the best helps to a close walk with God.

We are taught, lastly, in this passage, that *there are two personal comings of Christ revealed to us in Scripture*. He was appointed to come the first time in weakness and humiliation, to suffer and to die. He was appointed to come the second time in power and great glory, to put down all enemies under His feet, and to reign.—At the first coming He was to be "made sin for us," and to bear our sins upon the cross. At the second coming He was to appear without sin, for the complete salvation of His people. (2 Cor. v. 21 Heb. ix. 28.) Of both these comings our Lord speaks expressly in the verses before us. Of the first He speaks when He says that the Son of Man "must suffer, and be rejected." Of the second He speaks when He says the

Son of Man shall be as the lightning, which lighteneth out of one part of heaven unto another.

To see these two comings of Christ distinctly is of great importance to a right understanding of Scripture. The disciples, and all the Jews of our Lord's time, appear to have seen only one personal advent. They expected a Messiah who would come to reign, but not one who would come to suffer.—The majority of Christians, in like manner, appear to see only one personal advent. They believe that Christ came the first time to suffer. But they seem unable to understand that Christ is coming a second time to reign. Both parties have got hold of the truth, but neither, unhappily, has embraced the whole truth. Both are more or less in error, and the Christian's error is only second in importance to that of the Jew.

He that strives to be a well-instructed and established Christian must keep steadily before his mind both the advents of Jesus Christ. Clear views of the subject are a great help to the profitable reading of the Bible. Without them we shall constantly find statements in prophecy which we can neither reconcile with other statements nor yet explain away. Jesus coming in person the first time to suffer, and Jesus coming in person the second time to reign, are two landmarks of which we should never lose sight. We stand between the two. Let us believe that both are real and true.

NOTES. LUKE XVII. 20–25.

20.—[*Demanded of the Pharisees.*] Euthymius thinks that this question was asked in derision. It is as if the Pharisees said, "Where is this kingdom you so often speak of? what likelihood is there of one so poor and lowly as you setting up a kingdom? How long are we to wait before this kingdom of your's shall appear?"

I am not satisfied that this view is correct. Messiah's kingdom was looked for by all Jews at the time when our Lord was upon earth. They expected the kingdom foretold by Daniel to appear. (Dan. ii. 44.) The question before us appears to me nothing more than the natural question, which was uppermost in all Jews' minds at the time when it was asked.

[*Cometh not with observation.*] This expression is interpreted two ways. Some think, with Schleusner and our marginal reading, that our Lord meant, "it cometh not with outward pomp or show," Others think, with Parkhurst and our own translators, that our Lord meant, "it cometh not in such a way that men shall be able to observe it." It comes quietly, noiselessly, and unnoticed, except by those who, like Simeon and Anna, are waiting for it in a right state of mind. I decidedly incline to this last view.

One word of caution must be added. Our Lord did not mean us to understand, that there were no "signs" whatever of this kingdom, which any intelligent believer could perceive, and that it was useless to observe the signs of the times. In another place He rebukes the Jews for "not discerning the signs of the times." (Matt. xvi. 3.) He only meant that such signs as the carnal Jews expected would never be seen. Those who waited for such signs would wait in vain.

The kingdom of which our Lord speaks here evidently includes both His present spiritual kingdom and His future glorious kingdom.

21.—[*Neither shall they say, Lo here! &c.*] This expression is only an amplification of the preceding one. There were to be no signs of the kingdom of God so clear, plain, and unmistakable, that all men would be able to point at them and say, “Behold, the kingdom of God is come.” Neither the first spiritual kingdom which began under the Gospel, nor the second glorious kingdom which shall begin at the second advent, were intended by God to be ushered in by such clear unmistakable signs that no one could fail to see them and no room be left for unbelief.

Those who maintain that all prophecies in the book of Revelation, were meant to be fulfilled so manifestly that no one could doubt their fulfilment, and that Revelation is therefore entirely unfulfilled as yet, because interpreters of it have hitherto not explained it satisfactorily, would do well to mark our Lord’s language in this verse. It appears somewhat damaging to their theory.

[*The kingdom of God is within you.*] This expression again is interpreted two ways. Some hold, with our translators, that the word “within” means, “in your hearts and consciences. The kingdom of God is an inward and spiritual thing, and not an external and visible thing.” Others hold, with our marginal reading, that “within,” means “among you.” The kingdom has already begun in the midst of your nation. My disciples have already joined it and become its first subjects. While you are waiting, my spiritual kingdom has already been set up. I decidedly adhere to this last view.

22.—[*He said unto his disciples.*] Let it be noted that our Lord here turns away from the Pharisees and addresses His own disciples.

[*The days will come, &c.*] This expression is somewhat obscure. Stella thinks it refers to the time of our Lord’s second advent, and that it describes the misery of the unconverted in that day, desiring to have one day of Gospel offers granted to them, when it is too late. I rather regard it as describing the whole state of the believing Church during the interval between the first and second advents of Christ, and specially the state of the Apostles, and our Lord’s immediate followers after His ascension. How much they would long for one of the happy days when they had their Master visibly among them, we can easily conceive. The expression is like that in Matthew: “The days shall come when the bridegroom shall be taken away, and then shall they fast.” (Matt. ix. 15.)

23.—[*They shall say, See here, &c.*] This verse contains a warning to the disciples not to be moved by rumours of Messiah having come in glory, and the kingdom having been set up. Such rumours we know from history, abounded from the time of our Lord’s ascension till the taking of Jerusalem. False christs and false prophets were continually arising. The warning is unquestionably meant to apply to the times immediately preceding the second advent. False christs, false prophets, and pretenders to divine commission may be expected in the latter days, and believers must be on their guard against them.

24.—[*For as the lightning, &c.*] In this verse our Lord declares distinctly that His second advent, when it does take place, will be so sudden, so clearly-marked, and so unmistakable, that true believers shall at once recognize it as the coming of their King. It will not be a slow, gradual event. It will come on men in a moment.

That our Lord in this verse meant nothing more than the march of the Roman armies to destroy Jerusalem, is, to my mind, an unsatisfactory and improbable interpretation.

25.—[*First must he suffer.*] Our Lord here asserts that great truth which His disciples and all the Jews were so exceedingly slow to see. He must first suffer and afterwards reign. He must first endure the cross, and afterwards, at His second advent, wear the crown.

[*Rejected of this generation.*] I am strongly disposed to think, that both here and in Luke xxi. 32, Mark xiii. 30, and Matt. xxiv. 34, the word translated, “generation,” means this

nation or people of the Jews, and not merely the men who were living when our Lord spoke. Those who wish to see this view, and the quotations in favour of it, will find it set forth in Ravanelli's "Thesaurus," under the word "generatio."