

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XVII. 26–37.

<p>26 And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man.</p> <p>27 They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.</p> <p>28 Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;</p> <p>29 But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed <i>them</i> all.</p> <p>30 Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.</p> <p>31 In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that</p>	<p>is in the field, let him likewise not return back.</p> <p>32 Remember Lot's wife.</p> <p>33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.</p> <p>34 I tell you, in that night there shall be two <i>men</i> in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left.</p> <p>35 Two <i>women</i> shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.</p> <p>36 Two <i>men</i> shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.</p> <p>37 And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body <i>is</i>, thither will the eagles be gathered together.</p>
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THE subject of these verses is one of peculiar solemnity. It is the second advent of our Lord Jesus Christ. That great event, and the things immediately connected with it, are here described by our Lord's own lips.

We should observe, for one thing, in these verses, *what a fearful picture our Lord gives of the state of the professing Church at His second coming.* We are told that as it was in the "days of Noah," and in the "days of Lot," "so shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed." The character of those days we are not left to conjecture. We are told distinctly, that men were entirely taken up with eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, building,—and would attend to nothing else. The flood came at last in Noah's day, and drowned all except those who were in the ark. The fire fell from heaven at last in Lot's day, and destroyed all except Lot, his wife, and his daughters. And our Lord declares most plainly that like things will happen when He comes again at the end of the world. "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them." (1 Thess. v. 3.)

It is hard to imagine a passage of Scripture which more completely overthrows the common notions that prevail among men about Christ's return. The world will not be converted when Jesus comes again. The earth will not be full of the knowledge of the Lord. The reign of peace will not have been established. The millennium will not have begun. These glorious things will come to pass *after* the second advent, but not before. If words have any meaning, the verses before us show that the earth will be found full of wickedness and worldliness in the day of Christ's appearing. The unbelievers and the unconverted will be found very many. The believers and the godly, as in the days of Noah and Lot, will be found very few.

Let us take heed to ourselves, and beware of the spirit of the world. It is not enough to do as others, and buy, and sell, and plant, and build, and eat, and drink, and marry, as if we were born for nothing else. Exclusive attention to these things may ruin us as thoroughly as open sin. We must come out from the world and be separate. We must dare to be peculiar. We must escape for our lives, like Lot. We must flee to the ark, like Noah. This alone is safety. Then, and then only, we shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger, and avoid destruction when the Son of man is revealed. (Zeph. ii. 3.)

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, *what a solemn warning our Lord gives us against unsound profession*. He says to us, in immediate connection with the description of His second advent, "Remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife went far in religious profession. She was the wife of a "righteous man." She was connected through him with Abraham, the father of the faithful. She fled with her husband from Sodom in the day when he escaped for his life by God's command. But Lot's wife was not really like her husband. Though she fled with him, she had left her heart behind her. She wilfully disobeyed the strict injunction which the angel had laid upon her. She looked back towards Sodom, and was at once struck dead. She was turned into a pillar of salt, and perished in her sins. "Remember" her, says our Lord: "Remember Lot's wife."

Lot's wife is meant to be a beacon and a warning to all professing Christians. It may be feared that many will be found like her in the day of Christ's second advent. There are many in the present day who go a certain length in religion. They conform to the outward ways of Christian relatives and friends. They speak the "language of Canaan." They use all the outward ordinances of religion. But all this time their souls are not right in the sight of God. The world is in their hearts, and their hearts are in the world. And by and by, in the day of sifting, their unsoundness will be exposed to all the world. Their Christianity will prove rotten at the core. The case of Lot's wife will not stand alone.

Let us remember Lot's wife, and resolve to be *real* in our religion. Let us not profess to serve Christ for no higher motive than to please husbands, or wives, or masters, or ministers. A mere *lean-to* religion like this will never save our souls. Let us serve Christ for His own sake. Let us never rest till we have the true grace of God in our hearts, and have no desire to look back to the world.

We should observe, lastly, in these verses, *what an awful separation there will be in the professing Church when Christ comes again*. Our Lord describes this separation by a very striking picture. He says, "In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall

be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”

The meaning of these expressions is clear and plain. The day of Christ’s second advent shall be the day when good and evil, converted and unconverted, shall at length be divided into two distinct bodies. The visible Church shall no longer be a mixed body. The wheat and the tares shall no longer grow side by side. The good fish and the bad shall at length be sorted into two bodies. The angels shall come forth and gather together the godly, that they may be rewarded, and leave the wicked behind to be punished. “Converted or unconverted?” will be the only subject of enquiry. It will matter nothing that people have worked together, and slept together, and lived together for many years. They will be dealt with at last according to their religion. Those members of the family who have loved Christ will be taken up to heaven; and those who have loved the world will be cast down to hell. Converted and unconverted shall be separated for evermore when Jesus comes again.

Let us lay to heart these things. He that loves his relatives and friends is specially bound to consider them. If those whom he loves are true servants of Christ, let him know that he must cast in his lot with them, if he would not one day be parted from them for ever. If those whom he loves are yet dead in trespasses and sins, let him know that he must work and pray for their conversion, lest he should be separated from them by and by to all eternity. Life is the only time for such work. Life is fast ebbing away from us all. Partings, and separations, and the breaking up of families are at all times painful things. But all the separations that we see now are nothing compared to those which will be seen when Christ comes again.

NOTES. LUKE XVII. 26–37.

26.—[*As it was in the days of Noe, &c.*] The whole passage, from this verse down to the end, applies exclusively to the second personal advent of Christ, when He shall come to set up His glorious kingdom. The Pharisees had inquired about Messiah’s kingdom. The disciples themselves thought much of it, and were full of ignorant expectations. Our Lord thought it good to show them that Messiah’s kingdom in glory would be a far more solemn event than they supposed, and that it would find the vast majority of mankind utterly unprepared. Instead of indulging in carnal speculations, and looking for carnal rewards, they would do well to study an unworldly frame of mind, and to take heed that they were ready for the kingdom in heart and life. Its setting up would be attended by such a sifting and separation as they had not considered. For that day of sifting they would do well to prepare.

Let it be noted that our Lord speaks of Noah’s days as an illustration of the days of His own second advent in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew. But the discourse which He delivered then was delivered on a totally different occasion from that before us. It is plain therefore that He used the illustration twice.

To apply the conclusion of this chapter, as many do, to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, appears to me an unwarrantable and violent straining of Scripture.

27.—[*They did eat, they drank, &c.*] These expressions would perhaps be more literally translated, “They were eating, they were drinking,” &c. It was the habit of living, in which they were absorbed.

[*Noe entered into the ark, &c.*] Let it be noted that both here and in the two following verses our Lord speaks of the history of Noah’s ark, and of Lot and the destruction of Sodom, and of Lot’s wife, as real, true historical facts. The idea of modern sceptics, that the events recorded in Genesis are nothing better than myths and fables, finds no countenance here. Specially let it be observed that the modern notion of Neologians, that Sodom was destroyed by an earthquake, is completely overturned here. Our Lord expressly asserts, that “It rained fire and brimstone from heaven.” It is a dangerous thing to be wise above that which is written

31.—[*He which shall be upon the house-top, &c.*] This expression is remarkable. It is exactly like that which our Lord uses upon another occasion, where He is foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem and the miseries of its sieges, both the siege when the Romans took it and the siege foretold by Zechariah (Zech. xiv.), which is yet to come. Yet in the passage before us there is no reference whatever to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. The whole passage is exclusively confined to the second advent of Christ, and the circumstances attending it.

What then are we to understand by the language which our Lord uses, both in this verse and the five which follow it?

The most probable solution appears to me to be this. Our Lord desired to teach His disciples that His own second advent in glory would not be a time of carnal ease to everybody, as the Jews thought, but a time of trial to men’s religion, and of sifting and separation to the visible Church. It would be ushered in by such a period of tribulation and suffering, that none but those who were sitting loose to the world, and ready to give up everything for Christ’s sake, would come out of it unscathed. It would be a time when believers must give up all thought of worldly goods, and beware of lingering and looking back to the world. Nothing but singleness of eye, wholeness of heart, and unworldliness of spirit would abide the fire of that day.

The verse before us, in short, appears to me a proverbial expression. It shows the sort of thing which Christians must not do, and the sort of spirit which they must beware of, if they would come safely through the day of the Lord’s appearing.

The house-tops in Eastern countries, be it remembered, are generally flat, and much used by the inhabitants. The stairs were often outside, and a man need not come down through the house to flee away. Moreover he might flee over the flat roofs of his neighbours’ houses, and thus escape, in any sudden time of danger.

Whether in all this there may not be some reference to that future siege of Jerusalem which is so closely connected with our Lord’s second advent (Zech. xiv.) I am not prepared to decide. There is perhaps a deeper and fuller meaning in the verse than has yet been discovered. There are to be circumstances attending the second advent of Christ, in all probability, of which at present we have very inadequate conceptions, and which perhaps are mercifully withheld from us now, because we could not bear them.

33.—[*Whosoever shall seek, &c.*] This verse appears to point out that there will be a fiery trial of men’s religion at the time of Christ’s second advent, and that none will come through it safely but those who are prepared to give up everything, even life itself, for Christ’s sake.

[*Preserve it.*] The word so rendered is very peculiar. It means literally “to bring forth alive.” It is only found in one other place in the New Testament: Acts vii. 19.

35.—[*Two women...grinding together.*] This expression may seem strange to an English ear at first hearing. It is an exact description of what may commonly be seen in Eastern countries. Major quotes the following passage from Dr. Clarke: “Scarcely had we reached our apartments at Nazareth than we beheld two women grinding at the mill in a manner most fully illustrating the saying of our Saviour. They were preparing flour to make bread, as is always customary when strangers arrive. The two women, seated on the ground, held between them two round flat stones. In the centre of the upper stone was a cavity for pouring in corn, and by the side of this an upright wooden handle for moving the stone. One of the women with her right hand pushed this handle to the woman opposite, who again sent it to her companion, thus giving a rotary and very rapid motion to the upper stone. Their left hand was all the while employed in supplying fresh corn, as fast as the bran and corn escaped from the sides of the machine.” (See Exod. xi. 5; Isai. xlvii. 1-3.)

37.—[*Where, Lord?*] The question of the disciples appears to show that they were entirely perplexed by the words which our Lord had just spoken. The answer they received seems intended to keep them purposely in ignorance of our Lord’s full meaning. At present they were not able to bear it.

[*Wheresoever...body...eagles...together.*] This is a dark and mysterious saying, and has greatly perplexed all commentators. That it refers to the well-known power of the vulture-tribe to discern carcasses, whether by eye or by smell, is allowed by all. (Job xxxix. 30.) That it is a proverbial saying, signifying the gathering of things which from any cause have an attraction one to another, is also allowed. But when we come to the precise application of the saying, we find great variety of opinions. The parallel expression in St. Matthew (Matt. xxiv. 28) contains a Greek word for the body, which means a “dead body.” The word used in the verse before us, does not necessarily mean a dead body. In other respects the two passages are alike.

1. Some think that “the eagles” mean the saints. This is by far the commonest opinion. It is held by Chrysostom, Ambrose, Jerome, Theophylact, Euthymius, Luther, Calvin, Brentius, Bullinger, Bucer, Gualter, Beza, Pellican, Flacius, Musculus, Paræus, Piscator, Cocceius, Jansenius, Quesnel, Du Veil, Cornelius à Lapide, Calovius, Suicer, Ravanelli, Poole, Trapp, Cartwright, Pearce, Leigh, Wordsworth, and Burgon.

2. The meanings these writers attach to “the body,” are exceedingly various. Suffice it to say that some think it means “heaven;” some “Christ;” some “the Church;” some “the Lord’s supper;” and some “the judgment.”

3. Some think that “the eagles” mean the Roman armies, whose military ensign was the eagle, and “the body,” Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. This is the view of Hammond, Lightfoot, Whitby, Doddridge, Burkitt, Bengel, Gill, Parkhurst, Scott, A. Clark, Major, Davidson, Stier, and Barnes.

4. Matthew Henry, with characteristic kindness, seems to think that this interpretation and the former one may both be correct at the same time.

5. Some think that “the eagles” mean false prophets. This is the view of Aretius and Arias Montanus.

6. Some think that “the eagles” mean all mankind, and “the body,” the judgment day. This is the view of Barradius, Stella and Maldonatus.

7. Origen thinks that “the body” means the Church, and “the eagles gathered together,” the unanimous consent of doctors and early Fathers.

8. Chemnitius thinks that “the eagles” mean Christ Himself.

9. Heinsius thinks that the whole sentence is only a figurative prediction of the extreme rapidity of Christ's second advent. He shall come as rapidly as eagles come to a carcase.

10. Alford thinks that "the eagles" mean the angels of vengeance, and "the body" the whole world.

I cannot undertake to decide amidst so many conflicting judgments. I only venture the opinion, that, looking at the context, the eagles are more likely to be emblems of the angels who will be employed at our Lord's second coming, than of anything else. The verse immediately preceding that before us speaks of the separation between the just and the unjust which shall take place at our Lord's appearing. In that separation we are distinctly told elsewhere, the agents employed shall be the angels. (Matt. xiii. 49.) Is it too much then to conjecture that our Lord's simple meaning is, that wherever "His body" is, His professing Church, there the angels shall gather together at the last day, and sever the wicked from the just, in order to give to each his appointed place

It is, however, very probable that all the interpretations hitherto proposed will prove at last incorrect, and that the true one may yet remain to be discovered at the second advent. That our Lord purposely meant it to be regarded as a mysterious saying is very evident.