

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XVIII. 1-8.

1 And he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint;

2 Saying, There was in a city a Judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man:

3 And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him saying, Avenge me of mine adversary.

4 And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man;

5 Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

6 And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith.

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

THE object of the parable before us, is explained by Christ Himself. To use the words of an old divine, "The key hangs at the door." "He spake a parable to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint." These words, be it remembered, are closely connected with the solemn doctrine of the second advent, with which the preceding chapter concludes. It is prayer without fainting, during the long weary interval between the first and second advents, which Jesus is urging His disciples to keep up. In that interval we ourselves are standing. The subject therefore is one which ought to possess a special interest in our eyes.

These verses teach us, firstly, *the great importance of perseverance in prayer*. Our Lord conveys this lesson by telling the story of a friendless widow, who obtained justice from a wicked magistrate by dint of sheer importunity. "Though I fear not God, nor regard man," said the unjust judge, "yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me." Our Lord Himself supplies the application of the parable: "Hear what the unjust judge saith. Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" If importunity obtains so much from a wicked man, how much more will it obtain for the children of God from the Righteous Judge, their Father in heaven!

The subject of prayer ought always to be interesting to Christians. Prayer is the very life-breath of true Christianity: here it is that religion begins; here it flourishes; here it decays. Prayer is one of the first evidences of conversion. (Acts ix. 11.) Neglect of prayer is the sure road to a fall. (Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.) Whatever throws light on the subject of prayer is for our soul's health.

Let it then be graven deeply in our minds, that it is far more easy to begin a habit of prayer than it is to keep it up. The fear of death; some temporary prickings of conscience; some excited feelings, may make a man begin praying, after a fashion. But to go on praying requires faith. We are apt to become weary, and to give way to the suggestion of Satan, that "it is of no

use.” And then comes the time when the parable before us ought to be carefully remembered. We must recollect that our Lord expressly told us “always to pray and not to faint.”

Do we ever feel a secret inclination to hurry our prayers, or shorten our prayers, or become careless about our prayers, or omit our prayers altogether? Let us be sure, when we do, that it is a direct temptation from the devil. He is trying to sap and undermine the very citadel of our souls, and to cast us down to hell. Let us resist the temptation, and cast it behind our backs. Let us resolve to pray on steadily, patiently, perseveringly, and let us never doubt that it does us good. However long the answer may be in coming, still let us pray on. Whatever sacrifice and self-denial it may cost us, still let us pray on, “pray always;” “pray without ceasing;” and “continue in prayer.” (1 Thess. v. 17; Coloss. iv. 2.) Let us arm our minds with this parable, and while we live, whatever we make time for, let us make time for prayer.

These verses teach us, secondly, that *God has an elect people upon earth, who are under His special care.* The Lord Jesus declares that God will “avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him.” “I tell you,” He says, “that he will avenge them speedily.”

Election is one of the deepest truths of Scripture. It is clearly and beautifully stated in the seventeenth Article of the Church of England. It is “the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, he hath decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation.” This testimony is true. This is “sound speech which cannot be condemned.” (Titus ii. 8.)

Election is a truth which should call forth praise and thanksgiving from all true Christians. Except God had chosen and called them, they would never have chosen and called on Him. Except He had chosen them of His own good pleasure, without respect to any goodness of their’s, there would never have been anything in them to make them worthy of His choice. The worldly and the carnal-minded may rail at the doctrine of election; the false professor may abuse it, and “turn the grace of God into lasciviousness” (Jude 4); but the believer who knows his own heart will ever bless God for election. He will confess that without election there would be no salvation.

But what are the marks of election? By what token shall a man know whether he is one of God’s elect? These marks are clearly laid down in Scripture. Election is inseparably connected with faith in Christ, and conformity to His image. (Rom. viii. 29, 30.) It was when St. Paul saw the working “faith,” and patient “hope,” and labouring “love” of the Thessalonians, that he knew their “election of God.” (1 Thess. i. 3, 4.) Above all, we have a plain mark described by our Lord in the passage before us: God’s elect are a people who “cry unto him night and day.” They are essentially a

praying people. No doubt there are many persons whose prayers are formal and hypocritical. But one thing is very clear: a prayerless man must never be called one of God's elect. Let that never be forgotten.

These verses teach us, lastly, that *true faith will be found very scarce at the end of the world*. The Lord Jesus shows this by asking a very solemn question: "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

The question before us is a very humbling one. It shows the uselessness of expecting that all the world will be converted before Christ comes again. It shows the foolishness of supposing that all persons are "good," and that though differing in outward matters, they are all right at heart, and all going to heaven. Such notions find no countenance in the text before us.

Where is the use, after all, of ignoring facts under our own eyes: facts in the world, facts in the churches, facts in the congregations we belong to, facts by our own doors and fire-sides? Where is faith to be seen? How many around us really believe what the Bible contains? How many live as if they believed that Christ died for them, and that there is a judgment, a heaven, and a hell? These are most painful and serious inquiries. But they demand and deserve an answer.

Have we faith ourselves? If we have, let us bless God for it. It is a great thing to believe all the Bible. It is matter for daily thankfulness if we feel our sins, and really trust in Jesus. We may be weak, frail, erring, short-coming sinners. But do we believe? That is the grand question. If we believe, we shall be saved. But he that believeth not, shall not see life, and shall die in his sins. (John iii. 36 viii. 24.)

NOTES. LUKE XVIII. 1-8.

- 1.—[*And he spake a parable, &c.*] Let it be noted that this parable is closely connected with the preceding chapter. After giving a fearful account of the sifting and tribulations which shall attend His own second advent, our Lord proceeds to urge on His people the importance of the habit of persevering in prayer as a preparation for the advent, and of not fainting under trial and giving up prayer in despair.

[*Always to pray.*] This expression does not mean that a man should be incessantly performing the act of prayer. It means that a man should constantly keep up the habit of prayer, and endeavour to be always in a prayerful frame of mind.

- 2.—[*There was in a city, &c.*] As usual, there are various opinions about the primary purpose and application of this parable.

It is the opinion of many that the "widow" in the parable represents the Church, and the "adversary" the devil, or antichrist; the widow's distressed state, the whole condition of the Church between the first and second advents of Christ; and her crying for help, the groaning of creation for the manifestation of the sons of God. (Rom. viii. 19.)

Trench mentions a strange view of Vitranga's: that the unjust judge represents the Roman Emperors, and the widow the early Church; and a still stranger view of Irenaeus and Hippolytus: that the widow is the earthly Jerusalem, and the unjust judge antichrist.

My own impression is that the parable was meant simply to describe the duty of individual believers during the whole period of the present dispensation, and to encourage them to persevering prayer, by holding out the hope that God will at length plead their cause, when things seem at the worst.

[*Which feared not God...regarded man.*] This is a proverbial description of a thoroughly bad man in high office. Our Lord Jesus Christ, be it observed, knows that there are such men in high places, and will one day reckon with them.

The description has stumbled some commentators, and has been treated as a great difficulty. They have been offended at the idea of such a man as this judge standing in the position of a type and emblem of God. To avoid this seeming inconsistency Theophylact mentions a strange and monstrous view held by some: that the words exactly describe God, since He is one who need not fear God, and is no respecter of men's persons!

The difficulty raised appears to me thoroughly unreasonable. Both here and in other places we are not meant to draw an exact parallel between the person described and God. The one single point we are meant to notice is, that even an unjust and wicked man can be moved by importunity. And the inference pressed on us, is simply this,—that if a wicked man is to be moved by importunity, much more is God.

Quesnel says, "We may make a good use even of the worst examples. Everything serves to display the justice and goodness of God, either by way of conformity or opposition, either as lines which form the resemblance thereof, or as shadows which heighten the lustre and liveliness of the colours."

- 3.—[*A widow.*] The helpless and friendless condition of a widow in Eastern countries and Bible times, should be carefully remembered. (See Exod. xxii. 22; Deut. x. 18; Job xxix. 13; 1 Kings xvii. 9, 12.)
- 5.—[*Weary me.*] The Greek word translated "weary," is very peculiar. It signifies literally "to strike under the eyes." Some have thought it very strange that a man in the judge's position should use such language, and express any fear that a poor, weak, defenceless woman could trouble him so much as to require such a strong phrase. Yet a moment's reflection will show us, that selfish, worldly, wicked men, are just exactly the persons who employ such violent expressions, in order to express their sense of annoyance even on trifling occasions. How often for instance people talk of being "tired to death," or "worried out of their lives," when there is nothing to justify the use of such language.
- 6.—[*The unjust judge.*] The Greek words here mean literally "the judge of injustice." It is precisely the same form of language, that is used in a previous chapter describing "the unjust steward." (Luke xvi. 8.)
- 7.—[*Which cry day and night.*] This is doubtless a proverbial expression, signifying a habit of continual prayer.

[*Bear long.*] The Greek word so translated is generally rendered "have patience," "is longsuffering." The remark of Pearce on the passage is worth reading: "The word is commonly used for delaying to punish a bad man. Here it has another sense, and signifies the delaying to help a good man. So Peter seems to use the expression, 'longsuffering,' when he says, 'account that the longsuffering of God is salvation:' that is, that though He delays long to save you, yet He will save you at the last." (2 Pet. iii. 15.)
- 8.—[*He will avenge them speedily.*] This sentence points to the second advent of Christ. To our eyes it seems long delayed. But a thousand years in God's sight are but as one day.

[*When...Son of man...faith...earth.*] These words are differently interpreted.

Some, as usual, can see in the “coming of the Son of man,” nothing but the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. They think the sentence means, when the Jewish polity is overthrown the number of believers will be found very small.

Wordsworth maintains that “the earth” means the “world,” in contradiction to the children of light.

I am unable to see either view to be correct. I believe the view given in the exposition is the true one. Our Lord teaches that there will be comparatively few true believers upon earth when He comes again. True faith will be found as rare as it was in the days of Noah, when only eight persons entered the ark, and in the days of Lot, when only four persons left Sodom. He is speaking, we must remember, in close connection with the account of the second advent, and His own vivid comparison of the days of Noah and Lot with the day when the Son of man shall be revealed.

There is doubtless an implied lesson here, that persevering prayer is the secret of keeping up faith. Augustine says, “When faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith; and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer; and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith.”

The unbelief of man on the subject of both advents is strikingly shown in the beginning of Isaiah liii. and of 2 Pet. iii.