

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

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

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XX. 1-8.

1 And it came to pass, <i>that</i> on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon <i>him</i> with the elders.	5 And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not?
2 And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?	6 But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet.
3 And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me:	7 And they answered, that they could not tell whence <i>it was</i> .
4 The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?	8 And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.

LET us notice, firstly, in this passage, *the demand which the chief priests and scribes made upon our Lord*. "Tell us," they said, "by what authority thou doest these things? and who gave thee this authority?"

The spirit which prompted this demand is too evident to be mistaken: these men hated and envied Christ. They saw His influence increasing; they saw their own power waning: they resolved, if possible, to stop the progress of this new teacher; and the point on which they made their assault was His authority. His mighty works they ought to have examined; His teaching they ought, in all fairness, to have compared with their own Scriptures; but they refused to take either one course or the other. They preferred to call in question His commission.

Every true-hearted Christian who tries to do good in the world, must make up his mind to be treated like his Master. He must never be surprised to find, that the self-righteous and the worldly-minded dislike His ways. The lawfulness of his proceedings will be constantly called in question. He will be regarded as meddlesome, disorderly, and self-conceited, a pestilent fellow, and a troubler of Israel. (Acts xxiv. 5; 1 Kings xviii. 17.) Scripture-readers, district-visitors, lay-agents, and unordained missionaries, are specially liable to meet with such treatment. And, worst of all, they will often meet with enemies where they ought to find friends.

Let all who are attacked by the world for trying to do good, take comfort in the thought that they are only drinking of the cup which Christ drank. Their Master in heaven sympathizes with them. Let them work on patiently, and believe that, if they are faithful, their work will speak for itself. The world's opposition is sure to attend every really good work. If the servants of Christ are to cease from every movement which the world calls in question, they will soon come to an entire stand-still. If we are to wait till the world approves our plans, and is satisfied with the propriety of our efforts, we shall never do anything on earth.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, *the manner in which our Lord speaks of John the Baptist's ministry*. He refers those who questioned His

authority to John's constant and unvarying testimony to Himself. "Ought they not to remember how John had spoken of Him as the Lamb of God,—as One whose shoe-latchets he was not worthy to bear,—as one who had the fan in His hand, and had the Spirit without measure? Ought they not to recollect that they and all Jerusalem had gone out to John's baptism, and confessed that John was a prophet? Yet John had always told them plainly that Christ was the Messiah! Surely, if they were honest they would not come now to demand His authority. If they really believed John to be a prophet sent from God, they were bound to believe that Jesus was the Christ."

It may reasonably be doubted whether the importance of John the Baptist's ministry is generally understood by Christians. The brightness of our Lord's history overshadows the history of his forerunner, and the result is that John's baptism and preaching do not receive the attention which they deserve. Yet it should never be forgotten, that the ministry of the Baptist was the only New Testament ministry foretold in the Old Testament, excepting that of Christ. It was a ministry which produced an immense effect on the Jewish mind, and aroused the expectation of Israel from one end of Palestine to the other; above all, it was a ministry which made the Jews without excuse in their rejection of Christ, when Christ appeared. They could not say that they were taken by surprise when our Lord began to preach: their minds had been thoroughly prepared for His appearing. To see the full sinfulness of the Jews, and the entire justice of the judgments which came on them after crucifying our Lord, we must remember the ministry of John the Baptist.

However little man may esteem the work of faithful ministers, there is One in heaven who sees it, and keeps account of all their labour. However little their proceedings may be understood, and however much they may be slandered and misrepresented, the Lord Jesus Christ writes all their doings in His book. He lives who testified to the importance of John the Baptist's ministry, when John was dead and buried: He will yet testify to the toil of every one of His faithful servants at the last day. In the world they may have tribulation and disappointment; but they are not forgotten by Christ.

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, *the falsehood of which our Lord's enemies were guilty*. In reply to our Lord's question whether John's baptism was from heaven or men, "they answered that they could not tell." This was a downright untruth. They could have told, but they would not. They knew that if they said what they really believed they would condemn themselves. If they confessed that John was a prophet sent from God, they would be guilty of a gross inconsistency in not believing his testimony about Christ.

Falsehoods like this, it may be feared, are only too common among unconverted men. Thousands will say anything rather than acknowledge themselves to be in the wrong. Lying is just one of the sins to which the human

heart is most naturally inclined, and one of the commonest sins in the world. Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira have more followers and imitators than Peter and Paul. The number of lies which are constantly told by men, to save their own credit, and to cover over their own wickedness, is probably far greater than we are aware.

The true servant of Christ will do well to remember these things as he travels through this world. He must not believe all he hears, and especially in the matter of religion. He must not suppose that unconverted men really believe in their own hearts all that they say: they often feel more than they appear to feel; they often say things against religion and religious people, which they secretly know to be untrue; they often know the Gospel is true, but have not the courage to confess it; they often know the Christian's life is right, but are too proud to say so. The chief priests and scribes are not the only people who deal dishonestly in religion, and say what they know to be false. Then let the servant of Christ go patiently on his way; those who are now his enemies, will one day confess that he was right, though they used to cry loudly that he was wrong.

NOTES. LUKE. XX. 1-8.

- 1.—[*And it came to pass, &c.*] The chapter we have now begun is remarkable because of the variety of attacks on our Lord which it describes. Whether the whole of the events here narrated took place on one day is a question on which commentators do not agree. If they did not all happen on one day, they must at any rate have happened on two successive days.

[*In the temple.*] This expression means "in the outward courts of the temple," to which all Jews were admitted.

- 4.—[*The baptism of John, &c.*] We must beware of supposing that this question which our Lord put was not pertinent to the one which had been put to Himself, or was at all an evasion of a disagreeable query by a counter inquiry.

Our Lord's question was in reality an answer to the question of His inquirers. They had asked Him "by what authority" He did what He did. In reply, He asked them whether "John the Baptist was a prophet sent from God." His meaning evidently was that John the Baptist had expressly testified that He was the Messiah. They knew this: they could not deny it. Now if they really believed that John the Baptist was a prophet, they would see at once by "what authority" He did what He did: he did all as the Messiah, whom John had proclaimed Him to be.

[*From heaven.*] This expression means simply "from God." (See Dan. iv. 26; Luke xv. 18, 21.)

- 5.—[*Why then believed ye him not?*] The meaning of this of course must be, "Why did ye not believe what he told you about me?"
- 6.—[*The people will stone us.*] Grotius remarks, "They had themselves accustomed the people to this violence. When they could not legally convict their enemies, they incited the people to stone them. It was called the judgment of zeal." (See John x. 31; Acts xiv. 19.)
- 7.—[*They could not tell.*] The Greek words here, when literally translated, are even more remarkable than our version, as a proof of the falsehood of our Lord's enemies. They are literally, "they did not know."

8.—[*Neither tell I you, &c.*] Our Lord's refusal was just, because those who asked Him were not honest in their inquiry about His authority. Our Lord never refused to answer the question of any honest inquirer.