

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XX. 27–40.

<p>27 Then came to <i>him</i> certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him,</p> <p>28 Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.</p> <p>29 There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children.</p> <p>30 And the second took her to wife, and he died childless.</p> <p>31 And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died.</p> <p>32 Last of all the woman died also.</p> <p>33 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.</p>	<p>34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage:</p> <p>35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage:</p> <p>36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.</p> <p>37 Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.</p> <p>38 For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.</p> <p>39 Then certain of the Scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said.</p> <p>40 And after that they durst not ask him any <i>questions at all</i>.</p>
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WE see in these verses *what an old thing unbelief is*. We are told that “there came to our Lord certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection.” Even in the Jewish Church, the Church of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob,—the Church of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and the prophets,—we find that there were bold, avowed, unblushing sceptics. If infidelity like this existed among God’s peculiar people, the Jews, what must the state of heathenism have been? If these things existed in a green tree, what must have been the condition of the dry?

We must never be surprised when we hear of infidels, deists, heretics and free-thinkers rising up in the Church, and drawing away disciples after them: we must not count it a rare and a strange thing; it is only one among many proofs that man is a fallen and corrupt being. Since the day when the devil said to Eve “Ye shall not surely die,” and Eve believed him, there never has been wanting a constant succession of forms of unbelief.—There is nothing new about any of the modern theories of infidelity; there is not one of them that is not an old disease under a new name: they are all mushrooms which spring up spontaneously in the hot-bed of human nature. It is not in reality a wonderful thing that there should rise up so many who call in question the truths of the Bible; the marvel is rather, that in a fallen world the sect of the Sadducees should be so small.

Let us take comfort in the thought that in the long run of years the truth will always prevail. Its advocates may often be feeble, and their arguments very weak; but there is an inherent strength in the cause itself which keeps it alive. Bold infidels, like Porphyry, and Julian, and Hobbes, and Hume, and

Voltaire, and Paine, arise from time to time and make a stir in the world; but they produce no lasting impression: they pass away like the Sadducees, and go to their own place. The great evidences of Christianity remain like the Pyramids, unshaken and unmoved. The “gates of hell” shall never prevail against Christ’s truth. (Matt. xvi. 18.)

We see, secondly, in these verses, *what a favourite weapon of sceptics is a supposed case*. We are told that the Sadducees brought to our Lord a difficulty arising out of the case of a woman who had married seven brothers in succession. They professed a desire to know “whose wife of the seven” the woman would be in the resurrection. The intention of the inquiry is clear and plain: they wished to pour contempt on the whole doctrine of a life to come. The case itself is one which we cannot suppose had really arisen: it seems the highest probability that it was a story invented for the occasion, in order to raise a difficulty and found an argument.

Reasoning of this kind will often meet us, if we are thrown into company with persons of a sceptical turn of mind. Some imaginary difficulty or complication, and that connected probably with some fancied state of things in the world to come, will often prove the strong-hold of an unbeliever.—“He cannot understand it! He cannot reconcile it! It seems to him revolting and absurd! It offends his common sense!”—Such is the language which is often used.

Reasoning of this kind should never shake us for a moment. For one thing we have nothing to do with supposed and imaginary cases: it will be time enough to discuss them when they really arise; enough for us to talk and argue about facts as they are. For another thing, it is mere waste of time to speculate about difficulties connected with the state of existence in a world to come: we know so little of anything beyond the visible world around us, that we are very poor judges of what is possible or not possible in the unseen world; a thousand things beyond the grave must necessarily be unintelligible to us at present. In the mean time it is our wisdom to wait patiently: what we know not now, we shall know hereafter.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, *something of the true character of the saints’ existence in the world to come*. We read that our Lord said to the Pharisees, “They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels.”

Two things are abundantly clear from this description, respecting the saints in glory. For one thing, their happiness is not a carnal happiness, but a spiritual one: “They neither marry nor are given in marriage.” The glorified body shall be very unlike what it is now: it shall no longer be a clog and a hindrance to the believer’s better nature; it shall be a meet habitation for a glorified soul. For another thing, their happiness shall be eternal: “They can

die no more.” No births shall be needed, to supply the constant waste caused by death: weakness, and sickness, and disease, and infirmity, shall be no more at all. The curse shall be clean removed: Death himself shall die.

The nature of what we call “heaven” is a subject which should often engage our thoughts. Few subjects in religion are so calculated to show the utter folly of unconverted men, and the awful danger in which they stand. A heaven where all the joy is spiritual, would surely be no heaven to an unconverted soul!—Few subjects are so likely to cheer and animate the mind of a true Christian: the holiness and spiritual-mindedness which he follows after in this life will be the very atmosphere of his eternal abode. The cares of family relationship shall no longer distract his mind; the fear of death shall no longer bring him into bondage. Then let him press on and bear his cross patiently: heaven will make amends for all.

We see, lastly, in these verses *the antiquity of belief in a resurrection*. Our Lord shows that it was the belief of Moses. “That the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush.”

Faith in a resurrection and a life to come has been the universal belief of all God’s people from the beginning of the world. Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, and all the Patriarchs, were men who looked forward to a better inheritance than they had here below. “They looked for a city which had foundations.” “They desired a better country, that is, an heavenly.” (Heb. xi. 10-16.) The words of our own seventh Article are clear and unmistakeable: “They are not to be heard which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises.” This witness is true.

Let us anchor our own souls firmly on this great foundation truth: “that we shall all rise again.” Whatever ancient or modern Sadducees may say, let us believe firmly that we are not made like the beasts that perish, and that there shall be “a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” (Acts xxiv. 15.) The recollection of this truth will cheer us in the day of trial, and comfort us in the hour of death; we shall feel that though earthly prosperity fail us, there is a life to come where there is no change; we shall feel that though worms destroy our body, yet in the flesh we shall see God. (Job xix. 26.) We shall not lie always in the grave: our God is “not a God of the dead, but of the living.”

NOTES. LUKE XX. 27–40.

- 27.—[*Certain of the Sadducees.*] The only certain thing which we know about the sect of the Sadducees is this, that they denied that there was any resurrection, or angel, or spirit. (Acts xxiii. 8.) The common opinion that they rejected all the books of the Old Testament, excepting the five books of Moses, appears to be a vulgar error. There is no foundation for it. Josephus, the historian, was a Pharisee, and not likely to spare the errors of Sadducees in describing them; but though he charges them with rejecting traditions, he nowhere charges them with rejecting any of the sacred books.

[*Any resurrection.*] Campbell has a long note to prove that by this term “resurrection” we are not to understand the reunion of soul and body, but simply a renewal of life, in whatever manner this may happen. He holds that the fundamental error of the Sadducees was not barely the denial of the resurrection of the body, but the denial of the immortality of the soul, and that our Lord’s argument in this passage tends to prove no more than that the soul survives the body, and subsists after the body is dissolved.

The opinion must be received with caution. It solves some difficulties undoubtedly, but involves us in others.

28.—[*His brother should take his wife.*] The law of Moses here referred to (Deut. xxv. 5) ought to be carefully studied, and compared with Leviticus xviii. 16. It is clear that marriage with a deceased husband’s brother was only allowed under certain peculiar circumstances, and as a general rule was unlawful. How any Bible reader can advocate a man’s marriage with a deceased wife’s sister in the face of such texts as Leviticus xviii. 16 and xx. 21, is to my mind quite incomprehensible. If it is wrong for a woman to marry two brothers, it must be wrong for a man to marry two sisters. The exceptional permission to a woman to marry two brothers was only granted when the first brother had died without leaving any children; to argue from this permission that a man may marry two sisters in succession, on the ground that the first wife left *children*, who need an aunt’s care, seems very singular logic!

29.—[*First took a wife, and died childless.*] Let it be noted that Ambrose and Jerome attach allegorical meanings to this story, and regard the woman as an emblem of the Jewish synagogue. The idea seems utterly improbable.

31.—[*The seven also...left no children.*] The possibility of such a thing happening as that which is here described, of course cannot be denied. The gross improbability of it, however, must be evident to all reflecting minds. The most probable view is that the story was a supposed case invented to supply a foundation for a difficulty.

34.—[*Children of this world marry.*] We must beware that we do not allow these words to give any sanction to Roman Catholic notions of the superior holiness of the state of virginity to the state of matrimony. The distinction our Lord draws implies no reflection on matrimony. It is simply a declaration that the condition of men and women in a world to come is utterly unlike their condition in this world.

“The children of this world,” we must remember, do not in this place signify unconverted people, but simply people who are living on earth.

35.—[*The resurrection from the dead.*] The Greek words here are remarkable. They would be rendered more literally, “the resurrection out from the dead.” They seem strongly to favour the opinion that there is a first resurrection peculiar to the righteous. (Rev. xx. 5, &c.) The expression, “children of the resurrection,” in the following verse, seems to point the same way.

36.—[*Equal to the angels.*] We must not conclude from these words that the glorified saints are exactly like the angels. Angels have not bodies like ours, but are spiritual beings. The meaning appears to be, that in freedom from death and disease, and in complete deliverance from a condition of being in which marriage and birth are needful to supply the continual waste occasioned by death, the saints shall be like the angels.

[*The children of God.*] This means evidently, that the saints are introduced into a state of peculiar privilege as members of God’s family, and residents in God’s house, after a fashion that they know nothing of here on earth.

37.—[*That dead raised...Moses shewed, &c.*] The quotation contained in this verse has caused much controversy. At first sight it does not appear to be any proof of a resurrection, but only of a life to come.

Some have thought that stress ought to be laid on the expression in the original quotation, “*I am*,” and not “*I was*” the God of Abraham, &c.

Some think, with Mede and others, that our Lord refers to the promise of the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed, and to the fact that this promise, yet unfulfilled, will literally be fulfilled one day by Abraham rising again and possessing the land.

Some think, with Campbell, that our Lord’s object all through is not so much to prove a resurrection as a life to come.

One thing, however, is very clear: the argument which our Lord used completely silenced the Sadducees, and called forth the approbation of the Scribes. Now if the Sadducees had not felt the argument convincing and silencing, they would not have submitted to it so quietly as they did. If we do not see the full force of the argument, the fault is evidently in ourselves. We do not see the fulness of Scripture as we ought to do: there is depth of meaning in many texts which we have not fathomed.

38.—[*All live unto him.*] This expression is remarkable, and peculiar to St. Luke’s Gospel. It probably means, “In His sight all are living,” though long dead, buried, and removed from this world. There is no such thing as annihilation.