

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

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LUKE XX. 41–47.

<p>41 And he said unto them, How say they that Christ is David's son?</p> <p>42 And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,</p> <p>43 Till I make thine enemies thy footstool.</p> <p>44 David therefore calleth him Lord, how is he then his son?</p>	<p>45 Then in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples,</p> <p>46 Beware of the Scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts;</p> <p>47 Which devour widow's houses, and for a shew make long prayers: the same shall receive greater damnation.</p>
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LET us observe, in this passage, *what striking testimony to Christ's divinity the book of Psalms contains.* We read that after patiently replying to the attacks of His enemies, our Lord in turn propounds a question to them: He asks them to explain an expression in the hundred and tenth Psalm, where David speaks of the Messiah as his Lord. To this question the Scribes could find no answer. They did not see the mighty truth, that Messiah was to be God as well as man, and that while as man He was to be David's son, as God he was to be David's Lord. Their ignorance of Scripture was thus exposed before all the people. Professing themselves to be instructors of others and possessors of the key of knowledge, they were proved unable to explain what their own Scriptures contained. We may well believe that of all the defeats which our Lord's malicious enemies met with, none galled them more than this. Nothing so mortifies the pride of man, as to be publicly proved ignorant of that which he fancies is his own peculiar department of knowledge.

We have probably little idea how much deep truth is contained in the book of Psalms. No part of the Bible perhaps is better known in the letter, and none so little understood in the spirit. We err greatly if we suppose that it is nothing but a record of David's feelings, of David's experience, David's praises, and David's prayers. The hand that held the pen was generally David's; but the subject matter was often something far deeper and higher than the history of the son of Jesse. The book of Psalms, in a word, is a book full of Christ: Christ suffering, Christ in humiliation, Christ dying, Christ rising again, Christ coming the second time, Christ reigning over all. Both the advents are here: the advent in suffering to bear the cross,—the advent in power to wear the crown. Both the kingdoms are here: the kingdom of grace, during which the elect are gathered, the kingdom of glory, when every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. Let us always read the Psalms with a peculiar reverence. Let us say to ourselves as we read, "A greater than David is here."

The remark now made, applies more or less to all the Bible. There is a fulness about the whole Book, which is a strong proof of its inspiration. The more we read it, the more it will seem to contain. All other books become

threadbare, if they are constantly read; their weak points, and their shallowness become every year more apparent: the Bible alone seems broader, and deeper, and fuller, the oftener it is studied. We have no need to look for allegorical and mystical meanings; the fresh truths that will constantly spring up before our eyes, are simple, plain, and clear. Of such truths the Bible is an inexhaustible mine. Nothing can account for this, but the great fact, that the Bible is the word, not of man, but of God.

Let us observe, secondly, in this passage, *how abominable is hypocrisy in the eyes of Christ*. We are told that “in the audience of all the people he said unto his disciples, Beware of the Scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets, and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts; which devour widows’ houses, and for a show make long prayers.” This was a bold and remarkable warning. It was a public denunciation, we must remember, of men who “sat in Moses’ seat,” and were the recognized teachers of the Jewish people. It teaches us clearly that there may be times when the sins of people in high places make it a positive duty to protest publicly against them. It shows us that it is possible to speak out, and yet not to “speak evil of dignities.”

No sin seems to be regarded by Christ as more sinful than hypocrisy: none certainly drew forth from His lips such frequent, strong, and withering condemnation, during the whole course of His ministry. He was ever full of mercy and compassion for the chief of sinners: “Fury was not in him” when He saw Zacchæus, the penitent thief, Matthew the Publican, Saul the persecutor, and the woman in Simon’s house; but when He saw Scribes and Pharisees wearing a mere cloak of religion, and pretending to great outward sanctity while their hearts were full of wickedness, His righteous soul seems to have been full of indignation. Eight times in one chapter (Matt. xxiii.) we find Him saying, “Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites.”

Let us not forget that the Lord Jesus never changes: He is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. Whatever else we are in religion let us be *true*. However feeble our faith, and hope, and love, and obedience may be, let us see to it that they are real, genuine, and sincere; let us abhor the very idea of part-acting and mask-wearing in our Christianity. At any rate let us be *thorough*. It is a striking fact that the very first piece of armour which St. Paul recommends to the Christian soldier is “truth.” “Stand therefore,” he says, “having your loins girt about with truth.” (Eph. vi. 10.)

Let us observe, lastly, in this passage, that *there will be degrees of condemnation and misery in hell*. The words of our Lord are distinct and express. He says of those who live and die hypocrites, “the same shall receive greater damnation.”

The subject opened up in these words is a deeply painful one. The reality and eternity of future punishment are among the great foundation truths of

revealed religion, which it is hard to think upon without a shudder; but it is well to have all that the Bible teaches about heaven and hell firmly fixed on our minds. The Bible teaches distinctly that there will be degrees of glory in heaven: it teaches with no less distinctness both here and elsewhere, that there will be degrees of misery in hell.

Who, after all, are they who will finally receive condemnation? This is the practical point that concerns us most. All who will not come to Christ, all who know not God and obey not the Gospel, all who refuse to repent and go on still in wickedness,—all such will be finally condemned. They will reap according as they have sown. God willeth not their eternal ruin; but if they will not hear His voice, they must die in their sins.

But who among those who are condemned will receive the heaviest condemnation? It will not fall on heathens who never heard the truth; it will not fall on ignorant and neglected Englishmen, for whose souls, however sunk in profligacy, no man cared: it will fall on those who had great light and knowledge, but made no proper use of it; it will fall on those who professed great sanctity and religiousness, but in reality clung to their sins. In one word, the hypocrite will have the lowest place in hell. These are awful things. But they are true.

NOTES. LUKE XX. 41–47.

41.—[*He saith unto them.*] The connection between this verse and the two preceding ones should not be overlooked. It seems clear that it is “the Scribes” to whom our Lord now addresses Himself. They were ready enough to approve of His answer to the Sadducees; but did they themselves understand the Scriptures? Our Lord shows them that they did not.

[*How say they.*] This expression implies that it was a common saying among Jewish theologians: an acknowledged and received opinion.

[*Christ is David’s son.*] Let it be noted that this expression shows us that when sick persons and others who applied to our Lord called Him, “Thou Son of David,” they meant more than at first sight perhaps appears. The expression was tantamount to a confession that our Lord was the Messiah.

42.—[*David himself saith, &c.*] Let it be noted that the very Psalm which our Lord here brings forward is the one which the Apostle Peter presses on the Jews in the first public sermon he addresses to them on the day of Pentecost. (Acts ii. 34.) It is interesting to reflect that on that day Peter probably remembered his Master’s use of the Psalm, and wisely walked in His steps by quoting it to the Jews.

44.—[*How is he then his son?*] This was a question concerning Messiah’s person, which could only be answered by admitting that He was God as well as man, and man as well as God. This the Scribes and Pharisees did not understand.

Our Lord had probably a double object in view in the question which he put to the Scribes.

For one thing, He desired to convince them of their own ignorance of the Scriptures, which they proudly supposed they understood.

For another thing, He desired to teach them higher and more exalted views of the true nature of the Messiah. One grand error of the Scribes and Pharisees, and indeed of most Jews,

during our Lord's early ministry, was the low, carnal view which they held of Messiah's nature and person. They expected one who would be a prophet and a king, one greater than Moses and David, undoubtedly, but still not One who would be at the same time very God. To correct this error, and show the inconsistency of it with Scripture, appears to have been one part of our Lord's intention in this last public conversation which He held with His enemies.

Those who secretly wonder that our Lord did not fulfil prophecies, and apply them publicly to Himself, in such a plain way that there could be no room left for anyone to doubt, would do well to remember that this is not God's way of dealing with man. God never forces conviction on man's mind. If men are not willing to believe, there is always room left for unbelief. This is a most important principle, and one which we shall do well to remember in the interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy. To expect the book of Revelation, for instance, to be fulfilled so clearly that there shall be no possibility of dispute or doubt as to its fulfilment, is expecting that which is entirely contrary to the analogy of all God's dealings with man.

46.—[*Walk in long robes.*] This expression either refers to garments of an extravagantly large size, on which the Scribes prided themselves, or else to the fringes and borders to their garments, which they put on in obedience to the law. (Numb. xv. 38.) These fringes they made excessively large, in order to impress on the minds of the common people an opinion of their own holiness and their great reverence for the law.

[*Love greetings.*] This expression is explained in the Gospel of St. Matthew. (Matt. xxiii. 7-10.) They loved appellations of honour and respect, such as "Rabbi," "Father," "Master," "Teacher," to be given to them in public places. Men often profess a desire to magnify their office, when in truth they want to magnify themselves.

[*Highest seats...chief rooms.*] The grand characteristic of hypocritical and formal religion, is love of man's praise, and the honour that comes from man. True grace can wait for honour, and cares little what it has upon earth.

The Greek word which we have rendered "chief rooms," means literally, "the chief or uppermost reclining places" round a table at a feast. It does not mean the principal apartment out of several chambers.

47.—[*Devour widows' houses.*] The most probable explanation of this phrase is, that the Scribes, under pretence of charity, took charge of the property of widows, and pretended to manage it for them. But instead of managing it honestly and faithfully, they embezzled it, and privately used it for their own interests.