

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXI. 10–19.

10 Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom:	14 Settle <i>it</i> therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer:
11 And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences: and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven.	15 For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.
12 But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake.	16 And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and <i>some</i> of you shall they cause to be put to death.
13 And it shall turn to you for a testimony.	17 And ye shall be hated of all <i>men</i> for my name's sake.
	18 But there shall not an hair of your head perish.
	19 In your patience possess ye your souls.

WE should notice, for one thing, in this passage, *Christ's prediction concerning the nations of the world*. He says, "Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven."

These words no doubt received a partial fulfilment in the days when Jerusalem was taken by the Romans and the Jews were led into captivity. It was a season of unparalleled desolation to Judæa, and the countries round about Judæa. The last days of the Jewish dispensation were wound up by a struggle which for bloodshed, misery, and tribulation, has never been equalled since the world began.

But the words before us have yet to receive a more complete accomplishment. They describe the time which shall immediately precede the second advent of Jesus Christ. The "time of the end" shall be a time of war, and not of universal peace. The Christian dispensation shall pass away like the Jewish one, amidst wars, tumults, and desolation, amidst a general crash of empires and kingdoms, such as the eyes of man have never yet seen.

A thorough understanding of these things is of great importance to our souls. Nothing is so calculated to chill the heart and damp the faith of a Christian as indulgence in unscriptural expectations.—Let us dismiss from our minds the vain idea that nations will ever give up wars entirely, before Jesus Christ comes again. So long as the devil is the prince of this world, and the hearts of the many are unconverted, so long there must be strife and fighting. There will be no universal peace before the second advent of the Prince of peace. Then, and then only, men shall "learn war no more." (Isaiah ii. 4.) Let us cease to expect that missionaries and ministers will ever convert the world, and teach all mankind to love one another: they will do nothing of the kind; they were never intended to do it. They will call out a witnessing people who shall serve Christ in every land, but they will do no more; the bulk of mankind will always refuse to obey the Gospel; the na-

tions will always go on quarrelling, wrangling, and fighting. The last days of the earth shall be its worst days: the last war shall be the most fearful and terrible war that ever desolated the earth.

The duty of the true Christian is clear and plain. Whatever others do, he must give all diligence to make his own calling and election sure. While others are occupied in national conflicts and political speculations, he must steadily seek first the kingdom of God: so doing he shall feel his feet upon a rock, when the foundations of the earth are out of course, and the kingdoms of this world are going to ruin. He shall be like Noah, safe within the ark: he shall be "hid in the day of the Lord's anger." (Zeph. ii. 3.)

We should notice, for another thing, in this passage, *Christ's prediction concerning His own disciples*. He does not prophecy smooth things, and promise them an uninterrupted course of temporal comfort. He says that they shall be "persecuted," put in "prison," "brought before kings and rulers," "betrayed," "put to death," and "hated of all men for his name's sake."

The words of this prophecy were doubtless intended to apply to every age of the Church of Christ. They began to be fulfilled in the days of the Apostles. The book of Acts supplies us with many an instance of their fulfilment. They have been repeatedly fulfilled during the last eighteen hundred years: wherever there have been disciples of Christ, there has always been more or less persecution. They will yet receive a more full accomplishment before the end comes: the last tribulation will probably be marked by special violence and bitterness; it will be a "great tribulation." (Rev. vii. 14.)

Let it be a settled principle in our minds that the true Christian must always enter the kingdom of God "through much tribulation." (Acts xiv. 22.) His best things are yet to come. This world is not our home. If we are faithful and decided servants of Christ, the world will certainly hate us, as it hated our Master. In one way or another grace will always be persecuted: no consistency of conduct, however faultless, no kindness and amiability of character, however striking, will exempt a believer from the world's dislike, so long as he lives. It is foolish to be surprised at this; it is mere waste of time to murmur at it: it is a part of the cross, and we must bear it patiently. The children of Cain will hate the children of Abel as long as the earth continues. "Marvel not, my brethren," says St. John, "if the world hate you." "If ye were of the world," says our Lord, "the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (1 John iii. 13; John xv. 18, 19.)

We should notice, lastly, in this passage, *Christ's gracious promise to His disciples*. He says "there shall not an hair of your head perish." Our blessed Lord knew well the hearts of His disciples. He saw that the prophe-

cy He had just spoken might well make them faint. He supplies them with a cheering word of encouragement: "Not a hair of your head shall perish."

The promise before us is wide and comprehensive, and one which is the property of all believers in every age. A literal interpretation of it is clearly impossible. It cannot apply to the bodies of disciples: to say that would be contradictory to the notorious fact that James and other of the Apostles died violent deaths. A figurative interpretation must evidently be placed upon the words. They form a great proverbial saying; they teach us that whatever sufferings a disciple of Christ may go through, his best things can never be injured. His life is hid with Christ in God; his treasure in heaven can never be touched; his soul is beyond the reach of harm. Even his vile body shall be raised again, and made like his Saviour's glorious body at the last day.

If we know anything of true religion let us lean back on the words of the glorious promises in every time of need. If we believe in Christ, let us rest in the comfortable thought that Christ has pledged His word that we shall not perish. We may lose much by serving Christ, but we shall never lose our souls. The world may deprive a believer of property, friends, country, home, liberty, health, and life: it has done so in innumerable cases from the days of Stephen to the present time. The roll of the noble army of Martyrs is a very long one. But one thing the world cannot do to any believer: it cannot deprive him of his interest in Christ's love; it cannot break the union between Christ and his soul. Surely it is worthwhile to be a thorough-going believer? "I am persuaded," says St. Paul, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. viii. 38, 39.)

NOTES. LUKE XXI. 10-19.

- 10.—[*Then said he unto them.*] The part of the prophecy commencing here, and extending to the nineteenth verse, appears to admit of a double interpretation. Primarily it applies to the wars connected with the taking of Jerusalem, and the afflictions of Christians after our Lord's death until the end of the Jewish dispensation. Secondly it applies to the times immediately preceding the second advent of Christ and the end of the world.

[*Nation shall rise, &c.*] The times preceding the last Jewish war and destruction of Jerusalem were remarkable for repeated insurrections, and a most disturbed state of things in Judæa and the countries immediately around Judæa. The "time of the end" just preceding our Lord's second advent, will in like manner be a time of war, confusion and disorder among the nations of Christendom.

- 11.—[*Earthquakes...famines...pestilences.*] These visitations of God were remarked to be specially frequent and severe in the last days of the Jewish dispensation. In particular, myriads died from famine and pestilence at Jerusalem during the siege, before the city was taken.

[*Fearful sights and great signs.*] The following note of Bishop Pearce, deserves reading. "Josephus has given us a very particular account of the prodigies of this kind which preceded

ed the destruction of Jerusalem. He speaks of a flaming sword seen over the city, and of a comet which appeared there for a twelvemonth. He mentions a light, which for the space of half an hour, shone so bright in the night between the temple and the altar, that it seemed as if it was noon-day. He takes notice also, of what eye-witnesses had related to him, that chariots and armed troops were seen fighting in the sky upon a certain day. He adds, that on the day of Pentecost, when the priests entered into the inner temple, they heard a great noise and voice as of a multitude, crying out ‘let us depart hence.’ The substance of this account is also given by Tacitus, the Roman historian.”

There seems no reason to doubt the correctness of this report of Josephus. At any rate, being an unconverted Jew, he had no intention of confirming the statements contained in the Gospels.

It is in the highest degree probable that the second advent of Jesus Christ will be preceded by similar signs, and unusual appearances in the framework of nature.

- 12.—[*Lay hands...persecute...&c.*] This verse appears to have a special reference to the persecutions undergone by the early Christians, between the time of Christ’s ascension and the destruction of Jerusalem. The Acts of the Apostles describe the fulfilment of the verse.
- 13.—[*It shall turn...for a testimony.*] The meaning of this verse seems to be that the “sufferings of the Christians shall prove an evidence of the truth of Christianity.”

It may be well to remark here, that if the first professors of Christianity had always received riches, and honour, and temporal rewards as soon as they became Christians, the heathen world might fairly have doubted their sincerity, and the truth of their cause. But when the world saw thousands of them patiently enduring tremendous sufferings rather than give up their religion, the sight must have supplied a very strong proof that it was a religion which was true. A man here and there might be found who, in a fit of enthusiasm or fanaticism, might endure suffering and death for a false religion, which he foolishly believed to be true, or for a religion which he knew to be false. But when myriads suffered and died for Christianity, in the early days of the Church of Christ, an argument was supplied for the truth of Christianity which infidels have never been able to overthrow.

- 14.—[*Settle it...not to meditate.*] Here, as in other places the right application of this precept must not be overlooked. It was not intended to encourage ministers in neglecting preparation for the pulpit: it does not apply to their case at all. It was spoken for the comfort of persecuted Christians. The promises connected with it were marvellously fulfilled in the case of the Apostles in the Acts, as well as in the trials of many martyrs in modern times.
- 15.—[*I will give you a mouth and wisdom.*] Scott remarks on this promise that it is an incidental proof of the divinity of Christ. None but One who was very God could have made such a promise as this.
- 16.—[*Ye shall be betrayed.*] We have no particular instances of such betrayal given to us in the Acts. But that they were far from uncommon in the persecutions of the early Church is well known to all readers of ecclesiastical history.
- 17.—[*Ye shall be hated of all men.*] These words should be carefully noticed. They show that universal popularity is not a thing that Christians should covet, nor yet value much, if it should fall to their lot. The Christian of whom everybody speaks well can hardly be a faithful man.

It is no reply to this to point to the honours paid to eminent Christians after their deaths, and the respect with which worldly men have attended their funerals and spoken of their memories. The world has always liked dead saints better than living ones. The Pharisees could build the tombs of the prophets, when they were dead.

19.—[*In patience...possess...souls.*] We must not suppose that these words mean, “Keep your souls in a state of patience.” This is a common interpretation, but not a correct one. The meaning appears rather to be, “Win, or procure, or keep in possession the salvation of your souls, through or by patience.” Alford paraphrases it: “This endurance is God’s appointed way in and by which your salvation is to be put in your possession.” The expression “Work out your own salvation “(Phil. ii. 12), will naturally occur to a Bible reader as somewhat similar.

Pearce takes the word “souls” to mean nothing more than “your lives,” and thinks the verse may be paraphrased, “Your perseverance shall be rewarded with the preservation of your lives in the general ruin.” Yet the expression of the verse preceding is so clearly a spiritual promise, that the verse before us seems to mean something more than the saving of mere bodily life.