

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXI. 34–38.

34 And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and <i>so</i> that day come upon you unawares.	all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.
35 For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.	37 And in the day time he was teaching in the temple, and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the <i>mount</i> of Olives.
36 Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape	38 And all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him.

THESE verses form the practical conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ's great prophetic discourse. They supply a striking answer to those who condemn the study of unfulfilled prophecy as speculative and unprofitable. It would be difficult to find a passage more practical, direct, plain, and heart-searching than that which is now before our eyes.

Let us learn from these verses, *the spiritual danger to which even the holiest believers are exposed in this world*. Our Lord says to His disciples, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares."

These words are exceedingly startling. They were not addressed to carnal-minded Pharisees, or sceptical Sadducees, or worldly Herodians. They were addressed to Peter, James, and John, and the whole company of the Apostles. They were addressed to men who had given up everything for Christ's sake, and had proved the reality of their faith by loving obedience and steady adherence to their Master. Yet even to them our Lord holds out the peril of surfeiting, and drunkenness, and worldliness! Even to them He says, "Take heed to yourselves."

The exhortation before us should teach us the immense importance of humility. There is no sin so great but a great saint may fall into it: there is no saint so great but he may fall into a great sin. Noah escaped the pollutions of the world before the flood; and yet he was afterwards overtaken by drunkenness.—Abraham was the father of the faithful; and yet through unbelief he said falsely that Sarah was his sister.—Lot did not take part in the horrible wickedness of Sodom; and yet he afterwards fell into foul sin in the cave.—Moses was the meekest man on earth; and yet he so lost self-command that he spoke angrily and unadvisedly.—David was a man after God's own heart; and yet he plunged into most heinous adultery.—These examples are all deeply instructive: they all show the wisdom of our Lord's warning in the passage before us. They teach us to be "clothed with humility." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Pet. v. 5; 1 Cor. x. 12.)

The exhortation before us should teach us furthermore the great importance of an unworldly spirit. The “cares of this life” are placed side by side with surfeiting and drunkenness. Excess in eating and drinking is not the only excess which injures the soul: there is an excessive anxiety about the innocent things of this life, which is just as ruinous to our spiritual prosperity, and just as poisonous to the inner man. Never, never let us forget that we may make spiritual shipwreck on lawful things, as really and as truly as on open vices. Happy is he who has learned to hold the things of this world with a loose hand, and to believe that seeking first the kingdom of God, “all other things shall be added to him!” (Matt. vi. 33.)

Let us learn, secondly, from these verses, *the exceeding suddenness of our Lord’s second coming*. We read that “as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.” As a trap falling suddenly on an animal, and catching it in a moment; as the lightning flash shining suddenly in heaven, before the thunder is heard; as a thief coming suddenly in the night, and not giving notice that he will come,—so sudden, so instantaneous will the second advent of the Son of man be.

The precise date of our Lord Jesus Christ’s return to this world has been purposely withheld from us by God. “Of that day and hour knoweth no man.” On one point however all the teaching of Scripture about it is clear and unmistakable: whenever it shall take place, it shall be a most sudden and unexpected event. The business of the world shall be going on as usual: as in the days of Sodom, and the days before the flood, men shall be “eating and drinking, marrying and given in marriage.” Few, even among true believers, shall be found completely alive to the great fact, and living in a state of thorough expectation.—In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, the whole course of the world shall be stopped. The King of kings shall appear; the dead shall be raised; the living shall be changed; unbelief shall wither away; truth shall be known by myriads too late; the world with all its trifles and shadows shall be thrust aside; eternity with all its awful realities shall begin. All this shall begin at once, without notice, without warning, without note of preparation. “As a snare shall it come on the face of the whole earth.”

The servant of God must surely see that there is only one state of mind which becomes the man who believes these things: that state is one of perpetual preparedness to meet Christ. The Gospel does not call on us to retire from earthly callings, or neglect the duties of our stations; it does not bid us retire into hermitages, or live the life of a monk or a nun; but it does bid us live like men who expect their Lord to return. Repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and holiness of conversation, are the only true habitual preparedness required. The Christian who knows these things by experience, is the man who is always ready to meet his Lord.

Let us learn, lastly, from these verses, *the special duties of believers in the prospect of the second advent of Christ*. Our Lord sums up these duties under two great heads. One of these two is watchfulness: the other is prayer. “Watch ye therefore,” He says, “and pray always.”

We are to “watch.” We are to live on our guard, like men in an enemy’s country. We are to remember that evil is about us, and near us, and in us,—that we have to contend daily with a treacherous heart, an ensnaring world, and a busy devil. Remembering this, we must put on the whole armour of God, and beware of spiritual drowsiness. “Let us not sleep as do others,” says St. Paul, “but let us watch and be sober.” (1 Thess. v. 6.)

We are to “pray always.” We are to keep up a constant habit of real, business-like prayer. We are to speak with God daily, and hold daily communion with Him about our souls. We are to pray specially for grace to lay aside every weight, and to cast away everything which may interfere with readiness to meet our Lord. Above all we are to watch our habits of devotion with a godly jealousy, and to beware of hurrying over or shortening our prayers.

Let us leave the whole passage with a hearty determination, by God’s help, to act on what we have been reading. If we believe that Christ is coming again, let us get ready to meet Him. “If we know these things, happy are we if we do them.” (John xiii. 17.)

NOTES. LUKE XXI. 34–38.

34.—[*Overcharged with surfeiting.*] Let it be noticed that both the Greek words so translated are only found here in the New Testament.

The whole verse is full of singularly searching expressions. The “heart” is the part which the Christian must guard, if he would live ready to meet Christ.—The heart is in constant danger of being “weighed down,” or “pressed down.”—Intemperance in eating and drinking is a fault against which even the best of men must watch. The most eat and drink far too much. It does not follow because Roman Catholics fast superstitiously, that Protestants are never to fast at all. The “cares of this life” may inflict great injury on the soul, as well as open sins.—All these things require diligent attention and unceasing watchfulness. The words of Matthew Henry are most true on this verse: “We cannot be safe if we are secure.”

[*Unawares.*] The Greek word so rendered is only found in one other place in the New Testament, and in the same connection. It is there translated, “sudden.” Parkhurst defines it as “sudden, unexpected, unforeseen.”

36.—[*Watch...pray always.*] The Greek words so rendered are even more striking when translated literally. They would then be, “watch therefore, in every season praying.”

[*Accounted worthy to escape, &c....and to stand.*] It admits of some question whether these words do not point to the possibility of some believers being allowed to pass through great tribulation in the last days, because of their sloth and inconsistency. There certainly are expressions in the New Testament which seem to indicate that all Christ’s people will not “stand” before Him with equal boldness in the day of His appearing. St. Peter speaks of an “abundant entrance.” St. Paul speaks of some “saved so as by fire.” (2 Peter i. 11. 1 Cor. iii. 15.)

37.—[*Day time...teaching in the temple.*] Let it be noted, that from the time of our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem up to His death, He never withdrew from His enemies, but did all openly, and before their eyes. He knew that His time was come.

[*Abode.*] The Greek word so rendered is only found in one other place, and there is translated "lodged." (Matt. xxi. 17.) Major says, that the expression, "abode in the mount of Olives," means "at Bethany, because it was a town on the mount of Olives." Comparison with the text just quoted in Matthew, makes this highly probable. It is not necessary to suppose that our Lord lodged in the open air.