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 XXII. 14–23.

14 And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him.

15 And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:

16 For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

17 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide *it* among yourselves:

18 For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it,* and gave un­to them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

21 But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me *is* with me on the table.

22 And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!

23 And they began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing.

THESE verses contain St. Luke’s account of the institu­tion of the Lord’s supper. It is a passage which every true Christian will always read with deep interest. How wonderful it seems that an ordinance, so beautifully simple at its first appointment, should have been ob­scured and mystified by man’s inventions! What a painful proof it is of human corruption, that some of the bitterest controversies which have disturbed the Church have been concerning the table of the Lord! Great in­deed is the ingenuity of man in perverting God’s gifts! The ordinance that should have been for his health is too often made an occasion of falling.

We should notice, for one thing, in these verses, that *the principal object of the Lord’s supper was to remind Christians of Christ’s death for sinners.* In appointing the Lord’s supper, Jesus distinctly tells His disciples that they were to do what they did, “in remembrance of him.” In one word the Lord’s supper is not a sacrifice: it is eminently a commemorative ordinance.

The bread that the believer eats at the Lord’s table is intended to remind him of Christ’s body given to death on the cross for his sins; the wine that he drinks is in­tended to remind him of Christ’s blood shed to make atonement for his transgressions. The whole ordinance was meant to keep fresh in his memory the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and the satisfaction which that sacrifice made for the sin of the world. The two elements of bread and wine were intended to preach Christ crucified as our substitute under lively emblems; they were to be a visible sermon, appealing to the believer’s senses, and teaching the old foundation-truth of the Gospel, that Christ’s death on the cross is the life of man’s soul.

We shall do well to keep steadily in view this simple view of the Lord’s supper. That a special blessing is attached to a worthy use of it, as well to the worthy use of every ordinance appointed by Christ, there is of course no doubt; but that there is any other means by which Christians can eat Christ’s body and drink Christ’s blood, excepting faith, we must always steadily deny. He that comes to the Lord’s table with faith in Christ, may con­fidently expect to have his faith increased by receiving the bread and wine; but he that comes without faith has no right to expect a blessing. Empty he comes to the ordinance and empty he will go away.

The less mystery and obscurity we attach to the Lord’s supper, the better will it be for our souls. We should reject with abhorrence the unscriptural notion that there is any oblation or sacrifice in it, that the substance of the bread and wine is at all changed, or that the mere formal act of receiving the sacrament can do any good to the soul. We should cling firmly to the great principle laid down at its institution, that it is eminently a *commemorative* ordinance, and that reception of it, without faith and a thankful remembrance of Christ’s death, can do us no good. The words of the Church-catechism are wise and true: “It was ordained for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ.”—The declaration of the Articles is clear and distinct: “The means whereby the body of Christ is received and taken in the supper is faith.”—The exhortation of the Prayer-book points out the only way in which we can feed on Christ: “Feed on him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.” —Last, but not least, the caution of the Homily is most instructive: “Let us take heed lest of the memory it be made a sacrifice.”

We should notice, for another thing, in these verses, that *the observance of the Lord’s Supper is a duty binding on all true Christians.* The words of our Lord on this point are direct and emphatic: “Do this in remembrance of Me.” To suppose, as some do, that these words are only an injunction to the apostles and all ministers to administer the Lord’s supper to others, is a thoroughly unsatisfactory interpretation. The obvious sense of the words is a general precept to all disciples.

The command before us is overlooked to a fearful ex­tent. Myriads of members of Christian Churches never go to the Lord’s table. They would be ashamed perhaps to be known as open breakers of the ten commandments; yet they are not ashamed of breaking a plain command of Christ! They appear to think there is no great sin in not being communicants. They seem utterly unconscious that if they had lived in the days of the apostles they would not have been reckoned Christians at all.

The subject no doubt is one on which we must beware of mistakes. It is not, of course, to be desired that every baptized person should receive the Lord’s supper as a mere matter of form: it is an ordinance which was intended for the living, and not for the dead in sins; but when we see vast numbers of church-goers never going to the Lord’s table, and no-wise ashamed of their neglect of the sacrament, it is clear that there is something very wrong in the state of the Churches. It is a sign either of wide-spread ignorance, or of callous indifference to a divine precept. When such multitudes of baptized per­sons habitually break a command of Christ, we cannot doubt that Christ is displeased.

What are we doing ourselves? This, after all, is the point that concerns us. Do we stay away from the Lord’s supper under a vague notion that there is no great necessity for receiving it? If we hold such an opinion, the sooner we give it up the better. A plain precept of God’s own Son, is not to be trifled with in this way.—Do we stay away from the Lord’s supper because we are not fit to be communicants? If we do, let us thoroughly understand that we are not fit to die: unfit for the Lord’s table, we are unfit for heaven, un­prepared for the judgment day, and not ready to meet God! Surely this is a most serious state of things. But the words before us are clear and explicit. Christ gives us a plain command: if we wilfully disobey it, we are in danger of ruining our souls; if we are not fit to obey it, we ought to repent without delay.

Let us notice, lastly, *who were the communicants at the first appointment of the Lord’s supper.* They were not all holy: they were not all believers. St. Luke in­forms us that the traitor, Judas Iscariot, was one of them. The words of our Lord admit of no other fair interpretation. “Behold,” He says, “the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.”

The lesson of these words is deeply important. They show us that we must not regard all communicants as true believers and sincere servants of Christ. The evil and good will be found side by side even at the Lord’s supper. No discipline can possibly prevent it.—They show us furthermore that it is foolish to stay away from the Lord’s supper because some communicants are un­converted, or to leave a Church because some of its members are unsound: the wheat and the tares will grow together until the harvest. Our Lord Himself tolerated a Judas at the first communion that ever took place. The servant of God must not pretend to be more exclusive than his Master; let him see to his own heart, and leave others to answer for themselves to God.

And now, if we are not communicants, let us ask our­selves, as we leave this passage, “Why are we not? What satisfactory reason can we possibly give for neglecting a plain command of Christ?” May we never rest, till we have looked this inquiry in the face! If we are commu­nicants, let us take heed that we receive the sacrament worthily: “The sacraments have a wholesome effect and operation in those only who worthily receive them.” Let us often inquire whether we repent, and believe, and strive to live holy lives. So living, we need not be afraid to eat of that bread and drink of that cup, which the Lord has commanded to be received.

NOTES. LUKE XXII. 14–23.

14*.—*[*The twelve apostles with him.*]It is clear from this expres­sion that at this time Judas Iscariot was one of the company.

15*.—*[*With desire I have desired, &c.*]This is a Hebrew form of speech, signifying “I have desired exceedingly.” The reason of our Lord’s great desire is not distinctly stated, and we are left to conjecture it. Some refer it to the whole work of re­demption which He was about to accomplish that week, and the strong desire which He felt to accomplish it.—Others refer it to the institution of the Lord’s supper, and the affectionate desire which our Lord felt to leave this parting memorial of Himself among His disciples, before He died.

[*Before I suffer.*]Alford remarks that this is the only place in the Gospels where this absolute use of the word “suffer” is found. It is like the expression in the Apostle’s creed: “He suffered.” The word is elsewhere found in some such active form as “He suffered these things,” &c.

16*.—*[*Until it be fulfilled, &c.*]The meaning of this expression is that our Lord “would never eat of the passover again.” Macknight observes, “The particle ‘until,’ both here and in the 18th verse, does not imply that after the accomplishment of the sal­vation of men our Lord was to eat the passover. It is a Hebrew form of expression, signifying that the thing mentioned was no more to be done for ever. So it is said in Samuel (1 Sam. xv. 35): ‘Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death.’ That is he saw him no more at all.”

17*.—*[*He took the cup, &c.*]Let it be noted that the action des­cribed in this and the following verse took place in the pass-over feast, and that the appointment of the Lord’s supper does not begin till the 19th verse. The meaning, as before said, appears to be “that our Lord’s days of eating and drinking with His disciples were coming to an end.” He was about to be taken from them, and to drink the cup of thanksgiving with them for the last time.

19*.—*[*This is my body.*]It is almost needless to remark that the Protestant view of these words is the only satisfactory one: “This *represents* and is an emblem of my body.” To a Jewish ear the expression would be simple and intelligible. There is no word in the Syriac or Hebrew which expresses, to “signify,” or “represent.” (See Gen. xl. 12. Daniel vii. 24. Rev. i. 20. John xv. 1-5.)

[*Given for you.*]It may be asked by whom and to what was our Lord’s body given? It was given by His own free will and choice, as well as by God the Father’s love, to suffering, to death, and to the grave, on behalf of a world of sinners, to procure eternal life for as many as would believe on Him.

[*This do.*]The Roman Catholics struggle hard to make out that these words mean “Offer up this sacrifice,” and that the words were specially intended to be confined to priests conse­crating the bread and wine, and offering it up as a sacrifice in the mass. The idea will not bear calm examination. The natural meaning of the words is a command addressed to all disciples: “Practice this;” “Do what I have just showed you;” “Keep up the ordinance I have just appointed;” “Break, take, eat this bread in all ages, in remembrance of me.”

20*.—*[*This cup is the New Testament.*]Here, as well as in the former verse, the meaning is, “This cup represents the new covenant, which is to be sealed and ratified with my blood,—which blood is shed, or going to be shed for you.” There is a peculiarity in the Greek words which can only be conveyed to an English reader by a paraphrase.

It is clear that a “cup” is not literally a “testament” or covenant. The Roman Catholic who contends that in the former verse, where our Lord says “This is my body,” He meant “This is my literal body, really and truly,” will find it hard to explain our Lord’s meaning here.—The Pro­testant view, that in both cases our Lord meant “this bread *represents* my body,” and “this cup *represents* the new cove­nant which is ratified by my blood,” is the only rational and satisfactory view

If our Lord had really meant that what He gave His disciples was literally His “blood,” it seems impossible to understand the calmness with which they received the announcement. They were all Jews, and as Jews had all been taught from their infancy that to eat blood was a great sin. They evidently understood the words as Protestants do now. (Levit. iii. 17; vii. 26.)

21*.—*[*The hand...is with me on the table.*]These words make it clear and plain that Judas Iscariot was one of those who received the Lord’s supper. No other honest conclusion seems possible. If so, according to Roman Catholics, Judas must actually have eaten Christ’s body, and drank Christ’s blood! And yet he was a son of perdition!

To keep away from the Lord’s table at some particular church, because some of the communicants live inconsistent lives, is a proceeding which cannot be reconciled with the Scripture before us. The expression in Corinthians, which is often quoted on the subject, “with such an one no not to eat,” (1 Cor. v. 11), has no reference to the Lord’s supper at all.

Burkitt remarks, “Nothing is more ordinary than for un­holy persons to press into the holy ordinances of God, which they have no right to. Yet their presence pollutes the or­dinance only to themselves.”

22*.—*[*Goeth as it was determined; but woe, &c.*]Let us note in this verse that though the wickedness of Judas was foreknown, and foreseen, and permitted by God in His infinite wisdom,—yet Judas was not the less guilty in God’s sight. God’s foreknow­ledge does not destroy man’s responsibility, or justify man in going on still in wickedness, under the excuse that he cannot help sinning. Nothing can happen, in heaven or in earth, without God’s knowledge and permission. But sinners are always addressed by God as responsible, and as free agents.

Augustine, quoted by Ford, remarks, that “God is said to will things, in the way of permission, which He does not will in the way of approbation.”

Bishop Hall says, “It is the greatest praise of God’s wisdom that He can turn the sins of man to His own glory.”