

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXII. 24–30.

<p>24 And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.</p> <p>25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.</p> <p>26 But ye <i>shall</i> not <i>be</i> so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.</p>	<p>27 For whether <i>is</i> greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? <i>is</i> not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.</p> <p>28 Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.</p> <p>29 And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me;</p> <p>30 That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.</p>
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LET us observe, in this passage, *how firmly pride and love of pre-eminence can stick to the hearts of good men*. We are told, that “There was a strife among the disciples, which of them should be accounted the greatest.” The strife was one which had been rebuked by our Lord on a former occasion. The ordinance which the disciples had just been receiving, and the circumstances under which they were assembled, made the strife peculiarly unseemly. And yet at this very season, the last quiet time they could spend with their Master before His death, this little flock begins a contention who should be the greatest! Such is the heart of man, ever weak, ever deceitful, ever ready, even at its best times, to turn aside to what is evil.

The sin before us is a very old one. Ambition, self-esteem, and self-conceit lie deep at the bottom of all men’s hearts, and often in the hearts where they are least suspected; thousands fancy that they are humble, who cannot bear to see an equal more honoured and favoured than themselves: few indeed can be found who rejoice heartily in a neighbour’s promotion over their own heads. The quantity of envy and jealousy in the world is a glaring proof of the prevalence of pride: men would not envy a brother’s advancement, if they had not a secret thought that their own merit was greater than his.

Let us live on our guard against this sore disease, if we make any profession of serving Christ. The harm that it has done to the Church of Christ is far beyond calculation. Let us learn to take pleasure in the prosperity of others, and to be content with the lowest place for ourselves. The rule given to the Philippians should be often before our eyes: “In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” The example of John the Baptist is a bright instance of the spirit at which we should aim. He said of our Lord, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” (Phil. ii. 3. John iii. 30.)

Let us observe, secondly, in this passage, *the striking account which our Lord gives of true Christian greatness*. He tells His disciples that the worldly standard of greatness was the exercise of lordship and authority. “But ye,” He says, “shall not be so. He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.” And then He en-

forces this principle by the mighty fact of His own example: "I am among you as he that serveth."

Usefulness in the world and Church; a humble readiness to do anything, and put our hands to any good work; a cheerful willingness to fill any post, however lowly, and discharge any office, however unpleasant, if we can only promote happiness and holiness on earth,—these are the true tests of Christian greatness. The hero in Christ's army is not the man who has rank, and title, and dignity, and chariots, and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him: it is the man who looks not on his own things, but the things of others; it is the man who is kind to all, tender to all, thoughtful for all, with a hand to help all, and a heart to feel for all; it is the man who spends and is spent to make the vice and misery of the world less, to bind up the broken-hearted, to befriend the friendless, to cheer the sorrowful, to enlighten the ignorant, and to raise the poor. This is the truly great man in the eyes of God. The world may ridicule his labours and deny the sincerity of his motives; but while the world is sneering, God is pleased. This is the man who is walking most closely in the steps of Christ.

Let us follow after greatness of this sort, if we desire to prove ourselves Christ's servants. Let us not be content with clear head-knowledge, and loud lip-profession, and keen insight into controversy, and fervent zeal for the interests of our own party. Let us see that we minister to the wants of a sin-burdened world, and do good to bodies and souls. Blessed be God, the greatness which Christ commended is within the reach of all. All have not learning, or gifts, or money; but all can minister to the happiness of those around them, by passive or by active graces: all can be useful, and all can be kind. There is a grand reality in constant kindness; it makes the men of the world think.

Let us observe, thirdly, in this passage, *our Lord's gracious commendation of His disciples*. He said to them, "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations."

There is something very striking in these words of praise. We know the weakness and infirmity of our Lord's disciples during the whole period of His earthly ministry; we find Him frequently reproofing their ignorance and want of faith: He knew full well that within a few hours they were all going to forsake Him. But here we find Him graciously dwelling on one good point in their conduct, and holding it up to the perpetual notice of His Church. They had been faithful to their Master, notwithstanding all their faults: their hearts had been right, whatever had been their mistakes; they had clung to Him in the day of His humiliation, when the great and noble were against Him; they had "continued with Him in his temptations."

Let us rest our souls on the comfortable thought that the mind of Christ is always the same. If we are true believers, let us know that He looks at our

graces more than at our faults, that He pities our infirmities, and that He will not deal with us according to our sins. Never had master such poor, weak servants as believers are to Christ, but never had servants such a compassionate and tender Master as Christ is to believers! Surely we cannot love Him too well. We may come short in many things; we may fail in knowledge, and courage, and faith, and patience; we may stumble many times: but one thing let us always do, let us love the Lord Jesus with heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. Whatever others do, let “us continue with Him,” and cleave to Him with purpose of heart. Happy is he who can say with Peter, however humbled and ashamed, “Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” (John xxi. 15.)

Let us observe, lastly, *what a glorious promise our Lord holds out to His faithful disciples*. He says, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

These words were our Lord’s parting legacy to His little flock. He knew that in a few hours His ministry among them would be ended; He winds it up by a wonderful declaration of good things laid up in store for them. We may not perhaps see the full meaning of every part of the promise: enough for us to know that our Lord promised His eleven faithful ones, glory, honour, and rewards, far exceeding anything they had done for Him. They had gone a little way with Him, like Barzillai with David, and done a little for Him: He assures them that they shall have in another world a recompense worthy of a king.

Let us leave the whole passage with the cheering thought that the wages which Christ will give to His believing people will be far out of proportion to anything they have done for Him. Their tears will be found in His bottle; their least desires to do good will be found recorded; their weakest efforts to glorify Him will be found written in His book of remembrance. Not a cup of cold water shall miss its reward.

NOTES. LUKE XXII. 24–30.

24.—[*There was a strife among them,*] Let it be noted that this is the second instance of contention for pre-eminence among the apostles, recorded by St. Luke. On the first occasion it was a “reasoning” (Luke ix. 46); here it was a “strife.”

It is impossible to reconcile this twice-recorded contention with the Roman Catholic theory, that Peter was the recognized head of the apostles. Neither here nor elsewhere is there any intimation of such primacy being known in our Lord’s times! If our Lord had really appointed Peter the chief of the apostles the strife before us in this passage could not have taken place.

25.—[*Benefactors.*] The Greek word so translated (“energetes”) was a title often assumed by heathen Monarchs, who prided themselves on being special benefactors of their subjects.—One of the Ptolemies, King of Egypt, was so called.

26.—[*He that is greatest.*] This expression here may perhaps mean “greatest in age:” the oldest. It is so translated in Rom. ix. 12. In the following verse it clearly means “greater in dignity.”

27.—[*As he that serveth.*] There is an evident reference here to the act of washing the disciples’ feet, recorded by St. John, which had taken place a very short time before the conversation we are now considering. At the same time the expression describes the whole tenor of our Lord’s course on earth. “He took on Him the form of a servant:” “He came not to be ministered to, but to minister.”

In making a practical use of our Lord’s words in this place, we must carefully draw a distinction between a genuine, and a self-imposed, voluntary, ostentatious humility. It would be absurd and profane to compare the Pope’s annual practice of publicly washing the feet of a certain number of poor people with the “serving” to which our Lord refers. Cornelius à Lapide, in his commentary on the passage before us, gives a melancholy list of instances of self-imposed humility.

28.—[*In my temptations.*] This expression probably includes the whole course of our Lord’s earthly ministry. It was a period of almost uninterrupted trial and suffering. It would be manifestly impossible to confine the word to the special temptations of Satan to which our Lord was subjected.

29.—[*I appoint.*] The Greek word so rendered seems to bear a stronger sense than our translators have put upon it. It might be translated, “I appoint unto you by covenant.” It is the root of the words used in the well-known passage in Hebrews: “Where a *testament* is, there must be the death of the *testator*.” (Heb. ix. 16.)

[*A kingdom.*] The meaning of this phrase must probably not be pressed too closely. It signifies honour, dignity, reward, majesty, of which a King’s position in this world furnishes the only emblem. Christ will have a real kingdom, covenanted to Him from all eternity. In that kingdom of Christ the apostles will have a principal place. They will be like kings within a kingdom.

30.—[*Eat and drink at my table.*] This expression admits of two interpretations. We must either interpret it literally, as referring to the marriage supper of the Lamb, when the Lamb’s wife shall have made herself ready (Rev. xix. 7-9), to which our Lord seems to refer in Matt. xxvi. 29; or else we must interpret it figuratively, as signifying that complete satisfaction of every want which the saints in glory shall enjoy when they shall “awake up after Christ’s likeness and be satisfied.”

[*Sit on thrones judging ...Israel.*] This remarkable expression is differently interpreted by commentators.

1. Some think, with Brentius, that our Lord only meant that the doctrine of the Gospel preached by the apostles, should be the rule by which not only Israel, but all the Church should be judged at the last day.

2. Some think, with Gualtier, that the words mean that the apostles shall rise in the judgment and condemn the Jews at the last day, because they believed the Gospel, while Israel remained unbelieving. Like the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba, they shall deprive the Jews of all excuse.

3. Some think that the word “judging,” means that the apostles shall literally be assessors with Christ in the judgment day, just as St. Paul says to the Corinthians, “We shall judge angels.” (1 Cor. vi. 3.)

4. Some think that the word “judging,” means that the apostles shall have a pre-eminent place in the government of Israel, after Christ has come again and the Jews have been restored to their own land. It is clear that the word “judge” in many places in the Bible, means nothing more than “ruling or governing,” and has no reference to passing a judicial sentence.

I cannot pretend to speak decidedly on a question so mysterious as this. I am however inclined to think that the last view of the four is the most probable one. The following quotations, given by Ford, throw light on this view, and are worth reading.

Bishop Smalridge says, "However difficult it may be to determine wisely the full meaning of these expressions, yet certainly we may rationally infer from them that there are some particular marks of glory with which the apostles of our Lord will be honoured above other Christians."

Mede says, "Whatsoever is meant by the reward, it is plain there is some peculiar and eminent degree of glory promised here to the apostles, which shall not be common to others with them: firstly, because it is the reward of their proper and peculiar service of Christ; secondly, because these twelve thrones, in regard of their number, can befit no more but these twelve; thirdly, because supposing the twelve tribes of Israel to be in a condition of bliss, it must needs be that those who sit on twelve thrones to judge or govern them, must be in a higher degree of dignity than those over whom they are set."

Let us add to this, that we are told that on the twelve foundations of the mystical city described in Revelation, there were the names of the "twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Rev. xxi. 14.)

[*Twelve tribes of Israel.*] Let it be noted, that the "twelve tribes" are four times mentioned in the New Testament: here, and in Matt. xix. 28; Acts xxvi. 7; and James i. 1. It is clear that although the ten tribes never came back from captivity, they were regarded in the New Testament time as still existing, distinct and separate, and not lost and mingled among other nations. We need not therefore doubt that the ten tribes exist now somewhere on the face of the globe, and in due time will be brought forth and shown to the world.