

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXII. 39–46.

39 And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

40 And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

41 And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed,

42 Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

43 And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

44 And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.

45 And when he rose up from prayer, and was come to his disciples, he found them sleeping for sorrow.

46 And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.

THE verses before us contain St. Luke's account of our Lord's agony in the garden. It is a passage of Scripture which we should always approach with peculiar reverence: the history which it records is one of the “deep things of God.” While we read it, the words of Exodus should come across our minds: “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.” (Exod. iii. 5.)

We see, firstly, in this passage, an *example of what believers ought to do in time of trouble*. The great Head of the Church Himself supplies the pattern. We are told that when He came to the Mount of Olives, the night before He was crucified, “He kneeled down and prayed.”

It is a striking fact that both the Old and New Testaments give one and the same receipt for bearing trouble. What says the book of Psalms? “Call upon me in the time of trouble: I will deliver thee.” (Psalm 1. 15.) What says the apostle James? “Is any afflicted? let him pray.” (James v. 13.) Prayer is the receipt which Jacob used, when he feared his brother Esau; prayer is the receipt which Job used when property and children were suddenly taken from him; prayer is the receipt which Hezekiah used when Sennacherib's threatening letter arrived; and prayer is the receipt which the Son of God Himself was not ashamed to use in the days of His flesh. In the hour of His mysterious agony He “prayed.”

Let us take care that we use our Master's remedy, if we want comfort in affliction. Whatever other means of relief we use, let us pray. The first Friend we should turn to ought to be God; the first message we should send ought to be to the throne of grace. No depression of spirits must prevent us; no crushing weight of sorrow must make us dumb. It is a prime device of Satan to supply the afflicted man with false reasons for keeping silence before God. Let us beware of the temptation to brood sullenly over our wounds. If we can say nothing else, we can say, “I am oppressed: undertake for me.” (Isaiah xxxviii. 14.)

We see, secondly, in these verses, *what kind of prayers a believer ought to make to God in time of trouble*. Once more the Lord Jesus Himself af-

fords a model to His people. We are told that He said, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.” He who spake these words, we must remember, had two distinct natures in one Person: He had a human will as well as a divine. When He said, “Not my will be done,” He meant that will which He had as man, with a body, flesh and blood, like our own.

The language used by our blessed Master in this place shows exactly what should be the spirit of a believer’s prayer in his distress. Like Jesus, he should tell his desires openly to his heavenly Father, and spread his wishes unreservedly before Him; but like Jesus, he should do it all with an entire submission of will to the will of God. He should never forget that there may be wise and good reasons for his affliction. He should carefully qualify every petition for the removal of crosses with the saving clause, “If thou be willing.” He should wind up all with the meek confession, “Not my will, but thine be done.”

Submission of will like this is one of the brightest graces which can adorn the Christian character: it is one which a child of God ought to aim at in everything, if he desires to be like Christ; but at no time is such submission of will so needful as in the day of sorrow, and in nothing does it shine so brightly as in a believer’s prayers for relief. He who can say from his heart, when a bitter cup is before him, “Not my will, but thine be done,” has reached a high position in the school of God.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, an *example of the exceeding guilt and sinfulness of sin*. We are meant to learn this in Christ’s agony and bloody sweat, and all the mysterious distress of body and mind, which the passage describes. The lesson at first sight may not be clear to a careless reader of the Bible; but the lesson is there.

How can we account for the deep agony which our Lord underwent in the garden? What reason can we assign for the intense suffering, both mental and bodily, which He manifestly endured? There is only one satisfactory answer: it was caused by the burden of a world’s imputed sin, which then began to press upon Him in a peculiar manner. He had undertaken to be “sin for us,”—to be “made a curse for us,”—and to allow our iniquities to be laid on Himself. (2 Cor. v. 21; Gal. iii. 13; Isaiah. liii. 6.) It was the enormous weight of these iniquities which made Him suffer agony; it was the sense of a world’s guilt pressing Him down which made even the eternal Son of God sweat great drops of blood, and called from Him “strong crying and tears.” The cause of Christ’s agony was man’s sin. (Heb. v. 7.)

We must beware jealously of the modern notion that our blessed Lord’s life and death were nothing more than a great example of self-sacrifice. Such a notion throws darkness and confusion over the whole Gospel: it dishonours the Lord Jesus, and represents Him as less resigned in the day of

death than many a modern martyr. We must cling firmly to the old doctrine that Christ was “bearing our sins,” both in the garden and on the cross: no other doctrine can ever explain the passage before us, or satisfy the conscience of guilty man.

Would we see the sinfulness of sin in its true colours? Would we learn to hate sin with a godly hatred? Would we know something of the intense misery of souls in hell? Would we understand something of the unspeakable love of Christ? Would we comprehend Christ’s ability to sympathize with those that are in trouble? Then let the agony in the garden come often into our minds. The depth of that agony may give us some idea of our debt to Christ.

We see, lastly, in these verses, an *example of the feebleness of the best of saints*. We are told that while our Lord was in agony, His disciples fell asleep. In spite of a plain injunction to pray, and a plain warning against temptation, the flesh overcame the spirit. While Christ was sweating great drops of blood, His apostles slept!

Passages like these are very instructive; we ought to thank God that they have been written for our learning: they are meant to teach us humility. When apostles can behave in this way, the Christian who thinks he stands should take heed lest he fall. They are meant to reconcile believers to death, and make them long for that glorious body which they will have when Christ returns; then, and not till then, we shall be able to wait upon God without bodily weariness, and to serve Him day and night in His temple.

NOTES. LUKE XXII. 39–46.

39.—[*Went, as he was wont.*] Christ’s habit of going in the evening to the mount of Olives has been already mentioned in a former passage. (Luke xxi. 37.) At the feast of the passover, it must be remembered, multitudes of Jews came to Jerusalem from all parts of the world: it was no doubt impossible to find lodgings for all of them within the walls of the city: many of them probably passed the night in the villages round Jerusalem, or in the gardens lying near the city. This circumstance explains what we read in this verse. There was one particular place on the mount of Olives to which our Lord was in the habit of going, which was well-known to all the disciples, and to Judas Iscariot among the rest. Hence it was that Judas was able, though it was night, to lead our Lord’s enemies to the very spot where his Master was. To take any one prisoner by night of course requires an intimate knowledge of his habits, and of the place where he is. If Judas therefore had not guided the party which took Jesus, they might have spent the night in searching for Him in vain.

40.—[*Pray ...enter not into temptation.*] Let it be carefully noted that to be assaulted by temptation is one thing, but to enter into it quite another. We cannot avoid the assault, but we are not obliged to give way to it. We cannot prevent temptation coming to us, but it is our own fault if we “enter into temptation.” To be tempted is a painful thing, and a heavy trial; but to “enter into temptation” is a sin. It is vain to expect that we shall not be tempted, so long as there is a devil, and so long as we are in the body; but it must be our prayer and endeavour not to “enter into” the temptation. This is what our Lord sets before His disciples.

42.—[*This cup.*] Doddridge says, of this expression, “It was customary among the ancients to assign to each guest at a feast a particular cup, as well as a dish, and by the kind and quantity of the liquor contained in it, the respect of the entertained was expressed. Hence the word ‘cup’ came in general to signify a portion assigned, whether of pleasure or sorrow.” (See Psalm xi. 6; lxxiii. 10; lxxv. 8. Isai. li. 17. Jerem. xxv. 15. Matt. xx. 23.)

[*Not my will, but thine, be done.*] In this expression, and indeed throughout the verse, the great and mysterious truth that our Lord had two wills, a human and a divine will, is distinctly taught. In His Person the human nature and the divine were marvellously united. To use the words of the Article, “Two whole and perfect natures, the godhead and manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided.” But still we must carefully remember that while the two natures were united, the two wills were not confounded: our Lord had a will as perfect man, and He had also a will as perfect God. As God He had a will in entire harmony with the will of the Father,—a will to suffer, to die, to bear our sins, and to provide redemption on the cross; but as man He had a will which naturally shrank from death and pain, as everything which has the breath of life instinctively does. This is the will which we hear speaking in the verse before us. “Man,” says Theophylact, “naturally loves life.” Our Lord was a man exactly like ourselves in all things, sin only excepted. His bodily constitution, His nervous system, His capability of suffering, were all precisely like our own; therefore it is that He says, “Remove this cup from me,” and yet adds, “not my will, but thine, be done.”

The subject is undoubtedly a very mysterious one. The mystery, be it remembered, arises necessarily from our utter inability to understand the union of two natures in one Person. It is a depth which we have no line to fathom. How the Lord Jesus could be at the same time God and man,—as man weak but as God Almighty; for what reasons we see Him sometimes in the Gospels speaking as God, and sometimes as man; why we see Him sometimes veiling His divinity, and sometimes exhibiting it most clearly,—all these are questions which it is more easy to ask than to answer. Enough for us to know that it is so, and to believe and admire what we cannot explain.

One thing, however, we may safely remark,—that at no period of our Lord’s earthly ministry does the reality of His manhood come out so clearly as in His agony in the garden, and His death on the cross. As man, He endured temptation for us, and overcame Satan; as man He showed the intensity of His sufferings by bloody sweat, strong crying and tears; as man He thirsted on the cross, and said, “My God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The infinite merit of His passion unquestionably arose from the inseparable union of His godhead and His manhood. But the nature which is most prominently brought before us in His passion, is His nature as man.

43.—[*There appeared an angel.*] This circumstance in our Lord’s agony in the garden is only mentioned by St. Luke. It has given rise to many strange comments, and has even stumbled some Christians. It is a curious fact, that in the early ages of Christianity this verse and the following one were entirely omitted in some copies of St. Luke’s Gospel. It was ignorantly supposed that they were so derogatory to our Lord’s dignity, and so favourable to the Arian heresy, that they were not genuine. The omission was entirely unjustifiable. There is an immense preponderance of evidence to show that the two verses were as much inspired as any other part of the Gospel, and were really written by St. Luke. The omission, moreover, was entirely needless, and the fears which gave rise to it were fears without cause.

The object of the verse appears to be to supply additional proof that our Lord was really and truly man. As man, He was for a little time “lower than the angels” (Heb. ii. 9); as man, He condescended to receive comfort from angelic ministry; as man, He was willing to receive an expression of sympathy from angels, which the weakness of His disciples prevent-

ed them from giving. The reality of weakness is never so shown as when a person becomes the object of sympathy and help. As very God of very God, and Lord of angels and men, Jesus of course needed no angel to strengthen Him; but as very man, in the hour of His greatest weakness, He allowed an angel to minister to Him.

The German notion, that no real angel appeared to our Lord, and that this whole transaction took place in a trance or vision, is utterly untenable. At this rate we might explain away every fact in the Bible.

Lightfoot and others have a theory that the devil appeared to our Lord in the garden, in a visible horrible form, and that this angel appeared specially to strengthen our Lord against him. There seems nothing to justify the theory, and nothing to be gained if we admit it.

44.—[*In an agony, &c., &c.*] There can be little doubt that at this mysterious moment our Lord's distress of body and mind was most intense and bitter. It is plain that Satan was permitted to harass and assail Him with peculiar and special temptations. The prince of this world had indeed come. It is perfectly reasonable to suppose that as man, our Lord felt that shrinking from death and sufferings, of which He foreknew every particular, to which all flesh and blood, even sinless, must needs be liable.

But it is clear that we want some further explanation still. It will doubtless strike every well-informed person that hundreds of martyrs have been known to suffer the most painful deaths without any such demonstrations of mental and bodily agony as are here recorded in the case of our Lord. How are we to account for this? How are we to explain the remarkable circumstance that our Lord appears to have felt more distressed than many a martyr has done in the prospect of being burned alive, or even when at the stake?

I believe that these questions can never be satisfactorily answered by any Socinian, or by any upholder of the modern strange opinions about Christ's death. I believe that the favourite new theory, that both in death and life we are meant to see in Jesus only a great *example* of self-sacrifice and self-denial, utterly breaks down here. It makes our blessed Lord show less calmness in his last hours than many of His poor weak servants have shown when they were martyred.

The only satisfactory explanation of Christ's intense agony is the old doctrine of imputed sin. He had engaged to die for our sins. His death was a vicarious death. As our substitute, He was about to bear our iniquities, to suffer for us, and to pay our debts to God with His own blood: He was about to be counted a sinner, and be punished, that we might be counted righteous, and be delivered from punishment. The sin of the world began to be laid upon Him in a special manner in the garden: He was being "made a curse" for us, by bearing our sins; this was the principal cause of His agony and bloody sweat. The words of Isaiah were being fulfilled: "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." "The Lord made the iniquity of us all to meet on Him." (Isai. liii. 10, 6.)

The following quotations on this most important subject are worth reading.

Baxter says, "This agony was not from the fear of death, but from the deep sense of God's wrath against sin, which He as our sacrifice was to bear, in greater pain than mere dying, which His servants often bear with peace."

Sir Matthew Hale, quoted by Ford, says, "Christ stood under the imputation of all our sins; and though He was personally innocent, yet judicially and by way of imputation, He was the greatest offender that ever was. As our Lord was pleased to be our representative in bearing our sins, and to stand in our stead, so all these affections and motions of His soul did bear the same conformity as if acted by us. As He put on the person of the sinner, so He put on the same sorrow, the same shame, the same trembling, under the apprehension of the wrath of His Father, that we must have done. And as an imputed sin drew with it the obliga-

tion to punishment, so it did by necessary consequences raise all those storms and compassions in the soul of Christ as it would have done in the person of a sinner, sin only excepted."

[*His sweat...great drops of blood.*] It is observed by all the best commentators that there is good medical evidence that such a mixture of blood and sweat as that here recorded, can take place, and has taken place in cases of great mental and bodily distress.

It is worthy of remark that St. Luke is the only one of the four Evangelists who mentions the circumstance now before us, and that he was himself a physician.

Theophylact observes that this bloody sweat is one among many strong evidences that our Lord's body was a real body, like our's, with flesh, blood, and all other things pertaining to man's constitution. He observes also, that it supplies an unanswerable argument against the heresy of those who maintained that our Lord's body was only a seeming, or "phantastic" body, but not a real one.

An unworthy question has been started by some as to the manner in which St. Luke knew of this bloody sweat, when our Lord was manifestly alone at the time of its occurrence. And we are gravely told, as a solution of the supposed difficulty, that probably "the marks of such drops would be visible after the termination of the agony!" Questions like this are calculated to strike a blow at the root of all inspiration. If we are not to suppose the Gospel writers recorded anything except what they obtained from eye-witnesses, or saw with their own eyes, we shall take a miserably low view of the real nature of the inspiration of Scripture. We need not doubt that in this, and many other instances, St. Luke simply wrote down what was revealed to him by the Holy Ghost, and that in supplying or withholding facts in our Lord's history he was not dependent on mere human information, but was entirely guided by God.

The whole subject of this verse and the preceding one will be found very fully and ably discussed in the Commentary of Calovius, the Lutheran commentator.

45.—[*Sleeping for sorrow.*] Let it be noted here that St. Luke is the only evangelist who mentions the cause of the disciples being asleep. Flesh and blood cannot endure much either of sorrow or joy, without giving way. The same three who slept in Gethsemane were the three who slept at the transfiguration.

46.—[*Rise and pray.*] Bengel remarks here, with much shrewdness, that a standing posture of the body is best suited for overcoming drowsiness in prayer.