EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

*Author of “Home Truths,” etc.*

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LUKE XXII. 47–53.

47 And while he yet spake, be­hold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.

48 But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

49 When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword?

50 And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.

51 And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.

52 Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?

53 When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.

WE should learn, for one thing, from these verses, *that the worst and most wicked acts may be done under a show of love to Christ.* We read that when the traitor Judas brought the enemies of Christ to take Him, he betrayed Him “with a kiss.” He made a pretence of affection and respect, at the very moment when he was about to deliver his Master into the hands of His deadliest enemies.

Conduct like this, unhappily, is not without its paral­lels. The pages of history record many an instance of enormous wickedness wrought out and perfected under the garb of religion; the name of God has too often been pressed into the service of persecution, treachery, and crime. When Jezebel would have Naboth killed, she ordered a “fast to be proclaimed,” and false witnesses to accuse him of “blaspheming God and the king” (1 Kings xxi. 9, 10); when Count de Montfort led a cru­sade against the Albigenses, he ordered them to be murdered and pillaged as an act of service to Christ’s Church; when the Spanish Inquisition tortured and burned suspected heretics, they justified their abominable dealings by a profession of zeal for God’s truth.—The false apostle Judas Iscariot has never wanted successors and imitators: there have always been men ready to betray Christ with a kiss, and willing to deliver the Gospel to its enemies under a show of respect.

Conduct like this, we need not doubt, is utterly abominable in the sight of God. To injure the cause of religion under any circumstances is a great sin, but to injure it while we pretend to show kindness is the black­est of crimes. To betray Christ at any time is the very height of wickedness, but to betray Him with a kiss, proves a man to have become a very child of hell.

We should learn, for another thing, from these verses, that *it is much easier to fight a little for Christ, than to endure hardness and go to prison and death for His sake.* We read that when our Lord’s enemies drew near to take Him, one of His disciples “smote the servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear.” Yet the zeal of that disciple was very short-lived; his courage soon died away: the fear of man overcame him. By and by, when our Lord was led away prisoner, he was led away alone: the disciple who was so ready to fight and smite with the sword, had actually forsaken his Master and fled!

The lesson before us is deeply instructive. To suffer patiently for Christ is far more difficult than to work actively; to sit still and endure calmly, is far more hard than to stir about and take part in the battle. Crusaders will always be found more numerous than Martyrs: the passive graces of religion are far more rare and precious than the active graces. *Work* for Christ may be done from many spurious motives,—from excite­ment, from emulation, from party-spirit, or from love of praise. *Suffering* for Christ will seldom be endured from any but one motive,—that motive is the grace of God.

We shall do well to remember these things in forming our estimate of the comparative grace of professing Christians. We err greatly if we suppose that those who do public work, and preach, and speak, and write, and fill the eyes of the Church, are those who are most honourable in God’s sight; such men are often far less esteemed by Him than some poor unknown believer, who has been lying for years on his back, enduring pain without a murmur: their public efforts perhaps will prove at last to have brought less glory to Christ than his patience, and to have done less good than his prayers. The grand test of grace is patient suffering. “I will show Saul,” said the Lord Jesus, “what great things he shall suffer for my name.” (Acts ix. 16.) Peter, we may be sure, did far less good when he drew his sword and cut off a man’s ear, than he did when he stood calmly before the council as a prisoner, and said “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (Acts iv. 20.)

We should learn, lastly, from these verses, that *the time during which evil is permitted to triumph is fixed and limited by God.* We read that our Lord said to His enemies when they took Him, “This is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

The sovereignty of God over everything done upon earth is absolute and complete. The hands of the wicked are bound until He allows them to work: they can do nothing without His permission. But this is not all: the hands of the wicked cannot stir one moment before God allows them to begin, and cannot stir one moment after God commands them to stop. The very worst of Satan’s instruments are working in chains. He could not touch Job’s property or person until God allowed him; he could not prevent Job’s prosperity returning, when God’s designs on Job were accomplished. Our Lord’s enemies could not take and slay Him, until the appointed “hour” of His weakness arrived; nor yet could they prevent His rising again, when the hour came in which He was declared the Son of God with power, by His resurrection from the dead. (Rom. i. 4.) When He was led forth to Calvary, it was “their hour.” When He rose victorious from the grave, it was His.

The verses before us throw light on the history of believers in ages gone by, from the time of the apostles down to the present day. They have often been sorely oppressed and persecuted, but the hand of their enemies has never been allowed entirely to prevail. The “hour” of their trials has generally been succeeded by a season of light: the triumph of their enemies has never been entire and complete,—they have had their “hour,” but they have had no more: after the persecution about Stephen, came the conversion of St. Paul; after the martyrdom of John Huss, came the German Reformation; after the Marian persecution, came the establishment of English Protes­tantism. The longest night has had its morning: the sharpest winters have been followed by spring: the heaviest storms have been changed for blue sky.

Let us take comfort in these words of our Lord, in looking forward to our own future lives. If we are followers of Christ, we shall have an “hour” of trial, and it may be a long hour too; but we may rest assured that the darkness shall not last one moment longer than God sees fit for us. In His good time it shall vanish away. “At evening time there shall be light.”

Finally, let us take comfort in these words of our Lord, in looking forward to the future history of the Church and the world. Clouds and darkness may gather round the ark of God; persecutions and tribulations may assail the people of God; the last days of the Church and world will probably be their worst days,—but the “hour” of trial, however grievous, will have an end. Even at the worst we may boldly say, “The night is far spent and the day is at hand.” (Rom. xiii. 12.)

NOTES. LUKE XXII. 47–53.

49*.—*[*What would follow.*]The Greek expression so translated is literally “the thing about to be, or about to take place.”

50.—[*One* *of them smote the servant.*]We know from St. John’s Gospel, that the servant’s name was Malchus, and the disciple who smote him was St. Peter. The two names are not given by Matthew, Mark, or Luke, though all three mention the fact. This cautious silence of the three first Gospel writers is easily accounted for. St. John’s Gospel was probably not written till many years had passed away after the crucifixion: there was then no necessity for keeping back names from motives of prudence.

[*Cut off his right ear.*]Theophylact sees an allegorical mean­ing in this incident. He regards the high priest’s servant as a type of the whole Jewish priesthood, who from that time were to become slaves and lose their right ear. (Deut. xv. 17.)

Barradius takes another allegorical view, and regards the ser­vant as an emblem of the whole Jewish nation, which had no ear to hear Christ and the prophets, and was deservedly punished by judicial deafness. But as Malchus was mercifully healed and had his ear restored, so was it to be with many of the Jews.

Strange as these views may seem, it is fair to say that Major quotes a passage from a modern writer, containing an elaborate attempt to maintain much the same theory, the main point of it being that the cutting off of the ear typified the abolition of the Levitical priesthood.

For my own part I am unable to see that these allegorical views are sound, and according to the mind of the Spirit.

51*.—*[*Suffer ye thus far.*]The meaning of these words is a point on which commentators are not agreed. The following are the three principal interpretations.

1. Some think that the words were addressed to our Lord’s enemies, and had special reference to His disciples. “Bear with them. Suffer them to go away quietly. Let them go away.” This is the view of Whitby, Scott, and Henry.

2. Some think that the words were addressed to our Lord’s disciples, and were intended to calm them, and restrain them from fighting. “Suffer them to take me. Permit them to lay hands on me. Do not attempt resistance. Let them carry out the will of God, by taking me.” This is the view of Calvin, Brentius, Gerhard, Bengel, Major, Olshausen, Burgon.

3. Some think that the words were addressed to our Lord’s enemies, but with special reference to the case of Malchus. “Suffer me to heal this wounded man. Before binding me, let me do an act of kindness, to repair the wrong done by my hasty disciple.” This is the view of Bullinger, Barradius, Doddridge, Clarke, Alford.

The first and second views are certainly in harmony with the account given by the other evangelists. The last is per­haps the one most in accordance with the simple view of the Greek words.

[*He touched...ear...healed him.*]There are several re­markable things about this miracle.

It is the only instance in the Gospels of our Lord healing a fresh wound caused by external violence.

It is a striking instance of a miracle worked on an enemy, unasked for, without faith in the person healed, and without any apparent thankfulness for the cure.

It is an extraordinary proof of the wickedness and hard­ness of our Lord’s enemies, that so wonderful a miracle as this could be wrought without any effect being produced on them. Some think that in the darkness the miracle was not seen by anyone except those immediately round Malchus.

52*.—*[*The chief priests.*]Let it be noted that so much importance was attached to making our Lord a prisoner, that men of the rank and dignity of high priests were not ashamed to go out at night to accompany the soldiers who went to arrest Him.

53.—[*Your* *hour...power of darkness.*]Two parties seem to be brought in here: the wicked Jews, who were about to deliver our Lord to Pilate, and the devil, under whose instigation they were acting. It was the brief “hour” of triumph which the unbelieving Jews, by the determinate counsel and foreknow­ledge of God, were to enjoy. It was the little season, during which the prince of the darkness of this world was to have “power,” and to all appearance to prevail over the second Adam, as he had prevailed over the first. And yet neither wicked men nor a malicious devil could go a hair’s breadth beyond the limit appointed by God, or triumph over the Son of God a minute beyond the time decreed by the eternal counsels. They knew it not, but so it was. Even now, our Lord would have them know they were only able to take Him prisoner because God permitted them a little season of “power.”