

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 XXIII. 1–12.

<p>1 And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate.</p> <p>2 And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this <i>fellow</i> perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ a King.</p> <p>3 And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest <i>it</i>.</p> <p>4 Then said Pilate to the chief priests and to the people, I find no fault in this man.</p> <p>5 And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place.</p> <p>6 When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilæan.</p> <p>7 And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to</p>	<p>Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time.</p> <p>8 And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long <i>season</i>, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.</p> <p>9 Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing.</p> <p>10 And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him.</p> <p>11 And Herod with his men of war set him at nought, and mocked him, and arrayed him in a gorgeous robe, and sent him again to Pilate.</p> <p>12 And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves.</p>
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LET us observe, for one thing, in this passage, *what false accusations were laid to our Lord Jesus Christ's charge*. We are told that the Jews accused Him of "perverting the nation,—forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar,—and stirring up the people." In all this indictment, we know, there was not a word of truth. It was nothing but an ingenious attempt to enlist the feelings of a Roman governor against our Lord.

False witness and slander are two favourite weapons of the devil: he was a liar from the beginning, and is still the father of lies. (John viii. 44.) When he finds that he cannot stop God's work, his next device is to blacken the character of God's servants, and to destroy the value of their testimony. With this weapon he assaulted David: "False witnesses," he says, "did rise against me: they laid to my charge things that I knew not." With this weapon he assaulted the prophets: Elijah was a "troubler of Israel!" Jeremiah was a man who "sought not the welfare of the people but the hurt!" (Psalm xxxv. 11; 1 Kings xviii. 17; Jer. xxxviii. 4.) With this weapon he assaulted the apostles: they were "pestilent fellows," and men who "turned the world upside down." (Acts xxiv. 5; xvii. 6.) With this weapon he assaulted our Lord all through His ministry: he stirred up his agents to call Him a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a Samaritan and a devil. (Luke vii. 34; John viii. 48.) And here, in the verses before us, we find him plying his old weapon to the very last: Jesus is arraigned before Pilate upon charges which were utterly untrue.

The servant of Christ must never be surprised if he has to drink of the same cup with his Lord. When He who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, was foully slandered, who can expect to escape? "If they called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call them of his house-

hold?" (Matt. x. 25.) Nothing is too bad to be reported against a saint: perfect innocence is no fence against enormous lying, calumny, and misrepresentation; the most blameless character will not secure us against false tongues. We must bear the trial patiently: it is part of the cross of Christ. We must sit still, lean back on God's promises, and believe that in the long run truth will prevail. "Rest in the Lord," says David, "and wait patiently for him."—"He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday." (Psalm xxxvii. 6, 7.)

Let us observe, for another thing, in this passage, *the strange and mingled motives which influence the hearts of unconverted great men*. We are told that when our Lord was sent by Pilate to Herod, king of Galilee, "Herod was exceeding glad; for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him."

These words are remarkable. Herod was a sensual, worldly man,—the murderer of John the Baptist,—a man living in foul adultery with his brother's wife. Such a man, we might have supposed, would have had no desire to see Christ. But Herod had an uneasy conscience: the blood of God's murdered saint no doubt rose often before his eyes, and destroyed his peace. The fame of our Lord's preaching and miracles had penetrated even into his court: it was said that another witness against sin had risen up, who was even more faithful and bold than John the Baptist, and who confirmed his teaching by works which even the power of kings could not perform. These rumours made Herod restless and uncomfortable. No wonder that his curiosity was stirred, and he "desired to see Christ."

It may be feared that there are many great and rich men like Herod in every age of the Church,—men without God, without faith, and living only for themselves; they generally live in an atmosphere of their own, flattered, fawned upon, and never told the truth about their souls,—haughty, tyrannical, and knowing no will but their own. Yet even these men are sometimes conscience-stricken and afraid. God raises up some bold witness against their sins, whose testimony reaches their ears: at once their curiosity is stirred; they feel "found out," and are ill at ease. They flutter round his ministry, like the moth round the candle, and seem unable to keep away from it, even while they do not obey it; they praise his talents, and openly profess their admiration of his power: but they never get any further. Like Herod, their conscience produces within them a morbid curiosity to see and hear God's witnesses; but, like Herod, their heart is linked to the world by chains of iron. Tossed to and fro by storms of lust or ungovernable passions, they are never at rest while they live, and after all their fitful struggles of conscience, they die at length in their sins.—This is a painful history. But it is the history of many rich men's souls.

Let us learn from Herod's case to pity great men. With all their greatness and apparent splendour, they are often thoroughly miserable within. Silks and satins and official robes, often cover hearts which are utter strangers to peace. That man knows not what he is wishing, who wishes to be a rich man.—Let us pray for rich men, as well as pity them: they carry weight in the race for eternal life; if they are saved, it can only be by the greatest miracles of God's grace. Our Lord's words are very solemn: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matt. xix. 24.)

Let us observe, finally, in this passage, *how easily and readily unconverted men can agree in disliking Christ*. We are told that when Pilate sent our Lord a prisoner to Herod, "the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together; for before they were at enmity between themselves." We know not the cause of their enmity: it was probably some petty quarrel, such as will arise among great as well as small. But whatever the cause of enmity, it was laid aside when a common object of contempt, fear, or hatred was brought before them. Whatever else they disagreed about, Pilate and Herod could agree to despise and persecute Christ.

The incident before us is a striking emblem of a state of things which may always be seen in the world. Men of the most discordant opinions can unite in opposing truth; teachers of the most opposite doctrines can make common cause in fighting against the Gospel. In the days of our Lord, the Pharisees and the Sadducees might be seen combining their forces to entrap Jesus of Nazareth and put Him to death; in our own times we sometimes see Romanists and Socinians, infidels and idolaters, worldly pleasure-lovers and bigoted ascetics, the friends of so called liberal views and the most determined opponents of all changes, all ranked together against evangelical religion. One common hatred binds them together: they hate the cross of Christ. To use the words of the apostles in the Acts: "Against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, are gathered together." (Acts iv. 27.) All hate each other very much, but all hate Christ much more.

The true Christian must not count the enmity of the world a strange thing. He must not marvel, if like St. Paul at Rome, he finds the way of life, a "way everywhere spoken against," and if all around him agree in disliking his religion. (Acts xxviii. 22.) If he expects that by any concession he can win the favour of man, he will be greatly deceived. Let not his heart be troubled: he must wait for the praise of God. The saying of his Master should often come across his mind: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John xv. 19.)

NOTES. LUKE XXIII. 1-12.

- 1.—[*Unto Pilate.*] Pilate was the Roman governor of Judæa. Without him the Jews had no power to put our Lord to death. The mere fact that they were obliged to apply publicly to a foreign ruler for the carrying out their murderous plan was a striking proof that the “sceptre had departed from Judah,” and the time of Messiah had come. (Gen. xlix. 10.)
- 2.—[*Perverting...forbidding to give tribute.*] The duplicity and dishonesty of this charge are evident. When the enemies of our Lord wanted to bring Him into disfavour with the Jews, they had asked Him “if it was lawful to pay tribute unto Cæsar.” (Luke xx. 22.) But now when they want to make Him out an offender at the bar of the Roman governor, they charge Him with forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar the Roman emperor. The falseness of the charge is as striking as its dishonesty.
- 3.—[*Thou sayest it.*] This is the remarkable saying which St. Paul refers to when he tells Timothy that our Lord “before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession.” (1 Tim. vi. 13.) But we must remember that St. Luke only reports a portion of what our Lord said. The Gospel of St. John contains other particulars which are not reported here. (John xviii. 28-38.)
- 4.—[*I find no fault in this man.*] It is clear that Pilate said this after the conversation with our Lord, reported by St. John, and after satisfying himself that He claimed no temporal kingdom, and was not such a King as would interfere with the Roman authority. He had in particular heard our Lord’s words: “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John xviii. 36.)
- 5.—[*They were the more fierce.*] The Greek word so translated, means literally, “they grew more strong, more violent, more urgent: they persisted in their accusation.”
- 7.—[*He sent him to Herod.*] This Herod was Herod Antipas, the same Herod who put to death John the Baptist. He was son of Herod the Great, who caused all the children under two years of age to be murdered at Bethlehem, and uncle of Herod Agrippa, who slew James the apostle with the sword, and would have slain Peter if he had not been miraculously delivered from prison.

The family of the Herods was Idumæan. They were all descended from Esau, the father of Edom. This circumstance is noteworthy, when we see their unceasing enmity against Christ and His people. The seed of Esau seems to carry on the old enmity against the seed of Jacob.
- 8.—[*Exceeding glad...desirous to see...heard many things, &c.*] The expressions in this verse are very remarkable. They bring before us the fearful history of Herod’s sins, and throw light on the power of conscience. Herod had not forgotten John the Baptist and his testimony; moreover he had probably heard much about our Lord from his steward Chuza, whose wife Joanna was one of our Lord’s disciples. (Luke viii. 3.)
- 9.—[*He answered him nothing.*] It is probable that it would have been useless to answer Herod’s questions. Herod had heard the truth often from John the Baptist’s mouth: what he wanted was not more knowledge, but a heart and a will to act upon what he knew.
- 10.—[*The chief priests and scribes stood.*] It is clear that these bitter enemies of our Lord followed Him from place to place, and from court to court, with their accusations. The great additional fatigue which this going backwards and forwards from one ruler to another must have entailed on our Lord, should be remembered in estimating the whole amount of His sufferings.

11.—[*With his men of war.*] The Greek word so rendered means literally, “his armed force,” or “guards.” Of course we cannot suppose that Herod had a large army with him. The soldiers around him were only his body-guard, or escort.

[*Set him at nought...mocked...gorgeous robe.*] It is evident that Herod regarded our Lord as little better than a foolish, fanatical and contemptible person,—a person to be mocked and ridiculed, but not to be feared. The gorgeous, or shining robe put on Him, was probably such as candidates for high office used to wear. It was intended to ridicule His supposed claim to be a King, and to show that Herod thought it absurd. Thus was our Lord made “a scorn of men, and the outcast of the people.” (Psalm xxii. 6.)

[*Sent him again to Pilate.*] It is worthy of remark that we are specially told that neither the ruler of Galilee, nor the ruler of Judæa, could find any fault in our Lord. In Galilee most of His miracles had been wrought, and much of His time spent; yet the ruler of Galilee had nothing to lay to His charge. He was to be crucified as “a lamb without blemish or spot.”

12.—[*Pilate and Herod were made friends.*] It is doubtless true that neither Pilate nor Herod were afraid of Christ, or were animated by any special feeling of hatred towards Him personally; but it is no less true that they agreed in despising Him, and insulting Him, and were utterly unbelieving as to His claim to faith and respect. Their reconciliation therefore on the occasion of His trial, is a fact that is very significant and instructive.

It is certain that the circumstance struck the apostles very much; they regarded it as a fulfilment of part of the second Psalm. They mentioned in prayer to God the union of Pilate, Herod, and the Jews against their Master. (See Acts iv. 23-30.)

I mention this, because there is a disposition in some quarters, now-a-days, to deny the significance of the reconciliation of Pilate and Herod, and the correctness of the lesson commonly drawn from it. The comment of the Holy Ghost on the transaction outweighs all the reasonings of man.

Theophylact remarks on this verse, that “It is matter of shame to Christians, that while the devil can persuade wicked men to lay aside their enmities in order to do harm, Christians cannot even keep up friendship in order to do good.