

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXIII. 26–38.

26 And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear *it* after Jesus.

27 And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.

28 But Jesus turning unto them, said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.

29 For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed *are* the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.

30 Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.

31 For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.

33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

35 And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided *him*, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

36 And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,

37 And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

38 And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

WE ought to notice, in this passage, *our Lord's words of prophetic warning*. We read that He said to the women who followed Him, as He was being led away to Calvary, "Weep not for me, but for yourselves. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck."

These words must have sounded peculiarly terrible to the ears of a Jewish woman: to her it was always a disgrace to be childless. The idea of a time coming when it would be a blessing to have no children must have been a new and tremendous thought to her mind; and yet within fifty years this prediction of Christ was literally fulfilled! The siege of Jerusalem by the Roman army, under Titus, brought down on all the inhabitants of the city the most horrible sufferings from famine and pestilence that can be conceived. Women are reported to have actually eaten their own children during the siege, for want of food. Upon none did the last judgments sent upon the Jewish nation fall so heavily as upon the wives, the mothers, and the little children.

Let us beware of supposing that the Lord Jesus holds out to man nothing but mercy, pardon, love, and forgiveness. Beyond all doubt He is plenteous in mercy: there is mercy with Him like a mighty stream; He "delighteth in mercy:" but we must never forget that there is justice with Him as well as mercy. There are judgments preparing for the impenitent and the unbelieving; there is wrath revealed in the Gospel for those who harden themselves in wickedness. The same cloud which was bright to Israel was dark to the Egyptians: the same Lord Jesus who invites the labouring and heavy-

laden to come to Him and rest, declares most plainly that unless a man repents he will perish, and that he who believeth not shall be damned. (Luke xiii. 3. Mark xvi. 16.) The same Saviour who now holds out His hands to the disobedient and gainsaying, will come one day in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the Gospel. (2 Thess. i. 8.) Let these things sink down into our hearts. Christ is indeed most gracious: but the day of grace must come to an end at last. An unbelieving world will find at length, as Jerusalem did, that there is judgment with God as well as mercy. No wrath will fall so heavily as that which has been long accumulating and heaping up.

We ought to notice, for another thing, in this passage, *our Lord's words of gracious intercession*. We read that when He was crucified, His first words were "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." His own racking agony of body did not make Him forget others: the first of His seven sayings on the cross was a prayer for the souls of His murderers. His prophetic office He had just exhibited by a remarkable prediction; His kingly office He was about to exhibit soon by opening the door of paradise to the penitent thief; His priestly office He now exhibited by interceding for those who crucified Him: "Father," He said, "forgive them."

The fruits of this wonderful prayer will never be fully seen until the day when the books are opened, and the secrets of all hearts are revealed. We have probably not the least idea how many of the conversions to God at Jerusalem which took place during the first six months after the crucifixion, were the direct reply to this marvellous prayer. Perhaps this prayer was the first step towards the penitent thief's repentance; perhaps it was one means of affecting the centurion, who declared our Lord "a righteous man," and the people who "smote their breasts and returned;" perhaps the three thousand converted on the day of Pentecost, foremost, it may be at one time among our Lord's murderers, owed their conversion to this very prayer.—The day will declare it: there is nothing secret that shall not be revealed. This only we know, that "the Father heareth the Son alway." (John xi. 42.) We may be sure that this wondrous prayer was heard.

Let us see in our Lord's intercession for those who crucified Him, one more proof of Christ's infinite love to sinners. The Lord Jesus is indeed most pitiful, most compassionate, most gracious. None are too wicked for Him to care for: none are too far gone in sin for His almighty heart to take interest about their souls. He wept over unbelieving Jerusalem; He heard the prayer of the dying thief; He stopped under the tree to call the publican Zacchæus; He came down from heaven to turn the heart of the persecutor Saul; He found time to pray for His murderers even on the cross. Love like this is a love that passeth knowledge: the vilest of sinners have no cause to be

afraid of applying to a Saviour like this. If we want warrant and encouragement to repent and believe, the passage before us surely supplies enough.

Finally, let us see in our Lord's intercession, a striking example of the spirit which should reign in the hearts of all His people. Like Him, let us return good for evil, and blessing for cursing. Like Him, let us pray for those who evil entreat us and persecute us. The pride of our hearts may often rebel against the idea; the fashion of this world may call it mean-spirited to behave in such a way: but let us never be ashamed to imitate our divine Master. The man who prays for his enemies shows the mind that was in Christ, and will have his reward.

NOTES. LUKE XXIII. 26-38.

26.—[*As they led him away, &c.*] Let it be noted that St. Luke says nothing about the cruel treatment which our Lord received from the Roman soldiers after Pilate had condemned Him. His Gospel was specially written for the Gentiles, and he purposely passes over the conduct of the Gentiles at this particular stage of our Lord's passion.

I cannot admit the justice of Alford's remark on this verse. He says, "The break between the 25th and 26th verses is harsh in the extreme, and if Luke had any materials wherewith to fill it up, I have no doubt he would have done so." I deeply regret the tendency of this remark. I believe that St. Luke was entirely guided by the Holy Ghost, both in the details which he omits and the details which he inserts; and I believe that the omission of any details of Christ's passion between the condemnation and the going forth to Calvary, was advisedly and wisely ordered, in order to meet the prejudices of Gentile readers.

[*They laid hold upon one Simon, &c.*] It would appear that our Lord carried the cross Himself until He was exhausted, and that after this Simon was pressed into the service of carrying it, by the soldiers.

Nothing certain is known about this Simon, although the mention of his sons, Alexander and Rufus, by St. Mark (Mark xv. 21), would lead us to suppose that he was a disciple of Christ when the Gospels were written, whatever he was at the time of the crucifixion. Cornelius à Lapide mentions several traditions concerning Simon and his sons, which are not worth repeating.

27.—[*A great company of people and of women.*] Who these were we are not told. Some commentators think they were disciples and friends of Christ. Most think that they were persons who were moved to pity by the sight of an innocent person suffering, but had no sense of their own sins, and no faith in Christ. "Melting affections," says Burkitt, "are not infallible marks of grace, even when they proceed from a sense of Christ's sufferings." This last opinion seems most probable, when we consider the tenor of the next two verses.

Burgon quotes a remark, "That no woman is mentioned as speaking against our Lord in His life, or having a share in His death. On the contrary, He was anointed by a woman for His burial,—women were the last at His grave and the first at His resurrection,—to a woman He first appeared when He rose again,—women ministered to His wants,—women bewailed and lamented Him,—a heathen woman interceded for His life with her husband, Pilate,—and, above all, of a woman He was born."

28.—[*Daughters of Jerusalem.*] This expression helps the theory that the people who accompanied our Lord to Calvary were not disciples. We have no account in the Gospels of any women of Jerusalem who believed.

[*Yourselves and your children.*] Let it be noted that many of the women to whom our Lord here spoke might easily have been living forty years after, when Titus took Jerusalem.

29.—[*The days are coming, &c.*] These “days” mean the period of the last wars between the Jews and the Romans, and in particular the siege of Jerusalem.

30.—[*To say to the mountains ...to the hills, &c.*] The expressions of this verse are figurative and parabolical. They signify the intense misery and distress, and the desperate helplessness of all who would be found inside Jerusalem during its siege. (See Isai. ii. 19. Heb. x. 8. Rev. vi. 16.)

Some have seen a reference in the words to the caverns and excavations in the rocks under Jerusalem, in which many of the Jews took refuge when the city was taken.

31.—[*A green tree...the dry.*] The common opinion of all the best commentators is that our Lord here contrasts Himself and the Jewish nation. “If the Romans practice such cruelties on me, who am a green tree, and the very source of life, what will they do one day to your nation, which is like a barren, withered trunk, dead in trespasses and sins?”

Bengel maintains that the “green tree” here represents the young, strong, and healthy; and the “dry tree,” the old, feeble, and barren. In support of this view he quotes a passage from Josephus, describing how the Romans, after Jerusalem was taken, slew the old and feeble Jews, but shut up in confinement those who were vigorous and serviceable. In this opinion, however, Bengel stands almost alone.

32.—[*Malefactors led with him.*] This, let it be noted, was a literal fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy, that Messiah was to be “numbered with the transgressors.” (Isai. liii. 12.)

33.—[*The place which is called Calvary.*] The reason why this place was so called is not known with certainty, and has given rise to many conjectures.

Origen, Tertullian, Athanasius, Epiphanius, Augustine, Cyril, and others, according to Cornelius à Lapide, hold the absurd opinion that Calvary was the place where Adam was buried.

Jerome, Beda, Jansenius, and others, hold that Calvary was a place where criminals were executed, and sometimes beheaded, and where skulls and bones of dead men were consequently lying about.

Some have thought that Calvary was a bare, rocky hill, not unlike a skull in shape and appearance, and that hence arose its name.

Let it be noted that at the time when our Lord was crucified Calvary was outside the walls of Jerusalem. It was meet and right that our Lord, as the great sacrifice for sin, should suffer without the gate. (Heb. xiii. 12.) At the present day, the place commonly supposed to have been Calvary is within the walls of Jerusalem.

The common opinion that Calvary was a mount or hill is, at any rate, destitute of any foundation in Scripture. All the four Gospel-writers speak of it as “a place.” Not one of them calls it a “mount.”

34.—[*Father, forgive them.*] These words were probably spoken while our Lord was being nailed to the cross, or as soon as the cross was reared up on end. It is worthy of remark that as soon as the blood of the Great Sacrifice began to flow the Great High Priest began to intercede.

Let it be noted that during the six hours in which our Lord was on the cross He showed that He possessed full power as the Son of God, and that though He suffered, His sufferings were voluntarily undertaken. As King and Prophet He opened the gates of life to the penitent thief, and foretold His entrance into Paradise; as Priest, He intercedes, in the words before us, for those who crucified Him.

[*They know not what they do.*] The principle involved in this saying deserves notice, and requires fencing with two preliminary remarks.

On the one hand, we must beware of supposing that ignorance is not blameworthy, and that ignorant persons *deserve* to be forgiven their sins. At this rate ignorance would be a desirable thing. All spiritual ignorance is more or less culpable: it is part of man's sin, that he does not know better than he does. His not knowing God is only part of his guilt.

On the other hand, we cannot fail to observe in Scripture that sins of ignorance are less sinful before God than sins of knowledge, and that no case is apparently so hopeless as that of the man who sins wilfully against light.

Our Lord's meaning in the words before us appears to be that those who crucified Him did not at the time know the full amount of the wickedness they were committing. They knew that they were crucifying one whom they regarded as an imposter: they did not know that they were actually crucifying their own Messiah, the Son of God.—This is what St. Peter distinctly asserts: "I wot that through ignorance ye did it." (Acts iii. 17.) So also St. Paul says, "Had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." (1 Cor. ii. 8.) To use the words of Gill on this passage, our Lord "does not mention the ignorance of those He prays for as a plea for pardon, but as a description of their state." As Clarke observes, "If ignorance does not excuse a crime, at least it diminishes the intensity of it."

The question naturally arises, "Who were those for whom our Lord prayed?"—I cannot, as some do, confine His prayer to the Roman soldiers who nailed Him to the cross. I rather regard it as applying also to the great bulk of the Jewish people who were standing by, and aiding and abetting His crucifixion. They were mere tools in the hands of the leading Scribes and Pharisees. They were blindly led by blind teachers. They did not really know what they were doing.

Whether our Lord included the Chief Priests and Scribes, Annas and Caiaphas and their companions, who had heard His declaration that He was the Christ, and yet formally rejected and condemned Him, I think more than doubtful. I believe they were given over to judicial blindness, and most of them probably perished in their sins. We never read of any of them being converted. The priests who were "obedient to the faith" (Acts vi. 7) were probably of a different party from those who condemned Christ.

Let it be noted that the union of clear head-knowledge of Christ with wilful heart-rejection of Him is the nearest approach that can be made to a definition of the unpardonable sin. St. Paul seems to teach this in the sixth chapter of Hebrews; above all, he seems to point to this when he says of himself, "I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." (1 Tim. i. 13.)

[*Parted his raiment, and cast lots.*] Let it be noted here that our Lord was evidently crucified naked. The shame and unseemliness of such a posture in death must doubtless have added much to the misery of the punishment of crucifixion.

The literal fulfilment of the twenty-second Psalm in this verse and in the following one, ought to be carefully observed. (Psalm xxii. 17, 18.) The prophecies about Christ's first advent to suffer were fulfilled and accomplished in every word. In like manner, and by analogy, we are justified in expecting a literal fulfilment of every word in the prophecies of Christ's second advent to reign in glory.

35.—[*He saved others, let him save himself, if he be Christ.*] The utter blindness of the Jewish nation on the subject of Messiah's sufferings is a very remarkable fact. To us those sufferings appear most plainly foretold by David, Daniel, and Isaiah (Psalm xxii.; Dan. ix.; Isai. liii.), and most plainly prefigured and typified by all the sacrifices of the Mosaic law; yet the Jewish teachers of our Lord's time could not see them. The idea of Messiah "saving

others” by His own death seems never to have entered into their minds. The words before us are a striking proof of the blindness of the rulers: they might have been told most truly, “Because this person before you is Christ, He does not save Himself; and He does not save Himself in order that He may save others.”

37.—[*If thou be...King of the Jews...save thyself.*] The difference between the mockery of the Jewish rulers and of the soldiers ought to be noticed. The Jews mocked our Lord as a helpless “Christ,” or Messiah unable to save Himself, and therefore unfit to be a Saviour of Israel.—The ignorant Gentile soldiers, on the contrary, mocked Him as a helpless “King of the Jews,” without a crown, a kingdom, or an army, and therefore only fit to be ridiculed.—The Jew scoffed at His claim to be called the Messiah: the Gentile scoffed at His claim to be regarded as a King. The cross and the apparent weakness were, as usual, the stumbling-stone in both cases.

38.—[*A superscription...Greek...Latin...Hebrew.*] All careful readers of the Bible must have observed that the superscription placed over our Lord’s head on the cross is variously given by the Gospel-writers. Each one reports it in a manner slightly different from the other three. This apparent discrepancy has given rise to various explanations.

In order to solve the difficulty, we must remember that the superscription was written in three different languages. Greek was the language best known in the world at the time when our Lord was crucified, and there was a Greek superscription for the benefit of strangers from foreign parts.—Latin was the language of the Romans, and there was a Latin superscription, because the sentence on our Lord was passed by a Latin judge, and executed by Latin soldiers.—Hebrew was the language of the Jews, and there was a superscription in the Hebrew tongue, or in some dialect of the Hebrew, because Jesus was crucified as a Jew, that all Jews might see it.—But for anything we know, the superscription in each language may have slightly varied from the superscription in other languages. Matthew may have recorded it as it was in Hebrew,—Mark as it was in Latin,—Luke as it was in Greek;—and John, writing many years after the others, may have given the general substance of the other three.

This solution of the difficulty appears reasonable, and preferable to any other.

[*The King of the Jews.*] Let it be observed, that our Lord was crucified at last as a King. He came to set up a spiritual kingdom, and as a King He died.