

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XXIII. 44–49.

44 And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour.

45 And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst.

46 And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

47 Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.

48 And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.

49 And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.

LET us observe in these verses, *the miraculous signs which accompanied our Lord's death on the cross*. We are told that there was "a darkness over all the earth" for three hours. "The sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst."

It was meet and right that the attention of all around Jerusalem should be arrested in a marked way, when the great sacrifice for sin was being offered and the Son of God was dying. There were signs and wonders wrought in the sight of all Israel when the law was given on Sinai; there were signs and wonders, in like manner, when the atoning blood of Christ was shed on Calvary. There was a sign for an unbelieving world: the darkness at mid-day was a miracle which would compel men to think. There was a sign for the professing Church and the ministers of the temple: the rending of the veil which hung between the holy place and the holy of holies, was a miracle which would strike awe into the heart of every priest and Levite in Jewry.

Signs like these, on special occasions, let us remember, are a part of God's ways in dealing with man. He knows the desperate stupidity and unbelief of human nature; He sees it necessary to arouse our attention by miraculous works, when He brings in a new dispensation: He thus compels men to open their eyes whether they will or no, and to hear His voice for a little season. He has done so frequently in the days that are past: He did so when He gave the law; He did so in the passage before us, when He brought in the Gospel: He will do so once more when Christ comes again the second time. He will show a sneering, unbelieving world that He can suspend the laws of nature at His pleasure, and alter the framework of creation as easily as He called the earth into being. He will yet fulfil His words: "Yet once more, I shake not the earth only, but also the heavens." "The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion." (Heb. xii. 26; Isaiah xxiv. 23.)

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, *the remarkable words which our Lord spoke when He died*. We read that "when he had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost."

There is a depth of meaning, no doubt, in these words, which we have no line to fathom. There was something mysterious about our Lord's death, which made it unlike the death of any mere man. He who spoke the words before us, we must carefully remember, was God as well as man: His divine and human nature were inseparably united. His divine nature of course could not die. He says Himself, "I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." (John x. 17, 18.) Christ died, not as we die when our hour is come,—not because He was compelled and could not help dying, but voluntarily, and of His own free will.

'There is a sense, however, in which our Lord's words supply a lesson to all true Christians: they show us the manner in which death should be met by all God's children; they afford an example which every believer should strive to follow. Like our Master, we should not be afraid to confront the king of terrors: we should regard him as a vanquished enemy, whose sting has been taken away by Christ's death; we should think of him as a foe who can hurt the body for a little season, but after that has no more that he can do; we should await his approaches with calmness and patience, and believe that when flesh fails our soul will be in good keeping. This was the mind of dying Stephen: "Lord Jesus," he said, "receive my spirit." This was the mind of Paul the aged, when the time of his departure was at hand. He says, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." (Acts vii. 59; 2 Tim. i. 12.) Happy indeed are those who have a last end like this!

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *the power of conscience in the case of the centurion and the people who saw Christ die*. We are told that the centurion "glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man." We are told that the people who had come together to the sight, "smote their breasts and returned."

We know not exactly the nature of the feelings here described: we know not the extent to which they went, or the after-fruit which they brought forth. One thing, at all events, is clear: the Roman officer felt convinced that he had been superintending an unrighteous action, and crucifying an innocent person; the gazing crowd were pricked to the heart by a sense of having aided, countenanced, and abetted a grievous wrong. Both Jew and Gentile left Calvary that evening heavy-hearted, self-condemned, and ill at ease.

Great indeed is the power of conscience! Mighty is the influence which it is able to exercise on the hearts of men! It can strike terror into the minds of monarchs on their thrones; it can make multitudes tremble and shake before a few bold friends of truth, like a flock of sheep. Blind and mistaken as conscience often is, unable to convert man or lead him to Christ, it is still a most blessed part of man's constitution, and the best friend in the congrega-

tion that the preacher of the Gospel has. No wonder that Paul says, "By manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience." (2 Cor. iv. 2.)

He that desires inward peace must beware of quarrelling with his conscience. Let him rather use it well, guard it jealously, hear what it has to say, and reckon it his friend; above all, let him pray daily that his conscience may be enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and cleansed by the blood of Christ. The words of St. John are very significant: "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." (1 John iii. 21.) That man is doing well who can say, "I exercise myself to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man." (Acts xxiv. 16.)

NOTES. LUKE XXIII. 44-49.

44.—[*About the sixth hour.*] According to the Jewish mode of reckoning, the day began at what we should call six o'clock in the morning. Our Lord was crucified at the third hour, answering to our nine o'clock. The darkness began at the sixth hour, answering to our twelve o'clock in the day. It should be observed, therefore, that the supernatural darkness mentioned here took place precisely at the brightest part of the day, between twelve o'clock and three. Six hours was the whole length of time during which Jesus hung on the cross before He gave up the ghost.

[*There was a darkness.*] This was a miraculous darkness. It could not have been an eclipse of the sun, because our Lord's crucifixion took place at the passover, and the passover was always kept at the full moon, when an eclipse of the sun is impossible.

[*Over all the earth.*] The marginal reading of this expression seems preferable,—“over all the land.” There seems no necessity for supposing that the darkness extended beyond Palestine. Our Lord's ministry was specially directed to Israel, and the land of Israel was the land to which all miracles connected with His life and death were confined. (See the same expression in Luke xxi. 23.)

It is difficult to imagine any miraculous sign better calculated to arrest the attention of all people, and to strike awe into all minds than this sudden and unexpected darkness. It necessarily stopped all business, and obliged all men to be still, and think what could be its cause.

45.—[*The sun was darkened.*] We are not meant to regard this as a sign, or miracle, distinct from the darkness spoken of in the preceding verse. It is simply an amplification of the same fact, and intended to show how deep and intense the darkness was.

[*The veil of the temple was rent.*] This miracle must have been as striking and terrible to the priests who ministered in the temple, as the darkness was to the inhabitants of Palestine. It signified the opening of the way into the holiest by Christ's death,—the passing away of the Jewish dispensation,—and the revelation of the Gospel way of salvation to all mankind.

Doddridge remarks, "This being a high day, it is probable that Caiaphas the high priest might now be performing the solemn act of burning incense before the veil, which, if he did, it is astonishing that his obstinate heart should not be impressed with so awful and significant a phenomenon. There is no room to doubt that many of the other priests who had a hand in Christ's death saw the pieces of the veil, which considering its texture and other circumstances, must as fully have convinced them of this extraordinary fact as if they had been present."

46.—[*Cried with a loud voice.*] This expression, as well as all the verse, deserves particular notice. It shows that there was something peculiar and uncommon about our Lord's death. A dying man's voice is generally not "loud," but feeble.

To this circumstance, as well as to the expression "he gave up the ghost," all the best commentators, from Ambrose downwards, very properly direct our attention. It is evident, they tell us, that the Lord Jesus did not die because He was obliged, but because He chose voluntarily and of His own free will to submit to death. His death was "his own act." He "*offered himself* without spot to God."

Alford, after Stier, remarks that "none of the evangelists say that Jesus *died*, although that expression is ever after used of His death, when stated as one great fact." Matthew says that He "yielded up the Ghost." Mark, Luke, and John, though in different Greek words, say much the same, "He gave up the ghost."

I add to this remark that in all the five Old Testament passages which our translators have rendered, "giving up the ghost," the Septuagint Greek translators have not used the expressions applied in the Gospels to our Lord's death, nor anything like them. (Gen. xlix. 33; Job x. 18; xi. 20; xiv. 10; Jerem. xv. 9.) I also remark that the Greek expression about Sapphira, which is rendered, "yielded up the ghost" (Acts v. 10), is totally different from those used about our Lord's death.

The remarks of Brentius on the whole verse are peculiarly valuable.

47.—[*This was a righteous man.*] It may be doubted whether these words exactly convey the literal sense of the Greek expression. Alford would render it, "truly this man was innocent, or just."

48.—[*Beholding the things which were done.*] This expression seems to point to the darkness, and the earthquake which immediately followed our Lord's death. These signs struck awe into the minds of the gazing mob, which had mocked our Lord a few hours before. There was no raillery or mocking after this. Poole maintains that there is no proof that "the people" took part in mocking our Lord on the cross, but that it was confined to the scribes and priests. Yet the expression of St. Matthew and St. Mark about "those who passed by railing," besides the priests, seems to make his theory doubtful.

49.—[*The women.*] These would appear to be different from the women to whom our Lord spoke as He was carrying the cross. These came from Galilee. Those were "daughters of Jerusalem."