

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 XXIV. 36–43.

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| 36 And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace <i>be</i> unto you. | 40 And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them <i>his</i> hands and <i>his</i> feet. |
| 37 But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. | 41 And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? |
| 38 And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? | 42 And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. |
| 39 Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. | 43 And he took <i>it</i> , and did eat before them. |

WE should observe, in this passage, *the singularly gracious words with which our Lord introduced Himself to His disciples after His resurrection.* We read that He suddenly stood in the midst of them and said, “Peace be unto you.”

This was a wonderful saying, when we consider the men to whom it was addressed. It was addressed to eleven disciples, who three days before had shamefully forsaken their Master and fled. They had broken their promises; they had forgotten their professions of readiness to die for their faith; they had been scattered, “every man to his own,” and left their Master to die alone: one of them had even denied Him three times; all of them had proved backsliders and cowards,—and yet behold the return which their Master makes to His disciples! Not a word of rebuke is spoken: not a single sharp saying falls from His lips. Calmly and quietly He appears in the midst of them, and begins by speaking of peace: “Peace be unto you!”

We see, in this touching saying, one more proof that the love of Christ “passeth knowledge.” It is His glory to pass over a transgression: He “delighteth in mercy.” He is far more willing to forgive than men are to be forgiven, and far more ready to pardon than men are to be pardoned. There is in His almighty heart an infinite willingness to put away man’s transgressions; though our sins have been as scarlet He is ever ready to make them white as snow, to blot them out, to cast them behind His back, to bury them in the depths of the sea, to remember them no more. All these are Scriptural phrases intended to convey the same great truth. The natural man is continually stumbling at them, and refusing to understand them. At this we need not wonder: free, full, and undeserved forgiveness to the very uttermost is not the manner of man; but it is the manner of Christ.

Where is the sinner, however great his sins, who need be afraid of beginning to apply to such a Saviour as this? In the hand of Jesus there is mercy enough and to spare.—Where is the backslider, however far he may have fallen, who need be afraid of returning? “Fury is not in Christ” (Isai. xxvii. 4): He is willing to raise and restore the very worst.—Where is the saint who ought not to love such a Saviour, and to pay Him willingly a holy obe-

dience? There is forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared. (Psalm cxxx. 4.)—Where is the professing Christian who ought not to be forgiving towards his brethren? The disciples of a Saviour whose words were so full of peace, ought to be peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. (Coloss. iii. 13.)

We should observe, for another thing, in this passage, *our Lord's marvelous condescension to the infirmity of His disciples*. We read that when His disciples were terrified at His appearance, and could not believe that it was Himself, He said “Behold my hands and feet: handle me and see.”

Our Lord might fairly have commanded His disciples to believe that He had risen. He might justly have said, “Where is your faith? Why do ye not believe my resurrection, when ye see me with your own eyes?” But He does not do so. He stoops even lower than this: He appeals to the bodily senses of the eleven; He bids them touch Him with their own hands, and satisfy themselves that He was a material being, and not a spirit or ghost.

A mighty principle is contained in this circumstance, which we shall do well to store up in our hearts: our Lord permits us to use our *senses* in testing a fact or an assertion in religion. Things above our reason we must expect to find in Christianity; but things contrary to reason, and contradictory to our own senses, our Lord would have us know, we are not meant to believe. A doctrine so-called, which contradicts our senses, is not a doctrine which came from Him who bade the eleven touch His hands and His feet.

Let us remember this principle in dealing with the Romish doctrine of a change in the bread and wine at the Lord's supper: there is no such change at all. Our own eyes and our own tongues tell us that the bread is bread and the wine is wine, after consecration as well as before: our Lord never requires us to believe that which is contrary to our senses; the doctrine of transubstantiation is therefore false and unscriptural.

Let us remember this principle in dealing with the Romish doctrine of baptismal regeneration: there is no inseparable connection between baptism and the new birth of man's heart. Our own eyes and senses tell us that myriads of baptized people have not the Spirit of God, are utterly without grace, and are servants of the devil and the world: our Lord never requires us to believe that which is contrary to our senses; the doctrine that regeneration invariably accompanies baptism is therefore undeserving of credit. It is mere antinomianism to say that there is grace where no grace is to be seen.

A mighty practical lesson is involved in our Lord's dealing with the disciples, which we shall do well to remember: that lesson is the duty of dealing gently with weak disciples, and teaching them as they are able to bear. Like our Lord, we must be patient and longsuffering; like our Lord, we must condescend to the feebleness of some men's faith, and treat them as tenderly as little children, in order to bring them into the right way. We must not cast

off men because they do not see everything at once; we must not despise the humblest and most childish means, if we can only persuade men to believe. Such dealing may require much patience; but he who cannot condescend to deal thus with the young, the ignorant, and the uneducated, has not the mind of Christ. Well would it be for all believers if they would remember St. Paul's words more frequently: "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." (1 Cor. ix. 22.)

NOTES. LUKE XXIV. 36-43.

36.—[*Stood in the midst of them.*] We are not told in what manner our Lord entered the room where the disciples were. We know from John's words that the doors were shut (John xx. 19) "for fear of the Jews." Whether our Lord passed through the doors miraculously without opening them, or whether He opened them miraculously, as the angel did when he brought Peter out of prison, we cannot tell. (Acts xii. 10.) In either case there was a miracle. In any case the appearance was sudden and instantaneous.

[*Peace be unto you.*] I am quite unable to regard this expression as being nothing more than the ordinary salutation of courtesy; it seems to me to be full of deep and comfortable truth. It implied that the great battle was fought and the great victory won over the prince of this world, and peace with God obtained for man according to the old promise; it implied that our Lord came to His disciples with peaceful, gracious and forgiving feelings, and with no resentment for their having forsaken Him.

Let it be noted, that "peace" was the last word in the prophetic hymn of Zacharias; "peace on earth," part of the good news proclaimed by angels when Christ was born; "peace"; the proclamation which the seventy disciples were ordered to make in every house which they visited; "peace" the legacy which our Lord left and gave to the apostles on the night before He was crucified,—and "peace" was the first word which He spoke when He appeared among them again after His resurrection. (Luke i. 79; ii. 14; x. 5; John xiv. 27.)

Peace, in short, is one main ingredient of the Gospel. Every one of St. Paul's epistles, excepting the one to the Hebrews, begins with a gracious wish of "peace" to those to whom it is addressed.

Stella has a long and excellent passage on this expression.

37.—[*Terrified and affrighted.*] It is striking to remark, both here and elsewhere in Scripture, how invariably the appearance of any supernatural being, or any inhabitant of another world appears to strike terror into the heart of man. It seems an instinct of human nature to be afraid on such occasions, and is a strong indirect proof of man's utter inability to meet God in peace without a mediator. If man is afraid of spirits and ghosts, what would man feel if he saw God Himself?

38.—[*Thoughts arise in your hearts.*] Here, as elsewhere, our Lord shows His knowledge of the inward man. The reasonings and questionings of the apostles were all known to Him.

39.—[*Behold my hands and my feet.*] Some writers cannot see anything in this mention of "hands and feet," but a reference to the uncovered parts of our Lord's body, to which our Lord directs His disciples' attention, as a palpable proof that He had a real material body. I cannot, however, think that this was all that our Lord meant. I believe that He called attention to the nail-prints in His hands and feet, and thus showed that He was that very Saviour who had been crucified.

[*It is I myself.*] The Greek words here mean literally "I am I myself."

[*Handle me and see.*] Here is a direct appeal to two senses, touch and sight.

[*A spirit hath not flesh and bones.*] Stier and Alford both observe the absence of the word “blood” in this expression, and attach significance to it. I am unable to do so. Our Lord had just referred to the senses of touch and sight: flesh and bones could be touched, looked at, scrutinized, felt, without difficulty; blood of course could not. Our Lord therefore purposely mentions only “flesh and bones.” But to infer that His resurrection body had no blood, as Alford suggests, appears to me to be going further than we have any warrant to go.

Let it be noted that our Lord spoke here of “a spirit,” and the qualities of “a spirit,” in such a manner that it is impossible to deny the existence of incorporeal beings. To believe every idle story about ghosts and apparitions is foolish and unreasonable; but we must take care that we do not go into the other extreme, and deny the existence of spirits altogether. Our Lord’s words about them are clear and unmistakable.

- 41.—[*Believed not for joy.*] Poole remarks, “If they had not believed now, they would doubtless not have rejoiced, for faith was the cause of their joy. Yet the excess of their joy was the hindrance of their faith. So dangerous are the excessive motions of our affections! “

[*Any meat.*] The Greek word so rendered, means literally “anything eatable: any food.” The English word “meat,” at the time when our version of the Bible was last revised, did not mean “flesh” exclusively, as it does now.

- 43.—[*Did eat before them.*] The speculative questions raised on this circumstance, about the capacity of our Lord’s resurrection body really to eat and really to drink, are most unprofitable and vain. Let it suffice us to believe that it was a real eating and drinking, and not a mere optical delusion, or apparent eating and drinking, as some have ventured to insinuate. We need not inquire further. That it was so, Peter’s words in another place appear to prove plainly. (Acts x. 41.) The same remarks apply to the eating of the angels who appeared to Abraham. (Gen. xviii. 8.)

Our Lord’s manner of dealing with the disciples in this passage ought to be carefully remembered. He appeals to their senses, and allows them to satisfy their senses of the reality of His risen body; He even implies that if their senses had not been satisfied they might fairly and justly doubt whether His body had risen. This mode of arguing strikes a blow at the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation, and the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation, in the Lord’s supper. When our senses detect no change in the substance of the bread and wine, it is monstrous and unreasonable to require us to believe that any change has taken place in them after the act of consecration.