

# 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.*

ST. LUKE. VOL. II.

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.  
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE XXIV. 44–49.

44 And he said unto them, These *are* the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that *all* things must be fulfilled, which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.

45 Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,

46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day:

47 And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

48 And ye are witnesses of these things.

49 And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.

LET us observe, firstly, in these verses, *the gift which our Lord bestowed on His disciples immediately before He left the world*. We read that He “opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures.”

We must not misapprehend these words. We are not to suppose that the disciples knew nothing about the Old Testament up to this time, and that the Bible is a book which no ordinary person can expect to comprehend; we are simply to understand that Jesus showed His disciples the full meaning of many passages, which had hitherto been hid from their eyes: above all, He showed the true interpretation of many prophetic passages concerning the Messiah.

We all need a like enlightenment of our understandings. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Cor. ii. 14.) Pride, and prejudice, and love of the world blind our intellects, and throw a veil over the eyes of our minds in the reading of the Scriptures. We see the words, but do not thoroughly understand them until we are taught from above.

He that desires to read his Bible with profit, must first ask the Lord Jesus to open the eyes of his understanding by the Holy Ghost. Human commentaries are useful in their way: the help of good and learned men is not to be despised; but there is no commentary to be compared with the teaching of Christ. A humble and prayerful spirit will find a thousand things in the Bible, which the proud, self-conceited student will utterly fail to discern.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, *the remarkable manner in which the Lord Jesus speaks of His own death on the cross*. He does not speak of it as a misfortune, or as a thing to be lamented, but as a necessity. He says, “It behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise again the third day.”

The death of Christ was necessary to our salvation. His flesh and blood offered in sacrifice on the cross were “the life of the world.” (John vi. 51.) Without the death of Christ, so far as we can see, God’s law could never have been satisfied,—sin could never have been pardoned,—man could never have been justified before God,—and God could never have shown

mercy to man. The cross of Christ was the solution of a mighty difficulty: it untied a vast knot; it enabled God to be “just, and yet the justifier” of the ungodly. (Rom. iii. 26.) It enabled man to draw near to God with boldness, and to feel that though a sinner he might have hope. Christ by suffering as a Substitute in our stead, the just for the unjust, has made a way by which we can draw near to God. We may freely acknowledge that in ourselves we are guilty and deserve death; but we may boldly plead, that One has died for us, and that for His sake, believing on Him, we claim life and acquittal.

Let us ever glory in the cross of Christ; let us regard it as the source of all our hopes, and the foundation of all our peace. Ignorance and unbelief may see nothing in the sufferings of Calvary but the cruel martyrdom of an innocent person: faith will look far deeper; faith will see in the death of Jesus the payment of man’s enormous debt to God, and the complete salvation of all who believe.

Let us observe, thirdly, in these verses, *what were the first truths which the Lord Jesus bade His disciples preach after He left the world.* We read that “repentance and remission of sins” were to be preached in His name among all nations.

“Repentance and remission of sins” are the first things which ought to be pressed on the attention of every man, woman, and child throughout the world.—All ought to be told the necessity of repentance. All are by nature desperately wicked: without repentance and conversion none can enter the kingdom of God.—All ought to be told God’s readiness to forgive every one who believes on Christ. All are by nature guilty and condemned; but any one may obtain by faith in Jesus, free, full, and immediate pardon.—All, not least, ought to be continually reminded that repentance and remission of sins are inseparably linked together. Not that our repentance can purchase our pardon: pardon is the free gift of God to the believer in Christ; but still it remains true, that a man impenitent is a man unforgiven.

He that desires to be a true Christian must be experimentally acquainted with repentance and remission of sins. These are the principal things in saving religion. To belong to a pure Church, and hear the Gospel, and receive the sacraments, are great privileges: but are we converted? Are we justified? If not, we are dead before God. Happy is that Christian who keeps these two points continually before his eyes! Repentance and remission are not mere elementary truths, and milk for babes; the highest standard of sanctity is nothing more than a continual growth in practical knowledge of these two points. The brightest saint is the man who has the most heart-searching sense of his own sinfulness, and the liveliest sense of his own complete acceptance in Christ.

Let us observe, fourthly, *what was the first place at which the disciples were to begin preaching.* They were to begin “at Jerusalem.”

This is a striking fact, and one full of instruction. It teaches us that none are to be reckoned too wicked for salvation to be offered to them, and that no degree of spiritual disease is beyond the reach of the Gospel remedy. Jerusalem was the wickedest city on earth when our Lord left the world: it was a city which had stoned the prophets and killed those whom God sent to call it to repentance; it was a city full of pride, unbelief, self-righteousness, and desperate hardness of heart; it was a city which had just crowned all its transgressions by crucifying the Lord of glory,—and yet Jerusalem was the place at which the first proclamation of repentance and pardon was to be made.—The command of Christ was plain: “Begin at Jerusalem.”

We see in these wondrous words, the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of Christ’s compassion towards sinners. We must never despair of any one being saved, however bad and profligate he may have been: we must open the door of repentance to the chief of sinners; we must not be afraid to invite the worst of men to repent, believe, and live. It is the glory of our Great Physician, that He can heal incurable cases. The things that seem impossible to men are possible with Christ.

Let us observe, lastly, *the peculiar position which believers, and especially ministers, are meant to occupy in this world.* Our Lord defines it in one expressive word: He says, “Ye are witnesses.”

If we are true disciples of Christ, we must bear a continual testimony in the midst of an evil world. We must testify to the truth of our Master’s Gospel,—the graciousness of our Master’s heart,—the happiness of our Master’s service,—the excellence of our Master’s rules of life,—and the enormous danger and wickedness of the ways of the world. Such testimony will doubtless bring down upon us the displeasure of man: the world will hate us, as it did our Master, because we “testify of it, that its works are evil.” (John vii. 7.) Such testimony will doubtless be believed by few comparatively, and will be thought by many offensive and extreme; but the duty of a witness is to bear his testimony, whether he is believed or not. If we bear a faithful testimony, we have done our duty, although, like Noah, and Elijah, and Jeremiah, we stand almost alone.

What do we know of this witnessing character? What kind of testimony do we bear? What evidence do we give that we are disciples of a crucified Saviour, and, like Him, are “not of the world”? (John xvii. 14.) What marks do we show of belonging to Him who said, “I came that I should bear witness unto the truth”? (John xviii. 7.) Happy is he who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions, and whose life declares plainly that he “seeks a country.” (Heb. xi. 14.)

44.—[*These are the words, &c.*] This expression must be paraphrased, in order to give the full meaning of it. Alford renders it, “Behold the realization of the words.”—It signifies, “You now see actually fulfilled the words which I so often spake to you, saying that the predictions about my sufferings must be accomplished. You could not then believe that I was really going to suffer and afterwards rise again. You see now that it was true.”

[*Must be fulfilled.*] The Greek word here translated “must,” is the same that is rendered “ought” in the 26th verse, and “behoved” in the 46th.

[*Law of Moses...prophets...Psalms.*] It should be remembered that this threefold division was the Jewish division of the Old Testament: they classed all its contents under these three heads.

When our Lord speaks of the things in the “law of Moses” concerning Himself, there can be little doubt that He points to all the types and figures which were emblems of Himself, and specially to the sacrifices.

45.—[*Opened he their understanding, &c.*] We are taught here that the minds of the disciples had been closed by prejudice and traditional interpretations. Our Lord opened the doors and windows of their minds, and let in the light.

Poole remarks, he did not open their understanding without the Scripture: He sends them thither. He knows that Scripture would not give them a sufficient knowledge of the things of God without the influence and illumination of His Spirit. They are truly taught by God who are taught by His Spirit to understand the Scriptures. Christ gives great honour to the Scriptures. The devil cheats those whom he persuades to cast away the Scriptures in expectation of a teaching by the Spirit. The Spirit teacheth by, not without, not contrary to, the holy Scriptures.”

Cornelius à Lapidè tries in vain to argue from this verse that the laity cannot understand the Bible without the teaching of the Church, that the Bible is not suited for the laity, and that the apostles had the knowledge of the Scriptures specially entrusted to them. There is not the slightest proof that the apostles alone had their “understandings opened” on the present occasion; on the contrary, the context distinctly tells us that those who were here assembled were the apostles and “they that were with them.”—Moreover, the fact that our Lord opened the understandings of all, is a plain proof that all, whether apostles or not, require teaching from above, and that Christ is able, ready, and willing to give it to all, whether apostles or not, as long as the world stands.

46.—[*Thus it is written.*] This is a general expression, signifying “It was written in Scripture that things concerning me should take place in the way in which they have taken place.” It was “written” that it should be so, and it was necessary, or “behoved” therefore that so it should be. If Christ had not suffered and risen again, Scripture would not have been fulfilled. The chief reference here, no doubt, is to Isaiah liii. Psalm xxii. and Dan. ix. 26.

[*Rise from the dead the third day.*] The question has been raised here, “Where does the Old Testament say that Christ should rise again the *third day*?” Pearse remarks that it does not appear, unless in Hosea vi. 2, and Jonas i. 17.—I am not however convinced that either here or in 1 Cor. xv. 4, it was intended that we should lay stress on the *third day*, in understanding the sentence. The meaning of the verse seems to me to be simply, “that it was written, and was therefore necessary, that Christ should suffer and rise again.” I cannot see that the sense obliges us to find an Old Testament prediction about the *third day*. Even if it did, I feel no doubt that there are more passages to prove it than any one has yet discovered. There is a depth of meaning in the Old Testament, I suspect, with reference to Christ, which no one has yet fully fathomed.

47.—[*And that.*] The governing words here, we must remember, are still, “it is written, and was therefore necessary that,” &c.

[*Repentance and remission of sins.*] These words are a brief summary of the main doctrines of the Gospel. The necessity of repentance, and the possibility of remission,—the willingness of God to grant repentance unto life, and the full provision made by Christ for the pardon of man’s sins, were to be proclaimed and published like a notice given publicly by a herald. And all was to be done “in Christ’s name.” That expression is the leading one in the whole sentence. It signifies, “By the authority of Christ,” and “Through the merit and mediation of Christ.” Both ideas are included.

No Christian teaching, be it remembered, is scriptural and sound, which does not give the principal place to these two great doctrines.

[*Among all nations.*] The Greek words here would be equally well translated, “Among all Gentiles.” And considering that “Jerusalem” is brought in at the end of the verse, it is highly probable that this was the idea intended to be conveyed. The Gospel was to be preached to Gentiles as well as Jews.

[*Beginning at Jerusalem.*] This expression taught two things. One was, that the apostles and first preachers of the Gospel should not shrink from offering salvation to the worst and greatest sinners: they were not to regard even the city where their Master was crucified as hopelessly wicked, and too bad to be benefited by the Gospel. The result showed that this command was not given without cause. The greatest triumph ever won by the Gospel, perhaps, was the conversion of three thousand Jerusalem hearers on the day of Pentecost. — The other lesson was that the first offer of salvation should always be made to the Jews: hardened, unbelieving as they were, they were still “beloved for the fathers’ sakes,” and were not to be despised. (Rom. xi. 28.)

The Acts of the Apostles, in instances too many to be quoted, as well as St. Paul’s words in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. i. 16), show how faithfully the apostles discharged the duty of preaching to the Jews.

The duty of Christians to care specially for the souls of Jews seems plainly pointed out in the expression before us.

Let it be noted that the conclusions of Peter’s two first sermons at Jerusalem, in Acts ii. and iii., exactly carried out the command of the verse before us. He preached “repentance and remission in Christ’s name.”

48.—[*Ye are witnesses of these things.*] The “things” here spoken of must be the “things concerning Himself,” which our Lord had just been expounding.

The office which the first disciples, and after them all ministers and believers were to fill, is stated in the word “witnesses.”

Stier remarks, “It is not the Lord’s will to appoint and send forth orators, or enthusiasts, or even simple teachers, but before all, and in all, *witnesses*. The idea contained in Luke i. 2, ‘which from the beginning were eye-witnesses and ministers of the Word,’ is here found once more.”

49.—[*I send the promise of my Father.*] This expression means the Holy Ghost, whom the Father had promised in the Old Testament prophecies to send, and who came down on the day of Pentecost. (See Isai. xliv. 3; Joel ii. 28; Jerem. xxxi. 33; Ezek. xxxvi. 27.)

Let it be noted, that our Lord here speaks of “sending the Holy Ghost.” We see in this His equality and unity with God the Father: we also see that the Holy Ghost *proceeds* from the Son, no less than from the Father.

Let it be noted that the Holy Ghost is evidently a Person, and not an influence. The words “I send” can only be used of a “person.”

Let it be noted, that our Lord says, "I send:" not, "I will send." This shows the certainty of the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the speedy approach of His coming. May it not also show that even from the very time at which our Lord spoke the disciples would begin to receive grace and power from the Holy Ghost?

[*Tarry ye in the city...until, &c.*] This expression is remarkable. It seems to denote that our Lord would have His disciples go forth into all nations immediately after the day of Pentecost, and wait at Jerusalem no longer. Their backwardness to do this, when compared with the expression before us, is noteworthy.

[*Endued.*] This word means literally, "Be clothed upon, or invested with." It is frequently used in the New Testament, and implies a putting on something which we do not naturally possess. (See Rom. xiii. 14; 1 Cor. xv. 53; Gal. iii. 27; Col. iii. 9, 10.)

[*Power from on high.*] Some have thought that this expression is only a form of speech for the Holy Ghost Himself. It seems more likely that it signifies the energy and influence imparted by the Holy Ghost. It is very like the expression used about the Virgin Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most Highest shall overshadow thee." (Luke i. 35.) It would then mean in this place, "Tarry till ye be endued with that heavenly power which the Holy Ghost, whom the Father has promised, and I also send, shall impart to you."

Alford quotes a remark of Stier, that this "enduing with the Holy Ghost was the true and complete clothing of the nakedness of the fall." This appears to me only partially correct. I believe the "imputed righteousness of Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe," is the true garment which remedies the nakedness of the fall. (Rom. iii. 22.) The indwelling grace of the Spirit is doubtless never separate from that righteousness; but it is in itself a distinct and separate thing, and should be kept distinct in our minds.