

# EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

*And Many Explanatory Notes.*

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LUKE XXIV. 50–53.

50 And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them.

51 And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

52 And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy:

53 And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

THESE verses are the winding up of St. Luke's history of our Lord's ministry. They form a suitable conclusion to a Gospel, which in touching tenderness and full exhibition of Christ's grace, stands first among the four records of the things which Jesus did and taught. (Acts i. 1.)

Let us notice, firstly, in this passage, *the remarkable manner in which our Lord left His disciples*. We read that "He lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them." In one word, He left them when in the very act of blessing.

We cannot for a moment doubt that there was a meaning in this circumstance. It was intended to remind the disciples of all that Jesus had brought with Him when He came into the world; it was intended to assure them of what He would yet do, after He left the world. He came on earth to bless and not to curse, and blessing He departed; He came in love and not in anger, and in love He went away; He came not as a condemning Judge, but as a compassionate Friend, and as a Friend He returned to His Father.—He had been a Saviour full of blessings to His little flock while He had been with them. He would be a Saviour full of blessings to them, He would have them know, even after He was taken away.

For ever let our souls lean on the gracious heart of Christ, if we know anything of true religion. We shall never find a heart more tender, more loving, more patient, more compassionate, and more kind. To talk of the Virgin Mary as being more compassionate than Christ is a proof of miserable ignorance; to flee to the saints for comfort, when we may flee to Christ, is an act of mingled stupidity and blasphemy, and a robbery of Christ's crown. Gracious was our Lord Jesus while He lived among His weak disciples, gracious in the very season of His agony on the cross,—gracious when He rose again and gathered His scattered sheep around Him,—gracious in the manner of His departure from this world. It was a departure in the very act of blessing! Gracious, we may be assured He is at the right hand of God. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever: a Saviour ever ready to bless, abounding in blessings.

Let us notice, secondly, in this passage, *the place to which our Lord went when He left the world*. We read that He was "carried up into heaven."

The full meaning of these words we cannot of course comprehend. It would be easy to ask questions about the exact residence of Christ's glori-

fied body, which the wisest theologian could never answer: we must not waste our time in unedifying speculations, or “intrude into things unseen.” (Col. ii. 18.) Let it suffice us to know that our Lord Jesus Christ is gone into the presence of God on behalf of all who believe on Him, as a Forerunner and a High Priest. (Heb. vi. 20. John xiv. 2.)

As a Forerunner, Jesus has gone into heaven to prepare a place for all His members. Our great Head has taken possession of a glorious inheritance in behalf of His mystical body, and holds it as an elder brother and trustee, until the day comes when His body shall be perfected.—As a High Priest, Jesus has gone into heaven to intercede for all who believe on Him: there, in the holy of holies, He presents on their behalf the merit of His own sacrifice, and obtains for them daily supplies of mercy and grace. The grand secret of the perseverance of saints is Christ’s appearance for them in heaven: they have an everlasting Advocate with the Father, and therefore they are never cast away. (Heb. ix. 24. 1 John ii. 1.)

A day will come when Jesus shall return from heaven, in like manner as He went. He will not always abide within the holy of holies; He will come forth, like the Jewish high priest, to bless the people, to gather His saints together, and to restore all things. (Lev. ix. 23. Acts iii. 21.) For that day let us wait, and long, and pray. Christ dying on the cross for sinners, Christ living in heaven to intercede, Christ coming again in glory,—are three great objects which ought to stand out prominently before the eyes of every true Christian.

Let us notice, lastly, in this passage, *the feelings of our Lord’s disciples when He finally left them and was carried up into heaven.* We read that “they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.”

How shall we account for these joyful feelings? How shall we explain the singular fact, that this little company of weak disciples left for the first time like orphans in the midst of an angry world, was not cast down, but was full of joy?—The answer to these questions is short and simple. The disciples rejoiced, because now for the first time they saw all things clearly about their Master: the veil was removed from their eyes; the darkness had at length passed away. The meaning of Christ’s humiliation and low estate; the meaning of His mysterious agony, and cross, and passion; the meaning of His being Messiah and yet a sufferer; the meaning of His being crucified, and yet being Son of God,—all, all was at length unravelled and made plain. They saw it all: they understood it all. Their doubts were removed; their stumbling-blocks were taken away: now at last they possessed clear knowledge, and possessing clear knowledge felt unmingled joy.

Let it be a settled principle with us, that the little degree of joy which many believers feel arises often from want of knowledge. Weak faith and

inconsistent practice are doubtless two great reasons why many of God's children enjoy so little peace; but it may well be suspected that dim and indistinct views of the Gospel are the true cause of many a believer's discomfort. When the Lord Jesus is not clearly known and understood, it must needs follow that there is little "joy in the Lord."

Let us leave the Gospel of St. Luke with a settled purpose of heart to seek more spiritual knowledge every year we live. Let us search the Scriptures more deeply, and pray over them more heartily. Too many believers only scratch the surface of Scripture, and know nothing of digging down into its hid treasures: let the Word dwell in us more richly; let us read our Bibles more diligently: so doing we shall taste more of joy and peace in believing, and shall know what it is to be "continually praising and blessing God."

NOTES. LUKE XXIV. 50-53.

50.—[*Led them out as far as to Bethany.*] There is something very touching in the fact that our Lord's ascension took place close to Bethany. It was a small village bordering on the mount of Olives, where Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus dwelt. It is probable that they all were present when our Lord left the earth.

[*Lifted up his hands and blessed them.*] This circumstance is full of meaning. The blessing was significant: it showed the spirit in which our Lord parted from His Church on earth, and was an earnest of what He would do for them in heaven; it typified His full assumption of His priestly office, and gave assurance of what He will yet do when He comes again.

Gill remarks, "This lifting up of the hands was not in order to put them on His disciples, nor was it used as a prayer-gesture, nor was the blessing of them prayerwise, or by praying for a blessing on them. As Aaron, His type, lifted up his hands towards the people of Israel, and blessed them when he first offered the offerings for them (Lev. ix. 22), so Christ as the great High Priest, having offered Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of His people, lifted up His hands toward them and blessed them in an authoritative way."

51.—[*He was parted from them.*] The Greek word so rendered is somewhat remarkable: it signifies literally, "stood apart." A German commentator thinks it means "He went a little distance from them previous to His ascension." The more common opinion is that the word is only a part of the same incident which is described when it says He was "carried up into heaven."

[*Carried up into heaven.*] Where our Lord's body went when so carried up, is an unprofitable speculation. Let it be enough for us to remember that He went into the presence of God for us, and that He will come again exactly in like manner as He went. (Acts i. 11.)

Burgon remarks, "These beautiful words denote that Jesus was rather *taken away* from the men He loved, than that by an act of His own He left them. For His passion, it is said, that He was impatient (Luke xii. 50); for His ascension, not so. He did not *leave* His disciples, but was parted from them."

52.—[*They worshipped him.*] This is the first formal act of adoration which we ever read of the disciples paying to our Lord. Their knowledge of His Messiahship and divinity was now clear and distinct: hence came the "joy" which the verse mentions that they felt. All things were now clear and plain to them concerning their Master: the darkness was past, and the true light shone. (1 John ii. 8.)

53.—[*Continually in the temple.*] This expression does not necessarily mean that the disciples were never anywhere else except in the temple. It only means that they made a daily regular habit of attending the temple services and assembling in the temple courts, and specially at the times of prayer. (Acts iii. 1.) It is the same Greek word used about Cornelius, where it says that “he prayed to God alway.” (Acts x. 2.)

The temple, be it remembered, was a place of resort for all pious Jews in Jerusalem, and in its spacious courts all sorts of worshippers met daily without interruption, or interference with one another. Even of the Apostles it is said, that “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” (Acts v. 42.) It seems to have been such an established custom for all religious-minded persons to assemble in the temple that the apostles could even preach the Gospel there.

Maldonatus remarks, “that it is a striking fact that St. Luke’s Gospel begins by describing a scene in the temple when Zacharias had his vision, and also leaves us in the temple when it concludes.”

Burgon says, “They repaired to the temple, and so the temple service became henceforth filled with new meaning. The song of Moses has become to them the song of the Lamb: for them the Psalms speak henceforth another language, for they speak to them only of Christ. Well may they have been henceforth ‘continually in the temple, praising and blessing God.’”