

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS. ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE II. 25–35.

25 And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name <i>was</i> Simeon; and the same man <i>was</i> just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him.	30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ.	31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
27 And he came by the spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law,	32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.
28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,	33 And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.
29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word:	34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this <i>child</i> is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against;
	35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

We have in these verses the history of one whose name is nowhere else mentioned in the New Testament, a “just and devout man” named Simeon. We know nothing of his life before or after the time when Christ was born. We are only told that he came by the Spirit into the temple, when the child Jesus was brought there by His mother, and that he “took him up in his arms and blessed God” in words which are now well-known all over the world.

We see, in the case of Simeon, *how God has a believing people even in the worst of places, and in the darkest times.* Religion was at a very low ebb in Israel when Christ was born. The faith of Abraham was spoiled by the doctrines of Pharisees and Sadducees. The fine gold had become deplorably dim. Yet even then we find in the midst of Jerusalem a man “just and devout,”—a man “upon whom is the Holy Ghost.”

It is a cheering thought that God never leaves Himself entirely without a witness. Small as His believing church may sometimes be, the gates of hell shall never completely prevail against it. The true church may be driven into the wilderness, and be a scattered little flock, but it never dies. There was a Lot in Sodom and an Obadiah in Ahab's household, a Daniel in Babylon and a Jeremiah in Zedekiah's court;—and in the last days of the Jewish Church, when its iniquity was almost full, there were godly people, like Simeon, even in Jerusalem.

True Christians, in every age, should remember this and take comfort. It is a truth which they are apt to forget, and in consequence to give way to despondency. “I only am left,” said Elijah, “and they seek my life to take it away.” But what said the answer of God to him, “Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel.” (1 Kings xix. 14, 18.) Let us learn to be more hopeful. Let us believe that grace can live and flourish, even in the most unfavourable circumstances. There are more Simeons in the world than we suppose.

We see in the song of Simeon *how completely a believer can be delivered from the fear of death*; “Lord,” says old Simeon, “now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.” He speaks like one for whom the grave has lost its terrors, and the world its charms. He desires to be released from the miseries of this pilgrim-state of existence, and to be allowed to go home. He is willing to be “absent from the body and present with the Lord.” He speaks as one who knows where he is going when he departs this life, and cares not how soon he goes. The change with him will be a change for the better, and he desires that his change may come.

What is it that can enable a mortal man to use such language as this? What can deliver us from that “fear of death” to which so many are in bondage? What can take the sting of death away?—There is but one answer to such questions. Nothing but strong faith can do it. Faith laying firm hold on an unseen Saviour,—faith resting on the promises of an unseen God,—faith, and faith only, can enable a man to look death in the face, and say, “I depart in peace.” It is not enough to be weary of pain, and sickness, and ready to submit to anything for the sake of a change. It is not enough to feel indifferent to the world, when we have no more strength to mingle in its business, or enjoy its pleasures. We must have something more than this, if we desire to depart in real peace. We must have faith like old Simeon’s, even that faith which is the gift of God. Without such faith we may die quietly, and there may seem “no bands in our death.” (Psalm lxiii. 4.) But, dying without such faith, we shall never find ourselves at home, when we wake up in another world.

We see, furthermore, in the song of Simeon, *what clear views of Christ’s work and office some Jewish believers attained, even before the Gospel was preached*. We find this good old man speaking of Jesus as “the salvation which God had prepared,”—as “a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel.” Well would it have been for the letter-learned Scribes and Pharisees of Simeon’s time, if they had sat at his feet, and listened to his word.

Christ was indeed “a light to lighten the Gentiles.” Without Him they were sunk in gross darkness and superstition. They knew not the way of life. They worshipped the works of their own hands. Their wisest philosophers were utterly ignorant in spiritual things. “Professing themselves to be wise they became fools.” (Rom. i. 22.) The Gospel of Christ was like sun-rise to Greece and Rome, and the whole heathen world. The light which it let in on men’s minds on the subject of religion, was as great as the change from night to day.

Christ was indeed “the glory of Israel.” The descent from Abraham,—the covenants,—the promises,—the law of Moses,—the divinely ordered Temple service,—all these were mighty privileges. But all were as nothing com-

pared to the mighty fact, that out of Israel was born the Saviour of the world. This was to be the highest honour of the Jewish nation, that the mother of Christ was a Jewish woman, and that the blood of One “made of the seed of David, according to the flesh,” was to make atonement for the sin of mankind. (Rom. i. 3.)

The words of old Simeon, let us remember, will yet receive a fuller accomplishment. The “light” which he saw by faith, as he held the child Jesus in his arms, shall yet shine so brightly that all the nations of the Gentile world shall see it.—The “glory” of that Jesus whom Israel crucified, shall one day be revealed so clearly to the scattered Jews, that they shall look on Him whom they pierced, and repent, and be converted. The day shall come when the veil shall be taken from the heart of Israel, and all shall “glory in the Lord.” (Isai. xlv. 25.) For that day let us wait, and watch, and pray. If Christ be the light and glory of our souls, that day cannot come too soon.

We see, lastly, in this passage, a *striking account of the results which would follow when Jesus Christ and His Gospel came into the world*. Every word of old Simeon on this subject deserves private meditation. The whole forms a prophecy which is being daily fulfilled.

Christ was to be “a sign spoken against.” He was to be a mark for all the fiery darts of the wicked one. He was to be “despised and rejected of men.” He and His people were to be a “city set upon a hill,” assailed on every side, and hated by all sorts of enemies. And so it proved. Men who agreed in nothing else have agreed in hating Christ. From the very first, thousands have been persecutors and unbelievers.

Christ was to be the occasion of “the fall of many in Israel.” He was to be a stone of stumbling and rock of offence to many proud and self-righteous Jews, who would reject Him and perish in their sins. And so it proved. To multitudes among them Christ crucified was a stumbling-block, and His Gospel “a savour of death.” (1 Cor. i. 23; 2 Cor. ii. 16.)

Christ was to be the occasion of “rising again to many in Israel.” He was to prove the Saviour of many who, at one time, rejected, blasphemed, and reviled Him, but afterwards repented and believed. And so it proved. When the thousands who crucified him repented, and Saul who persecuted Him was converted, there was nothing less than a rising again from the dead.

Christ was to be the occasion of “the thoughts of many hearts being revealed.” His Gospel was to bring to light the real characters of many people. The enmity to God of some,—the inward weariness and hunger of others, would be discovered by the preaching of the cross. It would show what men really were. And so it proved. The Acts of the Apostles, in almost every chapter, bear testimony that in this, as in every other item of his prophecy, old Simeon spoke truth.

And now what do we think of Christ? This is the question that ought to

occupy our minds. What thoughts does He call forth in our hearts? This is the inquiry which ought to receive our attention. Are we for Him, or are we against Him? Do we love Him, or do we neglect Him? Do we stumble at His doctrine, or do we find it life from the dead? Let us never rest till these questions are satisfactorily answered.

NOTES. LUKE II. 25–35.

- 25.—[*A man whose name was Simeon.*] Some learned men hold that this Simeon was a man of great note in Jerusalem, the son of Hillel, and father of Gamaliel. Henry says, “the Jews say that he was endued with a prophetic spirit, and that he was turned out of his place because he witnessed against the common opinion of the Jews concerning the temporal kingdom of the Messiah.” All this, to say the least, is doubtful.
- [*The consolation of Israel.*] This was a name applied by the Jews to the Messiah. Light-foot says, “the whole nation waited for the consolation of Israel; insomuch that there was nothing more common with them, than to swear by the desire which they had of seeing it.”
- [*The Holy Ghost...upon him.*] Let us not fail to note that this was before the death and ascension of Christ, and the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. We must never forget that Old Testament saints were taught by the Holy Ghost as really as believers after the Gospel was set up, though not in such full measure.
- 29.—[*Lettest depart.*] The idea is that of loosing a person from a chain, or giving a prisoner release from captivity.
- 30.—[*Salvation.*] The word so translated is only used here and in three other places:—Luke iii-6; Acts xxviii. 28; and Ephes. vi. 17. It is a more abstract, energetic word than the one commonly so translated.
- 31.—[*All people.*] The expression here is different from that in verse 10. It would be more literally and correctly rendered in this place, “all peoples.”
- 32.—[*Light to...the Gentiles...glory of...Israel.*] Ford quotes Dr. Richard Clerke’s remarks on this verse, “It is noted by the learned that the sweet singer of this song doth put the Gentile before the Jew, because the second calling, the conversion of the Jews to Christ, shall not be till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.”
- 33.—[*Of him.*] Let it be noted carefully that “of” in this place means “about,” or “concerning.”
- 34.—[*Simeon blessed them.*] From this expression some have supposed that Simeon was at least a chief priest, if not the high priest. There is nothing to justify the supposition. As one specially inspired by the Holy Ghost to prophecy, Simeon was doing nothing more, in blessing them, than any prophet would have done, whether a priest or not.
- 35.—[*A sword shall pierce, &c.*] The simplest explanation of these words is, that Simeon foretells sorrow coming on the Virgin Mary, as cutting and heart-piercing as a sword. This was specially fulfilled when she stood by the cross, and saw her Son dying there. Might not our Lord be reminding her of this prophecy, when in that solemn hour He commended her to His disciple John, saying, “Behold thy mother,”—in order that she might have a friend in her time of need?