EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS.

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,  
*And Many Explanatory Notes*.

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LUKE III. 21—38.

21 Now when fell the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,

22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,

24 Which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph,

25 Which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge.

26 Which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda,

27 Which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri,

28 Which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er,

29 Which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi,

30 Which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim,

31 Which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha, which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David,

32 Which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naason,

33 Which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda,

34 Which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor,

35 Which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala,

36 Which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech,

37 Which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan,

38 Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.

WE see in the passage before us, the high honour the Lord Jesus has put on baptism. We find that among others who came to John the Baptist, the Saviour of the world came, and was “baptized.”

An ordinance which the Son of God was pleased to use, and afterwards to appoint for the use of His whole Church, ought always to be held in peculiar reverence by His people. Baptism cannot be a thing of slight im­portance, if Christ Himself was baptized. The use of baptism would never have been enjoined on the Church of Christ, if it had been a mere outward form, incapable of conveying any blessing.

It is hardly necessary to say that errors of every sort and description abound on the subject of baptism. Some make an idol of it, and exalt it far above the place assigned to it in the Bible. Some degrade it and dis­honour it, and seem almost to forget that it was ordained by Christ Himself. Some limit the use of it so narrowly that they will baptize none unless they are grown up, and can give full proof of their conversion. Some invest the baptismal water with such magic power, that they would like missionaries to go into heathen lands and baptize all persons, old and young indiscriminately, and believe that however ignorant the heathen may be, bap­tism must do them good. On no subject, perhaps, in religion, have Christians more need to pray for a right judgment and a sound mind.

Let it suffice us to hold firmly the general principle, that baptism was graciously intended by our Lord to be a help to His Church, and “a means of grace,” and that when rightly and worthily used, we may confidently look upon it for a blessing. But let us never forget that the grace of God is not tied to any sacrament, and that we may be baptized with water, without being baptized with the Holy Ghost.

We see, secondly, in this passage, *the close connection that ought to exist between the administration of baptism and prayer.* We are specially told by St. Luke, that when our Lord was baptized He was also “praying.”

We need not doubt that there is a great lesson in this fact, and one that the Church of Christ has too much overlooked. We are meant to learn that the baptism which God blesses must be a baptism accom­panied by prayer. The sprinkling of water is not suf­ficient. The use of the name of the blessed Trinity is not enough. The form of the sacrament alone conveys no grace. There must be something else beside all this. There must be “the prayer of faith.” A baptism without prayer, it may be confidently asserted, is a baptism on which we have no right to expect God’s blessing.

Why is it that the sacrament of baptism appears to bear so little fruit? How is it that thousands every year are baptized, and never give the slightest proof of having received benefit from it? The answer to these questions is short and simple. In the vast majority of baptisms there is no prayer except the prayer of the officiating minister. Parents bring their children to the font, without the slightest sense of what they are doing. Sponsors stand up and answer for the child, in evident ignorance of the nature of the ordinance they are attending, and as a mere matter of form. What possible reason have we for expecting such baptisms to be blessed by God? None! none at all! Such baptisms may well be barren of results. They are not baptisms according to the mind of Christ. Let us pray that the eyes of Christians on this important subject may be opened. It is one on which there is great need of change.

We see, thirdly, in these verses, a remarkable proof of the doctrine of the Trinity. We have all the Three Per­sons of the Godhead spoken of, as co-operating and acting at one time. God the Son begins the mighty work of His earthly ministry, by being baptized. God the Father solemnly accredits Him as the appointed Mediator, by a voice from heaven. God the Holy Ghost descends “in a bodily shape like a dove” upon our Lord, and by so doing declares that this is He to whom “the Father gives the Spirit without measure.” (John iii. 34. )

There is something deeply instructive, and deeply comforting in this revelation of the blessed Trinity, at this particular season of our Lord’s earthly ministry. It shows us how mighty and powerful is the agency that is employed in the great business of our redemption. It is the common work of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. All Three Persons in the God­head are equally concerned in the deliverance of our souls from hell. The thought should cheer us, when disquieted and cast down. The thought should hearten and encourage us, when weary of the conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. The enemies of our souls are mighty, but the Friends of our souls are mightier still. The whole power of the triune Jehovah is engaged upon our side. “A three-fold cord is not easily broken.” (Eccles. iv. 12. )

We see, fourthly, in these verses, a marvellous proclam­ation of our Lord’s office as Mediator between God and man. A voice was heard from heaven at His baptism, “which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” There is but One who could say this. It was the voice of God the Father.

These solemn words no doubt contain much that is deeply mysterious. One thing however about them is abundantly clear. They are a divine declaration, that our Lord Jesus Christ is the promised Redeemer, whom God from the beginning undertook to send into the world, and that with His incarnation, sacrifice, and sub­stitution for man, God the Father is satisfied and well pleased. In Him, He regards the claim of His holy law as fully discharged. Through Him, He is willing to receive poor sinful man to mercy, and to remember his sins no more.

Let all true Christians rest their souls on these words, and draw from them daily consolation. Our sins and shortcomings are many and great. In ourselves we can see no good thing. But if we believe in Jesus, the Father sees nothing in us that He cannot abundantly pardon. He regards us as the members of His own dear Son, and, for His Son’s sake, He is well pleased.

We see, lastly, in these verses, what a frail and dying creature is man. We read at the end of the chapter a long list of names, containing the genealogy of the family in which our Lord was born, traced up through David and Abraham to Adam. How little we know of many of the seventy-five persons, whose names are here recorded! They all had their joys and sorrows, their hopes and fears, their cares and troubles, their schemes and plans, like any of ourselves. But they have all passed away from the earth, and gone to their own place. And so will it be with us. We too are passing away, and shall soon be gone.

For ever let us bless God, that in a dying world we are able to turn to a dying Saviour. “I am he,” says Jesus, “that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore.” “I am the resurrection and the life.” (Rev. i. 18; John xi. 25. ) Let our main care be, to be one with Christ and Christ with us. Joined to the Lord Jesus by faith we shall rise again to live for evermore. The second death shall have no power over us. “Because I live,” says Christ, “ye shall live also.” (John xiv. 19.)

NOTES. LUKE III. 21–38.

23. —[Thirty years of age.] This was the age, be it remembered, at which Levites were first permitted to do work in the tabernacle. (Num. iv. 3. )

[Joseph, which was the son of Heli, &c.] Every careful reader of the Bible knows well that there is a great difficulty connected with the genealogy of our Lord. The difficulty lies in the entire variance between that part of the genealogy which lies between David and Joseph, as recorded by St. Luke, and the same part of it as recorded by St. Matthew. Between Abraham and David the two genealogies agree. Between David and Joseph they almost entirely differ. How can this difference be reconciled? This is a question on which learned men have written volumes, and failed to convince one another. A few simple remarks must suffice. Those who wish to study the subject will find it thoroughly discussed by Gomarus, Spanheim, South, Calovius, and A. Clarke.

The first, but least probable explanation, is this. The persons mentioned in the genealogy from David to Joseph had all two names. Matthew gives one of their names, Luke gives the other. But both enumerate the same persons, and both give the genealogy of Joseph. This explanation will satisfy very few people. The difference between the number of names given by Luke, compared to the number given by Matthew, is of itself an insuperable objection. It seems waste of time to dwell on this solution of the question.

The second, and more probable explanation of the difficulty, is this. The mother of Joseph the husband of Mary, married two husbands. Of one husband Joseph was the son by birth. Of the other he was the son by adoption. The two genealogies in the two Gospels, are the genealogies of these two husbands. Each evangelist ends his genealogy in Joseph, but Luke traces it through Heli, and Matthew through Jacob. Joseph was the natural son of one, and the adopted son of the other. This explanation is that which satisfied the early fathers, and is com­monly known as that of Julius Africanus. It is, however, in spite of its antiquity, open to several serious objections. It is difficult to see why Joseph’s genealogy should be repeated by Luke, in a Gospel written specially for Gentile converts, and why the genealogy of our Lord’s own mother should be entirely passed over by both evangelists.

The third, and most probable explanation of the difficulty, is to regard Luke’s genealogy as the genealogy of Mary, and not of Joseph. Heli was the father of Mary, and the father-in-law, by his marriage, of Joseph. It is not said that Heli “begat” Joseph; and that the Greek does not necessarily mean Joseph was “his son,” is clear from the expressions used about Mary and Jude, in two other places of the New Testament. (Mark xvi. 1. and Acts i. 15. ) It is Mary’s family, therefore, and not Joseph’s, that St. Luke describes, and Joseph’s family, and not Mary’s, that is described by St. Matthew.

There are doubtless some difficulties in the way of this ex­planation. But there seem to be far greater difficulties in the way of any other. In leaving the question, I may be allowed to remark, that the view I venture to maintain is that of Brentius, Gomarus, Chemnitius. Spanheim, Surenhusius, Poole, Bengel, Parseus, Lightfoot, Calovius, Gill, Burkitt, Henry, Scott, and Clarke, among Protestants,—and of Jansenius, Barrradius, Stella, and others, among Roman Catholics. It is also a remarkable fact, that Rabbinical writers, quoted by Lightfoot, speaking of Mary in very reproachful terms, distinctly call her, “the daughter of Heli.”

36. —[The son of Cainan.] There is a serious difficulty connected with this name. It is not to be found in the genealogy from Noah to Abraham, as recorded in the Hebrew version of Gen. xi. 12., although it is found in the Septuagint Greek version. The question at once arises, —Why did St. Luke put the name here? How are we to reconcile Moses and St. Luke?

The solutions of this difficulty are various, and a complete settlement of the question will probably never be attained. One thing only is certain, and that is, that neither Moses nor St. Luke could have made a real mistake, because both were inspired. Some think that St. Luke does not pretend to do more than copy out the genealogy which was commonly received, and guards himself against the charge of endorsing its errors and mistakes, by the use of the expression at the outset, “as was supposed.” They consider this expression to apply to the whole genealogy.—Some think that the name has been omitted in the Hebrew text of Genesis, by mistake of a transcriber.—Some think that St. Luke purposely put the name in the genealogy, in order to consult the feelings of those who only knew the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.—Some think that the name has crept into St Luke’s Gospel by the error of some transcriber, who knew nothing of Hebrew, and only knew the old Testament from the Septuagint version, and that St. Luke originally did not insert Cainan’s name. —This last solution is maintained by Spanheim, Capellus, Grotius, Calovius, Rivetus, Leigh, and Surenhusius, and is perhaps the most probable one. One argument in support of it is the fact that the name is omitted in Beza’s manuscript, though it must be admitted that on this point his manuscript stands almost alone.

In leaving the difficult subject of these questions connected with our Lord’s genealogy, we shall do well to ponder the sensible remarks of Mr. Burgon: “It is humbly suggested that a few difficulties of this class may have been suffered to find place in Holy Writ, in order to exercise the faith of persons who, while they feel such intellectual trials keenly, are but little affected by those which imperil the salvation of the ordinary class of mankind. “