

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE IV. 14-21

14. And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

15. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.

16. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and stood up for to read.

17. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18. The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20. And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.

THESE verses relate events which are only recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke. They describe the first visit which our Lord paid, after entering on His public ministry, to the city of Nazareth, where He had been brought up. Taken together with the two verses which immediately follow, they furnish an awfully striking proof that “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” (Rom. viii. 7.)

We should observe, in these verses, *what marked honour our Lord Jesus Christ gave to public means of grace*. We are told that “He went into the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read” the Scriptures. In the days when our Lord was on earth, the Scribes and Pharisees were the chief teachers of the Jews. We can hardly suppose that a Jewish synagogue enjoyed much of the Spirit’s presence and blessing under such teaching. Yet even then we find our Lord visiting a synagogue, and reading and preaching in it. It was the place where His Father’s day and Word were publicly recognised, and as such He thought it good to do it honour.

We need not doubt that there is a practical lesson for us in this part of our Lord’s conduct. He would have us know that we are not lightly to forsake any assembly of worshippers, which professes to respect the name, the day, and the book of God. There may be many things in such an assembly which might be done better. There may be want of fulness, clearness, and distinctness in the doctrine preached. There may be a lack of unction and devoutness in the manner in which the worship is conducted. But so long as no positive error is taught, and there is no choice between worshipping with such an assembly, and having no public worship at all, it becomes a Christian to think much before he stays away. If there be but two or three in the congregation who meet in the name of Jesus, there is a special blessing promised. But there is no like blessing promised to him who tarries at home.

We should observe, for another thing, in these verses, *what a striking account our Lord gave to the congregation at Nazareth, of His own office and*

ministry. We are told that He chose a passage from the book of Isaiah, in which the prophet foretold the nature of the work Messiah was to do when He came into the world. He read how it was foretold that He would “preach the Gospel to the poor,”—how He would be sent to “heal the broken-hearted,”—how He would “preach deliverance to the captives, sight to the blind, and liberty to the bruised,”—and how He would “proclaim that a year of jubilee to all the world had come.” And when our Lord had read this prophecy, He told the listening CROWD around Him, that He Himself was the Messiah of whom these words were written, and that in Him and in His Gospel the marvellous figures of the passage were about to be fulfilled.

We may well believe that there was a deep meaning in our Lord’s selection of this special passage of Isaiah. He desired to impress on His Jewish hearers, the true character of the Messiah, whom He knew all Israel were then expecting. He well knew that they were looking for a mere temporal king, who would deliver them from Roman dominion, and make them once more first among the nations. Such expectations, He would have them understand, were premature and wrong. Messiah’s kingdom at His first coming was to be a spiritual kingdom over hearts. His victories were not to be over worldly enemies, but over sin. His redemption was not to be from the power of Rome, but from the power of the devil and the world. It was in this way, and in no other way at present, that they must expect to see the words of Isaiah fulfilled.

Let us take care that we know for ourselves in what light we ought chiefly to regard Christ. It is right and good to reverence Him as very God. It is well to know Him as Head over all things—the mighty Prophet,—the Judge of all,—the King of kings. But we must not rest here, if we hope to be saved. We must know Jesus as the friend of the poor in spirit, the Physician of the diseased heart, the deliverer of the soul in bondage. These are the principal offices He came on earth to fulfil. It is in this light we must learn to know Him, and to know Him by inward experience, as well as by the hearing of the ear. Without such knowledge we shall die in our sins.

We should observe, finally, *what an instructive example we have in these verses of the manner in which religious teaching is often heard.* We are told that when our Lord had finished His sermon at Nazareth, His hearers “bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth.” They could not find any flaw in the exposition of Scripture they had heard. They could not deny the beauty of the well-chosen language to which they had listened. “Never man spake like this man.” But their hearts were utterly unmoved and unaffected. They were even full of envy and enmity against the Preacher. In short, there seems to have been no effect produced on them, except a little temporary feeling of admiration.

It is vain to conceal from ourselves that there are thousands of persons, in

Christian churches, in little better state of mind than our Lord's hearers at Nazareth. There are thousands who listen regularly to the preaching of the Gospel, and admire it while they listen. They do not dispute the truth of what they hear. They even feel a kind of intellectual pleasure in hearing a good and powerful sermon. But their religion never goes beyond this point. Their sermon-hearing does not prevent them living a life of thoughtlessness, worldliness, and sin.

Let us often examine ourselves on this important point. Let us see what practical effect is produced in our hearts and lives by the preaching which we profess to like. Does it lead us to true repentance towards God, and lively faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ? Does it excite us to weekly efforts to cease from sin, and to resist the devil? These are the fruits which sermons ought to produce, if they are really doing us good. Without such fruit, a mere barren admiration is utterly worthless. It is no proof of grace. It will save no soul.

NOTES. LUKE IV. 14—21.

- 14.—[*Fame of him.*] Here, as in other places, the word "of" is used by our translators in the sense of "about" or "concerning."
- 16.—[*He came to Nazareth.*] The date of this visit to Nazareth is not precisely known. There seems strong internal evidence that it did not take place immediately after the temptation. If this had been the case we should not find the expression, "as His custom was," or reference to His works at Capernaum. The simple explanation appears to be, that St Luke having made a general statement of our Lord's practice of teaching "in the synagogues," takes occasion to describe what took place when He taught in the synagogue of Nazareth,—not only as an interesting event in itself, but as an illustration of our Lord's method of proceeding when He visited a synagogue.
- 17.—[*Opened the book.*] The word "opened" would be more literally translated "unfolded," or "unrolled." A book in the times when our Lord was upon earth, was a scroll of parchment rolled up, and in no respect resembled a modern book.
- 20.—[*Closed the book.*] The word "closed" here would be more literally rendered, "folded up," or "rolled up."
- [*The Minister.*] We must not suppose that this word means the preacher, or teacher of the synagogue. It means the officer or attendant appointed to take charge of the sacred writings.
- 21.—[*He began to say.*] It is evident that the full exposition of the passage in Isaiah, which our Lord gave, has been withheld from us. The words which are recorded in this verse are probably the beginning of what our Lord said, and form the key-note of His sermon. The sermon itself is not recorded.