

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE V. 12–16.

12 And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on *his* face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

13 And he put forth *his* hand, and touched him, saying, I will, be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him.

14 And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and show thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them.

15 But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities.

16 And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

WE see in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's power over incurable diseases*. "A man full of leprosy," applies to Him for relief, and is at once healed. This was a mighty miracle. Of all ills which can afflict the body of man, leprosy appears to be the most severe. It affects every part of the constitution at once. It brings sores and decay upon the skin, corruption into the blood, and rottenness into the bones. It is a living death, which no medicine can check or stay. Yet here we read of a leper being made well in a moment. It is but one touch from the hand of the Son of God, and the cure is effected. One single touch of that almighty hand, "And immediately the leprosy departed from him."

We have in this wonderful history a lively emblem of Christ's power to heal our souls. What are we all but lepers spiritually in the sight of God? Sin is the deadly sickness by which we are all affected. It has eaten into our constitution. It has infected all our faculties. Heart, conscience, mind, and will, all are diseased by sin. From the sole of our foot to the crown of our head, there is no soundness about us, but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores. (Isaiah i. 6.) Such is the state in which we are born. Such is the state in which we naturally live. We are in one sense dead long before we are laid in the grave. Our bodies may be healthy and active, but our souls are by nature dead in trespasses and sins.

Who shall deliver us from this body of death? Let us thank God that Jesus Christ can. He is that divine Physician who can make old things pass away and all things become new. In Him is life. He can wash us thoroughly from all the defilement of sin in His own blood. He can quicken us, and revive us by His own Spirit. He can cleanse our hearts, open the eyes of our understandings, renew our wills, and make us whole. Let this sink down deeply into our hearts. There is medicine to heal our sickness. If we are lost it is not because we cannot be saved. However corrupt our hearts, and however wicked our past lives, there is hope for us in the Gospel. There is no case of spiritual leprosy too hard for Christ.

We see, secondly, in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's willingness to help those that are in need*. The petition of the afflicted leper was a very touching one. "Lord," he said, "if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean."

The answer he received was singularly merciful and gracious. At once our Lord replies, "I will: be thou clean."

Those two little words, "I will," deserve special notice. They are a deep mine, rich in comfort and encouragement to all labouring and heavy laden souls. They show us the mind of Christ towards sinners. They exhibit His infinite willingness to do good to the sons of men, and His readiness to show compassion. Let us always remember, that if men are not saved, it is not because Jesus is not willing to save them. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He would have all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.—He has no pleasure in the death of him that dieth.—He would have gathered Jerusalem's children, as a hen gathereth her chickens, if they would only have been gathered. He would, but they would not.—The blame of the sinner's ruin must be borne by himself. It is his own will, and not Christ's will, if he is lost for ever. It is a solemn saying of our Lord's, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." (2 Pet. iii. 9. 1 Tim. ii. 5. Ezek. xviii. 32. Matt. xxiii. 37. John v. 40.)

We see, thirdly, in this passage, *what respect our Lord Jesus Christ paid to the ceremonial law of Moses*. He bids the leper "go and show himself to the priest," according to the requirement in Leviticus, that he may be regularly pronounced clean. He bids him offer an offering on the occasion of his doing so, "according as Moses commanded." Our Lord knew well that the ceremonies of the Mosaic law were only shadows and figures of good things to come, and had in themselves no inherent power. He knew well that the last days of the Levitical institutions were close at hand, and that they were soon to be laid aside for ever. But so long as they were not abrogated He would have them respected. They were ordained by God himself. They were pictures and lively emblems of the Gospel. They were not therefore to be lightly esteemed.

There is a lesson here for Christians, which we shall do well to remember. Let us take heed that we do not despise the ceremonial law, because its work is done. Let us beware of neglecting those parts of the Bible which contain it, under the idea that the believer in the Gospel has nothing to do with them. It is true that the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. (1 John ii. 8.) We have nothing to do now with altars, sacrifices, or priests. Those who wish to revive them are like men who light a candle at noon day. But true as this is, we must never forget that the ceremonial law is still full of instruction. It contains that same Gospel in the bud, which we now see in full flower. Rightly understood we shall always find it throwing strong light on the Gospel of Christ. The Bible reader who neglects to study it, will always find at last that by the neglect his soul has suffered damage.

We see, lastly, in this passage, *our Lord Jesus Christ's diligence about*

private prayer. Although “great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities,” He still made time for secret devotion. Holy and undefiled as He was, He would not allow the demands of public business to prevent regular private intercourse with God. We are told that “He withdrew Himself into the wilderness and prayed.”

There is an example set before us here, which is much overlooked in these latter days. There are few professing Christians, it may be feared, who strive to imitate Christ in this matter of private devotion. There is abundance of hearing, and reading, and talking, and profession, and visiting, and almsgiving, and subscribing to societies, and teaching at schools. But is there, together with all this, a due proportion of private prayer? Are believing men and women sufficiently careful to be frequently alone with God? These are humbling and heart-searching questions. But we shall find it useful to give them an answer.

Why is it that there is so much apparent religious working, and yet so little result in positive conversions to God,—so many sermons, and so few souls saved,—so much machinery, and so little effect produced,—so much running hither and thither, and yet so few brought to Christ? Why is all this? The reply is short and simple. There is not enough private prayer. The cause of Christ does not need less working, but it does need among the workers more praying. Let us each examine ourselves, and amend our ways. The most successful workmen in the Lord’s vineyard, are those who are like their Master, often and much upon their knees.

NOTES. LUKE V. 12–16.

12.—[*A man full of leprosy*] Gill, in his commentary on this passage, gives a long list of the symptoms and indications of leprosy, as laid down by Galen, Aretæus, Pontanus, Ægineta, Carden, and others. Those who wish to study the subject are recommended to read what he has compiled. It will be found more interesting to medical men than to general readers.

The disease of leprosy is still to be found in some parts of the world, though comparatively unknown in England. There is said to be a small island on the coast of South Africa, near the Cape of Good Hope, which is appropriated by the Colonial Government to lepers. It is mentioned in “M’Cheyne’s Memoirs,” p. 200.

13.—[*I will.*] It is remarked by Mr. Burgon that this “is the saying of God, and of God only,—the saying of Him, whose almighty will is the cause of all things. When His servants wrought miracles, far different were the phrases they used. Joseph says, ‘It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.’” (Gen. xli. 16.)

16.—[*Withdrew himself.*] Gualter remarks on this expression that it should teach ministers of the Gospel to beware of too much familiarity, and too frequent public intercourse with their hearers. He considers that excessive familiarity between ministers and hearers leads to contempt, and that habits of privacy and retirement are on every account essential to a minister’s position.

[*And prayed.*] This frequent mention of our Lord’s praying is peculiar to St. Luke.

Wordsworth remarks, “a similar instance is seen in his narrative of our Lord’s baptism, and of the transfiguration. (Luke iii. 21, and ix. 28, 29.) The Gentiles, for whom St. Luke’s Gospel was especially designed, needed instruction in the duty and benefits of prayer. Accordingly this subject occupies a prominent place in his Gospel. It is eminently the Gospel of prayer.” (See Luke vi. 12; ix. 18, 28; xi. 1; xviii. 41, 46)