

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE V. 17–26.

17 And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judæa, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them.

18 And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay him before him.

19 And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in, because of the multitude, they went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus.

20 And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

21 And the Scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which

speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?

22 But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?

23 Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk?

24 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, he said unto the sick of the palsy, I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.

25 And immediately he rose up, before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God.

26 And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things today.

A THREEFOLD miracle demands our attention in these verses. At one and the same time, we see our Lord forgiving sins, reading men’s thoughts, and healing a palsy. He that could do such things, and do them with such perfect ease and authority, must indeed be very God. Power like this was never possessed by man.

Let us mark, firstly, in this passage, *what pains men will take about an object when they are in earnest*. The friends of a man, sick with the palsy, desired to bring him to Jesus that he might be cured. At first they were unable to do it, because of the crowd by which our Lord was surrounded. What, then, did they do? “They went upon the house-top, and let him down through the tiling, with his couch, into the midst before Jesus.” At once their object was gained. Our Lord’s attention was drawn to their sick friend, and he was healed. By pains, and labour, and perseverance, his friends succeeded in obtaining for him the mighty blessing of a complete cure.

The importance of pains and diligence, is a truth that meets our eyes on every side. In every calling, and vocation, and trade, we see that labour is one great secret of success. It is not by luck or accident that men prosper, but by hard working. Fortunes are not made without trouble and attention, by bankers and merchants. Practice is not secured without diligence and study, by lawyers and physicians. The principle is one with which the children of this world are perfectly familiar. It is one of their favourite maxims, that there are “no gains without pains.”

Let us thoroughly understand that pains and diligence are just as essential to the well-being and prosperity of our souls as of our bodies. In all our endeavours to draw near to God, in all our approaches to Christ, there ought to be the same determined earnestness which was shown by this sick man’s

friends. We must allow no difficulties to check us, and no obstacle to keep us back from anything which is really for our spiritual good. Specially must we bear this in mind in the matter of regularly reading the Bible, hearing the Gospel, keeping the Sabbath holy, and private prayer. On all these points we must beware of laziness and an excuse-making spirit. Necessity must be the mother of invention. If we cannot find means of keeping up these habits in one way, we must in another. But we must settle it in our minds, that *the thing shall be done*. The health of our souls is at stake. Let the crowd of difficulties be what it may, we must get through it. If the children of this world take such pains about a corruptible crown, we ought to take far more pains about one that is incorruptible.

Why is it that so many people take no pains in religion? How is it that they can never find time for praying, Bible reading, and hearing the Gospel? What is the secret of their continual string of excuses for neglecting means of grace? How is it that the very same men who are full of zeal about money, business, pleasure, or politics, will take no trouble about their souls?—The answer to these questions is short and simple. These men are not in earnest about salvation. They have no sense of spiritual disease. They have no consciousness of requiring a Spiritual Physician. They do not feel that their souls are in danger of dying eternally. They see no use in taking trouble about religion. In darkness like this thousands live and die. Happy indeed are they who have found out their peril, and count all things loss if they may only win Christ, and be found in Him.

Let us mark, secondly, *the kindness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Twice in this passage we see Him speaking most graciously to the poor sufferer who was brought before Him. At first He addresses to him those marvellous and heart-cheering words, “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.” Afterwards he adds words, which in point of comfort, must have been second only to the blessing of forgiveness. “Arise,” He says, “and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.” First He assures him that his soul is healed. Then He tells him that his body is cured, and sends him away rejoicing.

Let us never forget this part of our Lord’s character. Christ’s loving kindness to His people never changes, and never fails. It is a deep well, of which no one ever found the bottom. It began from all eternity, before they were born. It chose, called, and quickened them when they were dead in trespasses and sins. It drew them to God and changed their character, and put a new will in their minds, and a new song in their mouths. It has borne with them in all their waywardness and shortcomings. It will never allow them to be separated from God. It will flow ever forward, like a mighty river, through the endless ages of eternity. Christ’s love and mercy must be a sinner’s plea when he first begins his journey. Christ’s love and mercy will be his only

plea when he crosses the dark river and enters home. Let us seek to know this love by inward experience, and prize it more. Let it constrain us more continually to live, not to ourselves, but to Him who died for us and rose again.

Let us mark, lastly, *our Lord Jesus Christ's perfect knowledge of the thoughts of men*. We read that when the Scribes and Pharisees began to reason secretly among themselves, and privately charge our Lord with blasphemy, He knew what they were about, and put them to an open shame. It is written, that "He perceived their thoughts."

It should be a daily and habitual reflection with us that we can keep nothing secret from Christ. To Him apply the words of St. Paul, "All things are naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." (Heb. iv. 13.) To Him belong the solemn expressions of the 139th Psalm,—the Psalm which every Christian should often study. There is not a word in our mouths, nor an imagination in our hearts, but Jesus knows it altogether. (Psalm cxxxix. 4.)

How many searchings of heart this mighty truth ought to awaken within us! Christ ever sees us! Christ always knows us! Christ daily reads and observes our acts, words, and thoughts!—The recollection of this should alarm the wicked and drive them from their sins. Their wickedness is not hid, and will one day be fearfully exposed, except they repent!—It should frighten hypocrites out of their hypocrisy. They may deceive man, but they are not deceiving Christ!—It should quicken and comfort all sincere believers. They should remember that a loving Master is looking at them, and should do all as in His sight. Above all, they should feel that, however mocked and slandered by the world, they are fairly and justly measured by their Saviour's eye. They can say, "Thou Lord who knowest all things, knowest that I love Thee." (John xxi. 17.)

NOTES. LUKE V. 17–26.

- 17.—[*To heal them.*] We must not suppose that this means "to heal the Pharisees." Mr. Burgon remarks: "To heal whom? The Pharisees and doctors of the law? Clearly not. The truth is, the whole scene rose up before the Evangelist, while he wrote, so that he used the word 'them,' with reference to the many sick persons who had been brought to our Saviour on this occasion, and were waiting for an opportunity of being healed."
- 19.—[*Let him down through the tiling.*] In order to understand this we must remember the construction of houses in the countries where our Lord preached. It was, and is now, a common practice to construct them with a flat roof, and a small square or court-yard in the midst of the building. Access was obtained to the roof by a stair-case outside, so that a person might ascend to the roof without entering the house. Around the sides of the court-yard a shelter was provided, extending from the walls of the house towards the middle. Sometimes this shelter was made of canvas or cloth, sometimes of light tiling. The use of this shelter was to enable people to sit in the open air of the court-yard, and at the same

time to be protected against the rain or sun.

In the case before us, our Lord appears to have been preaching and teaching in the court-yard of the house, under cover of the tiling projecting from one of the sides. The friends of the paralytic man being unable to make their way into the courtyard, because of the crowd, carried him up the staircase outside the building, and so reached the flat roof of the house. They then removed that portion of the tiling which was above the place where our Lord was preaching, and let down their friend in his bed, by ropes, into the court-yard below.

Unless we entirely dismiss from our minds all conception of a house drawn from the construction of houses in England, the whole history of the circumstances of the miracle must be unintelligible. Bearing in mind what Eastern houses both were and are, it becomes clear and plain.

26.—[*They were all amazed.*] The word so rendered might be more literally translated, “Amazement took them all.” The word used for amazement is the same that is translated in three places as “a trance.” (Acts x. 10; xi. 5; and xxii. 17.) Suicer quotes Epiphanius to show that it is the word used concerning “the highest sort of admiration or wonder.”

[*Strange things.*] The word so translated is only used in this place in the New Testament. It is literally “paradoxes,”— things contrary to all common opinion and ordinary experience.