EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE V. 27–32.

27 And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and hesaid unto him, Follow me.

28 And he left all, rose up, and followed him.

29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.

30 But their scribes and Phari­sees murmured against his disci­ples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

31 And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician: but they that are sick.

32 I came not to call the righte­ous, but sinners to repentance.

THE verses we have now read ought to be deeply interesting to every one who knows the value of an immortal soul, and desires salvation. They describe the conversion and experience of one of Christ’s earliest disciples. We too are all by nature born in sin, and need conversion. Let us see what we know of the mighty change. Let us Compare our own experience with that of the man whose case is here described, and by compa­rison learn wisdom.

We are taught, in this passage, *the power of Christ’s calling grace.* We read that our Lord called a publican named Levi to become one of His disciples. This man belonged to a class who were a very proverb for wicked­ness among the Jews. Yet even to him our Lord says, “Follow me.”—We read furthermore, that such mighty influence on Levi’s heart accompanied our Lord’s words, that although “sitting at the receipt of custom,” when called, he at once “left all, rose up, followed” Christ, and became a disciple.

We must never despair of any one’s salvation, so long as he lives, after reading a case like this. We must never say of any one that he is too wicked, or too hard­ened, or too worldly to become a Christian. No sins are too many, or too bad, to be forgiven. No heart is too hard or too worldly, to be changed. He who called Levi still lives, and is the same that He was 1800 years ago. With Christ nothing is impossible.

How is it with ourselves. This, after all, is the grand question. Are we waiting, and delaying, and hanging back, under the idea that the cross is too heavy, and that we can never serve Christ? Let us cast such thoughts away at once and for ever. Let us believe that Christ can enable us by His Spirit to give up all, and come out from the world. Let us remember that He who called Levi never changes. Let us take up the cross boldly, and go forward.

We are taught, secondly, in this passage, *that conversion is* a *cause of joy to a true believer.* We read, that when Levi was converted he “made a great feast in his own house.” A feast is made for laughter and merriment. (Eccles. x. 19.) Levi regarded the change in himself as an occasion of rejoicing; and wished others to rejoice with him.

We can easily imagine that Levi’s conversion was a cause of grief to his worldly friends. They saw him giving up a profitable calling, to follow a new teacher from Nazareth! They doubtless regarded his conduct as a grievous piece of folly, and an occasion for sorrow rather than joy. They only looked at his temporal losses by becoming a Christian. Of his spiritual gains they knew nothing. And there are many like them. There are always thousands of people who, if they hear of a relation being converted, consider it rather a misfortune. Instead of rejoicing, they only shake their heads and mourn.

Let us, however, settle it in our minds that Levi did right to rejoice, and if we are converted, let us rejoice likewise. Nothing can happen to a man which ought to be such an occasion of joy, as his conversion. It is a far more important event than being married, or coming of age, or being made a nobleman, or receiving a great fortune. It is the birth of an immortal soul! It is the rescue of a sinner from hell! It is a passage from death to life! It is being made a king and priest for ever­more! It is being provided for, both in time and eternity!

It is adoption into the noblest and richest of all families, the family of God! Let us not heed the opinion of the world in this matter. They speak evil of things which they know not. Let us, with Levi, consider every fresh conversion as a cause for great rejoicing. Never ought there to be such joy, gladness, and congratulation, as when our sons, or daughters, or brethren, or sisters, or friends, are born again and brought to Christ. The words of the prodigal’s father should be remembered:—“It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” (Luke xv. 32.)

We are taught, thirdly, in this passage, *that converted souls desire to promote the conversion of others.* We are told that when Levi was converted, and had made a feast on the occasion, he invited “a great company of publicans” to share it. Most probably these men were his old friends and companions. He knew well what their souls needed, for he had been one of them. He desired to make them acquainted with that Saviour who had been merciful to himself. Having found mercy, he wanted them also to find it. Having been graciously delivered from the bondage of sin, he wished others also to be set free.

This feeling of Levi will always be the feeling of a true Christian. It may be safely asserted that there is no grace in the man who cares nothing about the salva­tion of his fellow-men. The heart which is really taught by the Holy Ghost, will always be full of love, charity, and compassion. The soul which has been truly called of God, will earnestly desire that others may experience the same calling. A converted man will not wish to go to heaven alone.

How is it with ourselves in this matter? Do we know anything of Levi’s spirit after his conversion? Do we strive in every way to make our friends and relatives acquainted with Christ? Do we say to others, as Moses to Hobab, “Come with us, and we will do you good”? (Num. x. 29.) Do we say, as the Samaritan woman, “Come, see a man that told me all that ever I did”? Do we cry to our brethren, as Andrew did to Simon, “We have found the Christ”?—These are very serious questions. They supply a most searching test of the real condition of our souls. Let us not shrink from applying it. There is not enough of a missionary spirit amongst Christians. It should not satisfy us to be safe ourselves. We ought also to try to do good to others. All cannot go to the heathen, but every believer should strive to be a missionary to his fellow-men. Having received mercy, we should not hold our peace.

We are taught, lastly, in this passage, one of the chief objects of Christ’s coming into the world. We have it in the well-known words, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

This is that great lesson of the Gospel which, in one form or another, we find continually taught in the New Testament. It is one which we can never have too strongly impressed upon our minds. Such is our natural ignorance and self-righteousness in religion, that we are constantly losing sight of it. We need to be frequently reminded, that Jesus did not come merely as a teacher, but as the Saviour of that which was utterly lost, and that those only can receive benefit from Him who will confess that they are ruined, bankrupt, hopeless, miserable sinners.

Let us use this mighty truth, if we never used it before. Are we sensible of our own wickedness and sinfulness? Do we feel that we are unworthy of anything but wrath and condemnation? Then let us understand that we are the very persons for whose sake Jesus came into the world. If we feel ourselves righteous, Christ has nothing to say to us. But if we feel ourselves sinners, Christ calls us to repentance. Let not the call be made in vain.

Let us go on using this mighty truth, if we have used it in time past. Do we find our own hearts weak and deceitful? Do we often feel that “when we would do good, evil is present with us “? (Rom. vii. 21.) It may be all true, but it must not prevent our resting on Christ. He “came into the world to save sinners,” and if we feel ourselves such, we have warrant for applying to, and trusting in Him to our life’s end. One thing only let us never forget:—Christ came to call us to repentance, and not to sanction our continuing in sin.

NOTES. LUKE V. 27–32.

27.—[*A publican named Levi*.] The person called Levi here, is called Matthew, in St. Matthew’s Gospel, and Levi in St. Mark’s. It is almost universally agreed that it is one and the same person,—Matthew the Apostle. Like some others in the Bible, he had two names.

It is hardly necessary to observe that a publican means a collector of public taxes.

[*At the receipt of custom*.] The Greek word so translated does not necessarily mean that Levi was in the very act of receiving money. It might be rendered with equal correctness, “At the place were taxes were received.” This seems the more probable meaning.

28.—[*He left all, rose up, &c.*]We must be careful not to suppose that Levi neglected his duty to the government and inflicted loss on his employers, by this sudden action here recorded, in leaving his post. It is highly probable that, like many tax gatherers and toll collectors, he hired the tolls at the place where our Lord found him, by the year, and paid in advance. This being the case, if he chose to leave his post, he did so entirely at his own loss, but the government was not defrauded. Watson remarks, “Had Levi been a government servant hired at a salary, like our custom house officers, to collect the duties, he must in justice have remained until a successor was appointed. But having himself purchased the tolls and dues for a given period, he was at liberty to throw up the office of exacting them at pleasure.”

29.—[*A* *great feast.*]The word translated “feast,” is only used here and Luke xiv. 13. It means a kind of large reception banquet, such as only wealthy people could give, and at which the guests were numerous. The worldly sacrifice which Levi made in becoming Christ’s disciple, was probably greater than that made by any of the Apostles.

32.—[*Call...to repentance.*]Let it be carefully noted here, as well as elsewhere, that our Lord’s call to sinners is not a bare call to become His disciples, but a call “to repentance.”

Stella, the Spanish annotator, remarks on this verse,—“You must not understand from this, that Christ found some who were righteous. For the sentence of Paul is true: ‘all have sinned.’ Christ calls these Scribes and Pharisees righteous, not because they were really so, but only according to the common estimation and appearance of them.”