

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE VII. 1–10.

1. Now when he had ended all his sayings in the audience of the people, he entered into Capernaum.	Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:
2. And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.	7. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.
3. And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.	8. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.
4. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, that he was worthy for whom he should do this:	9. When Jesus heard these things, he marvelled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.
5. For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.	10. And they that were sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole that had been sick.
6. Then Jesus went with them. And when he was now not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying unto him,	

THESE verses describe the miraculous cure of a sick man. A centurion, or officer in the Roman army, applies to our Lord on behalf of his servant, and obtains what he requests. A greater miracle of healing than this, is nowhere recorded in the Gospels. Without even seeing the sufferer, without touch of hand or look of eye, our Lord restores health to a dying man by a single word. He speaks, and the sick man is cured. He commands, and the disease departs. We read of no prophet or apostle, who wrought miracles in this manner. We see here the finger of God.

We should notice in these verses *the kindness of the centurion*. It is a part of his character which appears in three ways. We see it in his treatment of his servant. He cares for him tenderly when sick, and takes pains to have him restored to health.—We see it again in his feeling towards the Jewish people. He did not despise them as other Gentiles commonly did. The elders of the Jews bear this strong testimony, “He loveth our nation.”—We see it lastly in his liberal support of the Jewish place of worship at Capernaum. He did not love Israel “in word and tongue only, but in deed.” The messengers he sent to our Lord supported their petition by saying, “He hath built us a synagogue.”

Now where did the centurion learn this kindness? How can we account for one who was a heathen by birth, and a soldier by profession, showing such a spirit as this? Habits of mind like these were not likely to be gathered from heathen teaching, or promoted by the society of a Roman camp. Greek and Latin philosophy would not recommend them. Tribunes, consuls, prefects and emperors would not encourage them.—There is but one account of the matter. The centurion was what he was “by the grace of God.” The Spirit had opened the eyes of his understanding, and put a new heart within him.

His knowledge of divine things no doubt was very dim. His religious views were probably built on a very imperfect acquaintance with the Old Testament Scriptures. But whatever light from above he had, it influenced his life, and one result of it was the kindness which is recorded in this passage.

Let us learn a lesson from the centurion's example. Let us, like him, show kindness to everyone with whom we have to do. Let us strive to have an eye ready to see, and a hand ready to help, and a heart ready to feel, and a will ready to do good to all. Let us be ready to weep with them that weep, and rejoice with them that rejoice. This is one way to recommend our religion, and make it beautiful before men. Kindness is a grace that all can understand.—This is one way to be like our blessed Saviour. If there is one feature in His character more notable than another, it is His unwearied kindness and love.—This is one way to be happy in the world, and see good days. Kindness always brings its own reward. The kind person will seldom be without friends.

We should notice, secondly, in this passage, *the humility of the centurion*. It appears in his remarkable message to our Lord when He was not far from his house: "I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof:—neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee."—Such expressions are a striking contrast to the language used by the elders of the Jews. "He is worthy," said they, "for whom thou shouldest do this."—"I am not worthy," says the good centurion, "that thou shouldest enter under my roof."

Humility like this is one of the strongest evidences of the indwelling of the Spirit of God. We know nothing of this by nature, for we are all born proud. To convince us of sin, to show us our own vileness and corruption, to put us in our right place, to make us lowly and self-abased,—these are among the principal works which the Holy Ghost works in the soul of man. Few of our Lord's sayings are so often repeated as the one which closes the parable of the Pharisee and Publican: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke xviii. 14.) To have great gifts, and do great works for God, is not given to all believers. But all believers ought to strive to be clothed with humility.

We should notice, thirdly, in this passage, *the centurion's faith*. We have a beautiful example of it in the request that he made to our Lord: "Say in a word, and my servant shall be healed." He thinks it needless for our Lord to come to the place where his servant lay dying. He regards our Lord as one possessing authority over diseases, as complete as his own authority over his soldiers, or a Roman Emperor's authority over himself. He believes that a word of command from Jesus is sufficient to send sickness away. He asks to see no sign or wonder. He declares his confidence that Jesus is an almighty Master and King, and that diseases, like obedient servants, will at once depart at His orders.

Faith like this was indeed rare when the Lord Jesus was upon earth. "Show us a sign from heaven," was the demand of the sneering Pharisees. To see something wonderful was the great desire of the multitudes who crowded after our Lord. No wonder that we read the remarkable words, "Jesus marvelled at him," and said unto the people, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." None ought to have been so believing as the children of those who were led through the wilderness, and brought into the promised land. But the last was first and the first last. The faith of a Roman soldier proved stronger than that of the Jews.

Let us not forget to walk in the steps of this blessed spirit of faith which the centurion here exhibited. Our eyes do not yet behold the book of life. We see not our Saviour pleading for us at God's right hand. But have we the word of Christ's promises? Then let us rest on it and fear nothing. Let us not doubt that every word that Christ has spoken shall be made good. The word of Christ is a sure foundation. He that leans upon it shall never be confounded. Believers shall all be found pardoned, justified, and glorified at the last day. "Jesus says so," and therefore it shall be done.

We should notice, finally, in these verses, *the advantage of being connected with godly families*. We need no clearer proof of this than the case of the centurion's servant. We see him cared for in sickness. We see him restored to health through his master's intercession. We see him brought under Christ's notice through his master's faith. Who can tell but the issue of the whole history, was the conversion and salvation of the man's soul? It was a happy day for that servant, when he first took service in such a household!

Well would it be for the Church, if the benefits of connection with "the household of faith," were more frequently remembered by professing Christians. Often, far too often, a Christian parent will hastily place his son in a position where his soul can get no good, for the sake of mere worldly advantage. Often, far too often, a Christian servant will seek a new place, where religion is not valued, for the sake of a little more wages. These things ought not so to be. In all our moves, our first thought should be the interest of our souls. In all our settlements, our chief desire should be to be connected with godly people. In all our scheming and planning, for ourselves or our children, one question should ever be uppermost in our minds: "What shall it profit to gain the whole world, and lose our own souls?" Good situations, as they are called, are often godless situations, and ruin to all eternity those who take them.

NOTES. LUKE VII. 1-10.

- 1.—[*Into Capernaum.*] Let it be remembered that a remarkable miracle of healing had already been worked at Capernaum in the cure of the ruler's son, described at the end of the fourth

chapter of St. John. This cure was distinct from that described here. The Centurion had in all probability heard of it. Few places, let it be noted, witnessed more of our Lord's miracles than Capernaum. This circumstance probably throws light on our Lord's expression, "Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven." (Matt. xi. 23.)

- 2.—[*A certain Centurion's servant.*] Some things in the history of this miracle call for remarks, which, for convenience sake, may be made here.

The Centurion here spoken of, was evidently a Gentile by birth. This is manifest from our Lord's expression, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

In a Roman soldier such faith and love as we see here described, were very extraordinary. "A Roman soldier," says Bunyan, "was the first fruit of the Gentile world."—"Even the bloody trade of war," says Bishop Hall, "yielded worthy clients to Christ. This Roman captain had learned to believe in that Jesus, whom many Jews despised. No nation, no trade, can shut out a good heart from God. If he was a foreigner in birth, yet he was a domestic in heart." It is worthy of remark, that neither here, nor in the case of soldiers who came to John the Baptist, nor in the case of Cornelius in the Acts, do we find the slightest hint that the profession of a soldier is unlawful in the sight of God. On the contrary, both here and in the history of such men as Colonel Gardiner and General Havelock, we see proof that God can give much grace to soldiers, and put much honour on them.

The Centurion's conduct towards his servant, is very noteworthy. When we remember the position of servants in Gentile households, his care and kindness towards this servant are a strong evidence of the grace which he possessed.

- 3.—[*He sent unto him the elders.*] Bishop Hall observes here: "Great variety of visitors resorted to Christ. One comes to Him for a son, another for a daughter; a third for himself. I see none come to Him for his servant but this one Centurion. Neither was he a better man than a master. His servant is sick: he doth not drive him out of doors, but lays him at home; neither doth he stand gazing by his bedside, but seeks forth; he seeks forth not to physicians, but to Christ.—Had the master been sick the faithfullest servant could have done no more. He is unworthy to be well served that will not sometimes wait upon his followers."

- 5.—[*He hath built us a synagogue.*] The English version here can hardly be said to give the full sense of the Greek. The meaning is, "He hath himself built us a synagogue; "that is, at his own expense and charges.

- 6.—[*Sent friends to him.*] In the parallel passage in St. Matthew, both here and in the beginning of the narrative, the centurion is represented as coming to our Lord in person, and not by the intervention of messengers or friends. This variation in the two accounts has induced some to think that St. Matthew and St. Luke are describing two different miracles. This view is ingeniously defended by Flacius Illyricus. But there seems no sufficient ground for it.—Matthew's account of the miracle is evidently shorter, and more abridged than that of Luke, and he may perhaps speak of the Centurion as doing some things himself, which a more full and complete narrative shows that he did by others. "This," says Trench, "is an exchange of persons, of which all historical narrations, and all the language of common life, is full."—It is highly probable however that the narratives of both the Gospels are literally accurate, and do not require the explanation just given. In all probability the Centurion first sent messengers to our Lord, and afterwards went to speak to Him in person. St. Matthew relates the personal interview, and St. Luke the message. On this view both accounts are true, and do not clash with one another.

Apparent discrepancies between the Gospel narratives, be it noted, are often explainable in this way. Common fairness should make us remember that two men in daily life may describe the same event, and both speak the truth, and yet their accounts may not be precisely the same. And the reason of it is simply this. One man dwells on one circumstance of

the story and the other on another. Each brings out his own point more fully than the other. Yet each speaks truth.

The slightly varying accounts which two faithful historians give of the same public events, and the slightly varying evidence which two honest witnesses will often give in a court of justice about the same facts, are striking illustrations of what I mean. In short an entire sameness in the stories told by two separate witnesses is sometimes in itself suspicious, because it looks like concert, collusion, and an attempt to deceive.

[*Trouble not thyself.*] The Greek word so translated is only used three times in the New Testament: here, and at Mark v. 35, and Luke viii. 49; and each time in the same sense, as descriptive of persons giving unnecessary trouble and fatigue to our Lord.

7.—[*Say in a word.*] The Portuguese Commentator, Barradius, has some striking remarks on this expression of the Centurion's. He says, "This is a peculiar attribute of God's, to be able to do all things by a word and a command. 'He spake and they were made' He commanded and they were created.' (Psalm cxlviii. 5.) Read the book of Genesis. You will see the world created by the word of God: 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light' 'God said, Let there be a firmament,' and a firmament was made," &c. He then shows by a quotation from Augustine, how all the created beings in existence, whether kings, or angels, or seraphims, cannot create so much as an ant. But when God says, "Let the world be made," at once it is made by a word. And he concludes, "Well therefore does the Centurion say, 'say in a word only, and my servant shall be healed.'"

9.—[*He marvelled at him.*] There are two occasions where it is recorded that our Lord Jesus Christ "marvelled," once in this history, and once in Mark vi. 6. It is remarkable that in one case He is described as marvelling at "faith," and in the other as marvelling at "unbelief." Bishop Hall, and Burkitt after him, both observe, "What can be more wonderful than to see Christ wonder?"

The expression is one of those which show the reality of our Lord's human nature. He was made like unto us in all things, sin only excepted. As man He grew in wisdom and stature. As man He hungered, thirsted, was weary, ate, drank, slept, wept, sorrowed, rejoiced, groaned, agonized, bled, suffered and died. And so also as man He wondered. Yet all this time He was very and eternal God, one with the Father, and the Saviour of the world. This is a great mystery, and one which we cannot fathom. The union of two natures in one Person, is a thing passing our weak comprehension. We must believe and admire, without attempting to define or explain.

In the case in Mark the marvelling is evidently a marvelling of sorrow. In the case before us it is a marvelling of admiration. Burkitt remarks, "Let it teach us to place our admiration where Christ placed His. Let us be more affected with the least measure of grace in a good man, than with all the gaities and glories of a great man." Our Lord be it remembered, did not marvel at the gorgeous and beautiful buildings of the Jewish temple. But he did marvel at faith.

