

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE VII. 18–23

<p>18. And the disciples of John showed him of all these things.</p> <p>19. And John calling <i>unto him</i> two of his disciples sent <i>them</i> to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?</p> <p>20. When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?</p> <p>21. And in the same hour he cured many</p>	<p>of <i>their</i> infirmities and plagues and of evil spirits; and unto many <i>that were</i> blind he gave sight.</p> <p>22. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached.</p> <p>23. And blessed is <i>he</i>, whosoever shall not be offended in me.</p>
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THE message which John the Baptist sent to our Lord, in these verses, is peculiarly instructing, when we consider the circumstances under which it was sent. John the Baptist was now a prisoner in the hands of Herod. "He heard in the prison the works of Christ." (Matt. xi. 2.) His life was drawing to a close. His opportunities of active usefulness were ended. A long imprisonment, or a violent death, were the only prospects before him. Yet even in these dark days, we see this holy man maintaining his old ground, as a witness to Christ. He is the same man that he was when he cried, "Behold the Lamb of God." To testify of Christ, was his continual work as a preacher at liberty. To send men to Christ, was one of his last works as a prisoner in chains.

We should mark, in these verses, *the wise fore-thought which John exhibited about his disciples, before he left the world.* He sent some of them to Jesus, with a message of inquiry,—“Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” He doubtless calculated that they would receive such an answer as would make an indelible impression on their minds. And he was right. They got an answer in deeds, as well as words,—an answer which probably produced a deeper effect than any arguments which they could have heard from their master’s lips.

We can easily imagine that John the Baptist must have felt much anxiety about the future course of his disciples. He knew their ignorance and weakness in the faith. He knew how natural it was for them to regard the disciples of Jesus with feelings of jealousy and envy. He knew how likely it was that petty party-spirit would creep in among them, and make them keep aloof from Christ when their own master was dead and gone. Against this unhappy state of things he makes provision, as far as possible, while he is yet alive. He sends some of them to Jesus, that they may see for themselves what kind of teacher He is, and not reject Him unseen and unheard. He takes care to supply them with the strongest evidence that our Lord was indeed the Messiah. Like his divine Master, having loved his disciples, he loved them to the end. And now, perceiving that he must soon leave them, he strives to leave them in the best of hands. He does his best to make them

acquainted with Christ.

What an instructive lesson we have here for ministers, and parents, and heads of families,—for all, in short, who have anything to do with the souls of others! We should endeavour, like John the Baptist, to provide for the future spiritual welfare of those we leave behind, when we die. We should often remind them, that we cannot always be with them. We should often urge them to beware of the broad way, when we are taken from them, and they are left alone in the world. We should spare no pains to make all, who in any way look up to us, acquainted with Christ. Happy are those ministers and parents, whose consciences can testify on their death-beds, that they have told their hearers and children to go to Jesus, and follow Him!

We should mark, secondly in these verses, *the peculiar answer which the disciples of John received from our Lord*. We are told that “in the same hour He cured many of their infirmities and plagues.” And then, “He said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard.” He makes no formal declaration that He is the Messiah that was to come. He simply supplies the messengers with facts to repeat to their master, and sends them away. He knew well how John the Baptist would employ these facts. He would say to his disciples, “Behold in Him who worked these miracles, the prophet greater than Moses.—This is He whom you must hear and follow, when I am dead.—This is indeed the Christ.”

Our Lord’s reply to John’s disciples, contains a great practical lesson, which we shall do well to remember. It teaches us that the right way to test the value of Churches and ministers, is to examine the works they do for God, and the fruits they bring forth. Would we know whether a Church is true and trustworthy?— Would we know whether a minister is really called of God, and sound in the faith?—We must apply the old rule of Scripture, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” As Christ would be known by His works and doctrine, so must true Churches of Christ, and true ministers of Christ. When the dead in sin are not quickened, and the blind are not restored to sight, and the poor have no glad tidings proclaimed to them, we may generally suspect that Christ’s presence is wanting. Where He is, He will be seen and heard. Where He is, there will not only be profession, forms, ceremonies, and a show of religion. There will be actual, visible work in hearts and lives.

We should mark, lastly, in these verses, *the solemn warning which our Lord gave to John’s disciples*. He knew the danger in which they were. He knew that they were disposed to question His claim to be the Messiah, because of His lowly appearance. They saw no signs of a king about Him, no riches, no royal apparel, no guards, no courtiers, and no crown. They only saw a man, to all appearance poor as any one of themselves, attended by a few fishermen and publicans. Their pride rebelled at the idea of such an one

as this being the Christ! It seemed incredible! There must be some mistake! Such thoughts as these, in all probability, passed through their minds. Our Lord read their hearts, and dismissed them with a searching caution. "Blessed," He said, "is he that is not offended in me."

The warning is one that is just as needful now as it was when it was delivered. So long as the world stands, Christ and His Gospel will be a stumbling block to many. To hear that we are all lost and guilty sinners, and cannot save ourselves,—to hear that we must give up our own righteousness, and trust in One who was crucified between two thieves,—to hear that we must be content to enter heaven side by side with publicans and harlots, and to owe all our salvation to free grace,—this is always offensive to the natural man. Our proud hearts do not like it. We are offended.

Let the caution of these verses sink down deeply into our memories. Let us take heed that we are not offended. Let us beware of being stumbled, either by the humbling doctrines of the Gospel, or the holy practice which it enjoins on those who receive it. Secret pride is one of the worst enemies of man. It will prove at last to have been the ruin of thousands of souls. Thousands will be found to have had the offer of salvation, but to have rejected it. They did not like the terms. They would not stoop to "enter in at the strait gate." They would not humbly come as sinners to the throne of grace. In a word, they were offended. And then will appear the deep meaning of our Lord's words, "Blessed is he who shall not be offended in me."

NOTES. LUKE VII. 18–23.

19.—[*John calling unto him...disciples sent them to Jesus.*] The reason why John the Baptist sent this message to our Lord, is explained by different commentators in widely different ways. Those who wish to see the subject fully discussed should read what Chemnitius and Barradius say about it.

Some think that John sent this message at a time when his faith was failing. They think that like many other saints in the Bible, he had his moments of weakness, and that his imprisonment, together with the fact that our Lord did nothing to deliver him, had made him begin to doubt whether Jesus was the Messiah. This explanation was maintained by Tertulian, but it is not satisfactory.

Some think that John sent his message not from unbelief, but from a desire to obtain information. He regarded himself as delivered to death, and on the brink of the grave. He desired to know whether he was to announce in the world beyond the grave that the Messiah was coming after him. This explanation seems so absurd that it needs no refutation, and were it not that it is maintained (according to Barradius,) by Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Beda, it would not be worth mentioning.

The most probable explanation is that which I have set forth in the exposition of the passage. John's message was not sent on his account, but on account of his disciples. It was not sent because his own faith was failing, but because he wished those he was about to leave behind him to believe in Jesus as the Messiah.—One argument in favour of this view is the great improbability that one so eminently taught of God as John was, and so singular-

ly clear in his past testimony, would forget his first faith and doubt whether Jesus was the Christ.—Another, and far more powerful argument, is the strong language of commendation which our Lord uses about John the Baptist as soon as his messengers had left Him. His expressions are so peculiarly strong, that we might suppose they were specially intended to prevent any slur being thrown on John's character on account of his message. They look as if our Lord would have all men know that John's own faith never failed, and that he was the same man at the end of his course that he was at the beginning.

The view now set forth is maintained by Hilary, Augustine, Chrysostom, Theophylact, and the great majority of the best commentators.

[*He that should come.*] This expression might be rendered more literally, "the coming One." It seems to have been an expression specially applied to the Messiah. John iv. 25. and xi. 27. Chemnitius says, that the word in Hebrew signifies not merely one who comes to a place, but one who comes to enter upon an office, and occupy a position.

20.—[*John Baptist hath sent us.*] It is very difficult to see why our English translators in this place have used the expression "John Baptist," and not "John the Baptist," as at verses 28 and 33. I can detect nothing in the Greek version, to warrant the omission of the word "the."

21.—[*Infirmities...plagues...evil spirits.*] Let it be noted that evil spirits are here mentioned as an affliction distinct from any bodily ailments. Bishop Pearce remarks, "We may conclude that evil spirits are reckoned by St. Luke, (who speaks of distempers with more accuracy than the other evangelists,) as things different from any disorders of the body included in the two former words."

[*He gave sight.*] There is something very peculiar in the Greek words so translated, which our version can hardly convey. It might be rendered, "he made a present of seeing."

22.—[*The dead are raised.*] The question has often been asked, To whom does our Lord refer, in saying this? We only know of one dead person restored to life by Christ up to the present time. That person was the widow's son at Nain.

The answer is simply this. It is mere assumption to say that no dead person was raised to life beside those whose cases are described, during the period of our Lord's earthly ministry. It is unreasonable to suppose that all our Lord's miracles are recorded in the Gospels. He doubtless did many mighty works, beside those which are there described. See John xxi. 25. Augustine in his sermon on this miracle, says: "Who knows how many dead the Lord raised visibly? For all the things that He did are not written. John tells us this. So then there were without doubt many others raised."

[*To the poor the Gospel is preached.*] That this was a sign of Messiah's times appears plain from the words of Isaiah: "In that day the poor among men shall rejoice in the holy one of Israel." (Isa. xxix. 19.) Contempt for the poor, as ignorant and despicable, appears to have been very common in the times of the Gospel. (John vii. 49. ix. 34. and James ii. 24.) Concern and tender interest about the souls of the poor, as souls which would live as long as the souls of rich men, was a distinguishing feature of our Lord's ministry, and of that of His apostles. It is always an evil sign of the state of a Church when the spiritual wants of the lower orders are neglected, and the rich man's way to heaven is made smoother than the way of the poor.