

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE VIII. 26-36.

26 And they arrived at the country of the Gadarenes, which is over against Galilee.

27 And when he went forth to land, there met him out of the city a certain man, which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in *any* house, but in the tombs.

28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out, and fell down before him, and with a loud voice said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of God most high? I beseech thee, torment me not.

29 (For he had commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man. For oftentimes it had caught him: and he was kept bound with chains and in fetters; and he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.)

30 And Jesus asked him, saying, What is thy name? And he said, Legion: because many devils were entered into him.

31 And they besought him that he would

not command them to go out into the deep.

32 And there was there an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them to enter into them. And he suffered them.

33 Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked.

34 When they that fed *them* saw what was done, they fled, and went and told *it* in the city and in the country.

35 Then they went out to see what was done; and came to Jesus, and found the man, out of whom the devils were departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind: and they were afraid.

36 They also which saw *it* told them by what means he that was possessed of the devils was healed.

THE well-known narrative which we have now read, is carefully recorded by all the three first Gospel-writers. It is a striking instance of our Lord's complete dominion over the prince of this world. We see the great enemy of our souls for once completely vanquished,—the “strong man” foiled by One stronger than he, and the lion spoiled of his prey.

Let us mark, first, in this passage, *the miserable condition of those over whom the devil reigns*. The picture brought before us is a frightful one. We are told that when our Lord arrived in the country of the Gadarenes, there met Him “a certain man which had devils long time, and ware no clothes, neither abode in any house, but in the tombs.” We are also told that although he had been “bound with chains and in fetters, he brake the bands, and was driven of the devil into the wilderness.” In short, the case seems to have been one of the most aggravated forms of demoniacal possession. The happy sufferer was under the complete dominion of Satan, both in body and soul. So long as he continued in this state, he must have been a burden and a trouble to all around him. His mental faculties were under the direction of a “legion” of devils. His bodily strength was only employed for his own injury and shame. A more pitiable state for mortal man to be in, it is difficult to conceive.

Cases of bodily possession by Satan, like this, are, to say the least, very rarely met with in modern times. Yet we must not, on this account, forget that the devil is continually exercising a fearful power over many hearts and souls. He still urges many, in whose hearts he reigns, into self-dishonouring and self-destroying habits of life. He still rules many with a rod of iron,—

goads them on from vice to vice, and from profligacy to profligacy,—drives them far from decent society, and the influence of respectable friends,—plunges them into the lowest depths of wickedness,—makes them little better than self-murderers,—and renders them as useless to their families, the Church, and the world, as if they were dead, and not alive. Where is the faithful minister who could not put his finger on many such cases? What truer account can be given of many a young man, and many a young woman, than that they seem possessed of devils? It is vain to shut our eyes to facts. Demoniacal possession of men's bodies may be comparatively rare. But many, unhappily, are the cases in which the devil appears completely to possess men's souls.

These things are fearful to think upon. Fearful is it to see to what a wreck of body and mind Satan often brings young persons! Fearful is it to observe how he often drives them out of the reach of all good influence, and buries them in a wilderness of bad companions and loathsome sins! Fearful, above all, is it to reflect that yet a little while Satan's slaves will be lost for ever, and in hell! There often remains only one thing that can be done for them. They can be named before Christ in prayer. He that came to the country of the Gadarenes, and healed the miserable demoniac there, still lives in heaven, and pities sinners. The worst slave of Satan in England is not beyond a remedy. Jesus may yet take compassion on him, and set him free.

Let us mark, secondly, in these verses, *the absolute power which the Lord Jesus Christ possesses over Satan*. We are told that he "commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man," whose miserable condition we have just heard described. At once the unhappy sufferer was healed. The "many devils" by whom he had been possessed were compelled to leave him. Nor is this all. Cast forth from their abode in the man's heart, we see these malignant spirits beseeching our Lord that he would "not torment" them, or "command them to go out into the deep," and so confessing His supremacy over them. Mighty as they were, they plainly felt themselves in the presence of One mightier than themselves. Full of malice as they were, they could not even hurt the "swine" of the Gadarenes until our Lord granted them permission.

Our Lord Jesus Christ's dominion over the devil should be a cheering thought to all true Christians. Without it, indeed, we might well despair of salvation. To feel that we have ever near us an invisible spiritual enemy, labouring night and day to compass our destruction, would be enough to crush out every hope, if we did not know a Friend and Protector. Blessed be God! The Gospel reveals such an One. The Lord Jesus is stronger than that "strong man armed," who is ever warring against our souls. The Lord Jesus is able to deliver us from the devil. He proved His power over him frequently when upon earth. He triumphed over him gloriously on the cross. He will

never let him pluck any of His sheep out of His hand. He will one day bruise him under our feet, and bind him in the prison of hell. (Rom. xvi. 20; Rev. xx. 1, 2.) Happy are they who hear Christ's voice and follow Him! Satan may vex them, but he cannot really hurt them! He may bruise their heel, but he cannot destroy their souls. They shall be "more than conquerors" through Him who loved them. (Rom. viii. 37.)

Let us mark, finally, *the wonderful change which Christ can work in Satan's slaves.* We are told that the Gadarenes "found the man out of whom the devil was departed, sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind." That sight must indeed have been strange and astonishing! The man's past history and condition, no doubt, were well known. He had probably been a nuisance and a terror to all the neighbourhood. Yet here, in one moment, a complete change had come over him. Old things had passed away, and all things had become new. The power by which such a cure was wrought must indeed have been almighty. When Christ is the physician nothing is impossible.

One thing, however, must never be forgotten. Striking and miraculous as this cure was, it is not really more wonderful than every case of decided conversion to God. Marvellous as the change was which appeared in this demoniac's condition when healed, it is not one whit more marvellous than the change which passes over every one who is born again, and turned from the power of Satan to God. Never is a man in his right mind till he is converted, or in his right place till he sits by faith at the feet of Jesus, or rightly clothed till he has put on the Lord Jesus Christ.—Have we ever considered what real conversion to God is? It is nothing else but the miraculous release of a captive, the miraculous restoration of a man to his right mind, the miraculous deliverance of a soul from the devil.

What are we ourselves? This, after all, is the grand question which concerns us. Are we bondsmen of Satan or servants of God? Has Christ made us free, or does the devil yet reign in our hearts? Do we sit at the feet of Jesus daily? Are we in our right minds? May the Lord help us to answer these questions aright!

NOTES. LUKE VIII. 26-36.

27.—[*A certain man, which had devils long time.*] There is much in this case, like all the cases of demoniacal possession in Scripture, which is deeply mysterious. It must needs be so from the fact that such possession appears to have been far more common, and much more distinctly marked in its symptoms, when our Lord was upon earth, than it ever has been since.

Let it suffice us to believe implicitly, that diabolical possession of the entire man, both body, mind, and soul, was an undeniable fact during the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, and that all attempts to explain away the cases described in the Gospels, by calling them epilepsy, lunacy, and the like, are utterly unsatisfactory. For the rest, what we cannot thoroughly understand, we must be content to believe.

That there is such a thing as Satanic possession now, though comparatively a rare thing, is an opinion held by many able physicians, who have given special attention to this subject. Disease of the mind, or madness, is at all times a deeply mysterious subject. It is highly probable that Satan has far more to do with it than we think.

[*In the tombs.*] Trench quotes a remarkable circumstance, mentioned by the traveller Warburton, in "The Crescent and the Cross," which throws some light on this expression. "On descending from the height of Lebanon, I found myself in a cemetery, where sculptured turbans showed us, that the neighbouring village was Moslem. The silence of the night was now broken by fierce yells and howlings, which I discovered proceeded from a naked maniac, who was fighting with some wild dogs for a bone. The moment he perceived us, he left his canine companions, and bounding along with rapid strides, seized my horse's bridle and almost forced him backwards over the cliff."

The determined propensity to wear no clothes and go naked, which is a striking symptom of some kinds of mania, is another curious illustration of the case described in this verse.

28.—[*What have I to do with thee.*] The Greek expression so rendered, let it be noted, is the same which our Lord uses when He addresses His mother at the marriage of Cana in Galilee. (John ii. 4.)

The words here used are the words of the devil by whom the man was possessed, rather than the man himself. This fact shows us how entirely all the faculties and powers of the unhappy demoniac were occupied and employed by the evil spirit which possessed him.

[*Jesus, thou Son of God, torment me not.*] These words are a striking incidental proof that there will be a judgment, and a hell. The devils believe this, if men do not.

29.—[*Brake the bands.*] Prodigious muscular strength has often been remarked as accompanying some cases of mania.

30.—[*Legion.*] This is a well-known name by which a division of the Roman army was designated. A Roman Legion is supposed to have contained 5 or 6000 men. The word here is evidently used indefinitely to express a great number.

31.—[*Into the deep.*] The "deep" here means the abyss or pit of hell. It is the same Greek word which is five times translated "bottomless pit," in the book of Revelation. For instance, Rev. xx. 1, 3.

32.—[*An herd of many swine feeding.*] Let it be noted that to keep swine was a breach of the Mosaic law, swine being unclean animals. (Lev. ii. 7.) If therefore the Gadarenes were Jews, and there seems strong reason for supposing they were, they were committing an habitual sin.

[*He suffered them.*] It has often been asked, why our Lord suffered the devils to go into the swine, and permitted the consequent destruction of animal life which ensued. It might suffice to say in reply to this question, that Scripture shows us that animal life was continually taken away by God's own command, when some great spiritual truth was to be taught to man, as in the case of the sacrifices of the law. But in addition to this, it is fair to suppose that our Lord permitted the destruction of the swine, as a mark of God's displeasure against the Gadarenes for keeping them.

After all, the question is ultimately bound up with the deepest of all things the origin and permission of evil in creation. To explain this is impossible. Enough for us to see, that it exists, and to use the great remedy which God has provided against it.—So doing "what we know not now, we shall know hereafter."

33.—[*The herd ran violently down, &c.*] The extraordinary malice, hatred of God's creation, and love of mischief, which are attributes of Satan, appear strikingly in this fact. Satan must be doing harm. If he cannot harm man, he will harm swine. Well would it be for the world,

if Christians were as unwearied and zealous in doing good, as devils are in doing evil.

34.—[*In the country.*) This expression would be rendered more literally “in the fields.”

Before leaving this miracle it may be well to say something about the apparent discrepancy between the account given of it by St. Matthew, and those given by St. Mark and St. Luke. St. Matthew speaks of two demoniacs. St. Mark and St. Luke speak of only one.

The explanations of the discrepancy are various. According to Augustine, Theophylact, and Grotius, the one mentioned by Mark and Luke was a more illustrious and well known person than the other. According to Chrysostom, Euthymius, and Maldonatus, he was the fiercest of the two. According to Lightfoot, one of the demoniacs was a Jew and the other a heathen, and the healing of the heathen one is the case which Mark and Luke dwell on.

I venture to suggest that the reason why Mark and Luke only mention one, is the fact that only one of the two asked to be allowed to remain with our Lord, after he was healed, and only one ultimately became a witness to the Lord in the country of the Gadarenes. The case of the other man presented no peculiar circumstances of interest, and therefore Mark and Luke pass it over.

It is hardly necessary to remark that there is no contradiction between the two accounts. Though Mark and Luke only describe the cure of one demoniac, it would be absurd to say that they denied that two were cured. They only describe the case which was most remarkable.