EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE IX. 1–6.

1 Then he called his twelve disci­ples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.

2 And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.

3 And he said unto them, Take nothing for *your* journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, nei­ther money; neither have two coats apiece.

4 And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart.

5And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them.

6 And they departed, and went through the towns, preaching the Gospel, and healing every where.

THESE verses contain our Lord’s instructions to His twelve apostles, when He sent them forth the first time to preach the Gospel. The passage is one which throws much light on the work of Christian ministers in every age. No doubt the miraculous powers which the apostles possessed, made their position very unlike that of any other body of men in the Church. No doubt, in many respects, they stood alone, and had no successors. Yet the words of our Lord in this place must not be confined entirely to the apostles. They contain deep wisdom for Christian teachers and preachers, for all time.

Let us observe, that *the commission to the apostles con­tained special reference to the devil and bodily sickness.* We read that Jesus gave them “authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.”

We see here, as in a glass, two of the principal parts of the Christian minister’s business. We must not ex­pect him to cast out evil spirits, but we may fairly expect him to “resist the devil and all his works,” and to keep up a constant warfare against the prince of this world.—We must not expect him to work miraculous cures, but we may expect him to take a special interest in all sick people, to visit them, sympathize with them, and help them, if needful, as far as he can.—The minister who neglects the sick members of his flock is no true pastor. He must not be surprised if people say that he cares for the fleece of his sheep more than for their health. The minister who allows drunkenness, blas­phemy, uncleanness, fighting, revelling, and the like, to go on among his congregation unreproved, is omitting a plain duty of his office. He is not warring against the devil. He is no true successor of the apostles.

Let us observe, secondly, that *one of the principal works which the apostles were commissioned to take up was preach­ing.* We read that our Lord “sent them to preach the kingdom of God,” and that “they went through the towns preaching the Gospel.”

The importance of preaching, as a means of grace, might easily be gathered from this passage, even if it stood alone. But it is but one instance, among many, of the high value which the Bible everywhere sets upon preaching. It is, in fact, God’s chosen instrument for doing good to souls. By it sinners are converted, inquirers led on, and saints built up. A preaching ministry is absolutely essential to the health and pros­perity of a visible church. The pulpit is the place where the chief victories of the Gospel have always been won, and no Church has ever done much for the advancement of true religion in which the pulpit has been neglected. Would we know whether a minister is a truly apostolical man? If he is, he will give the best of his attention to his sermons. He will labour and pray to make his preaching effective, and he will tell his congregation that he looks to preaching for the chief results on souls. The minister who exalts the sacraments, or forms of the Church, above preaching, may be a zealous, earnest, conscientious, and respectable minister; but his zeal is not according to knowledge. He is not a follower of the apostles.

Let us observe, thirdly, that our Lord charges His apostles, when He sends them forth, *to study simplicity of habits, and contentment with such things as they have.* He bids them “take nothing for their journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread nor money; neither have two coats a piece. And whatsoever house ye enter into there abide, and thence depart.” In part, these instructions apply only to a peculiar period. There came a day when our Lord Himself bade every one who had “no sword, to sell his garment and buy one.” (Luke xxii. 36.) But, in part, these instructions contain a lesson for all time. The spirit of these verses is meant to be remembered by all ministers of the Gospel.

The leading idea which the words convey is, a warning against worldliness and luxurious habits. Well would it be for the world and the Church if the warning had been more carefully heeded! From no quarter has Christianity received such damage as it has from the hands of its own teachers. On no point have its teachers erred so much, and so often, as in the matter of personal worldliness and luxury of life. They have often destroyed, by their daily lives, the whole work of their lips. They have given occasion to the enemies of religion to say, that they love ease, and money, and good things, far more than souls. From such ministers may we pray daily that the Church may be delivered! They are a living stumbling-block in the way to heaven. They are helpers to the cause of the devil, and not of God. The preacher whose affections are set on money, and dress, and feasting, and pleasure-seeking, has clearly mistaken his vocation. He has forgotten his Master’s instructions. He is not an apostolic man.

Let us observe, lastly, that our *Lord prepares His disciples to meet with unbelief and impenitence in those to whom they preached.* He speaks of those “who will not receive them” as a class which they must expect to see. He tells them how to behave, when not received, as if it was a state of things to which they must make up their mind.

All ministers of the Gospel would do well to read carefully this portion of our Lord’s instructions. All mis­sionaries, and district visitors, and Sunday-school teachers, would do well to lay it to heart. Let them not be cast down if their work seems in vain, and their labour without profit. Let them remember that the very first preachers and teachers whom Jesus employed were sent forth with a distinct warning, that not all would believe. Let them work on patiently, and sow the good seed without fainting. Duties are theirs. Events are God’s. Apostles may plant and water. The Holy Ghost alone can give spiritual life. The Lord Jesus knows what is in the heart of man. He does not despise his labourers because little of the seed they sow bears fruit. The harvest may be small. But every labourer shall be rewarded according to his work.

NOTES. LUKE IX. 1–6.

1*.—*[*His twelve disciples.*]Let it be noted, that Judas Iscariot, the false apostle and traitor, was one of those twelve whom our Lord sent forth to preach and heal the sick. It must not surprise us, if we see unconverted men as preachers and ministers of the Gospel. Our Lord permitted one to be in the number of His apostles, in order to show that we must expect to see the evil mingled with the good in this world. The highest ecclesiastical office and dignity afford no proof that a man has the grace of God.

[*Gave them power.*]Theophylact remarks, what an evi­dence we have here of our Lord’s divine power. He could not only work miracles Himself, but could give power to others to work them.

2*.—*[*He sent them to preach.*]Let it be carefully noted, that, speaking literally and accurately, there is no such thing as apostolical succession. The office of the apostles was isolated, peculiar, and distinct, and ceased with themselves. Ministers of the churches of Christ are successors of Timothy and Titus, but not of the apostles.

3*.—*[*Take nothing for your journey, &c.*]The words of Quesnel on this verse are worth reading. “Men will never be able to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of people, so long as they do not appear fully persuaded themselves of those truths which they preach. And how can they appear so, if they plainly contradict them in their practice and behaviour? In order to persuade others to be unconcerned for superfluities, a man must not himself appear too much concerned, even about necessaries.”

[*Scrip.*]The word so translated, means, a little bag to carry provisions in.

4*.—*[*There abide, and thence depart.*]The object of this injunction is evident. The apostles were to beware of appearing changeable, fickle, luxurious, and hard to please. Like men who regard all the world as an inn, and heaven as their home, they were to be content with any lodging, and any kind of entertainment.

6*.—*[*Preaching the Gospel.*]It is a very awful thought, that one of those who did this, was Judas Iscariot. There seems no reason to suppose that he preached less faithfully or powerfully than the other apostles. Yet his heart was all the time wrong in the sight of God. It is no proof that a man is a con­verted man, because he preaches the Gospel! See Philipp. i. 15. A man may preach Christ from false motives.