

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE IX. 28–36.

28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.

29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.

30 And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:

31 Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.

32 But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.

33 And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.

34 While he thus spake, there came a cloud, and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud.

35 And there came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him.

36 And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

THE event described in these verses, commonly called “the transfiguration,” is one of the most remarkable in the history of our Lord’s earthly ministry. It is one of those passages which we should always read with peculiar thankfulness. It lifts a corner of the veil which hangs over the world to come, and throws light on some of the deepest truths of our religion.

In the first place, this passage shows us *something of the glory which Christ will have at His second coming*. We read that “the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening,” and that the disciples who were with Him “saw His glory.”

We need not doubt that this marvellous vision was meant to encourage and strengthen our Lord’s disciples. They had just been hearing of the cross and passion, and the self-denial and sufferings to which they must submit themselves, if they would be saved. They were now cheered by a glimpse of the “glory that should follow,” and the reward which all faithful servants of their Master would one day receive. They had seen their Master’s day of weakness. They now saw, for a few minutes, a pattern and specimen of His future power.

Let us take comfort in the thought, that there are good things laid up in store for all true Christians, which shall make ample amends for the afflictions of this present time. Now is the season for carrying the cross, and sharing in our Saviour’s humiliation. The crown, the kingdom, the glory, are all yet to come. Christ and His people are now, like David in the cave of Adullam, despised, and lightly esteemed by the world. There seems no form nor comeliness in Him, or in His service. But the hour cometh, and will soon be here, when Christ shall take to Himself His great power and reign, and put down every enemy under His feet. And then the glory which was first seen for a few minutes, by three witnesses on the Mount of Transfiguration, shall be seen by all the world, and never hidden to all eternity.

In the second place, this passage shows us *the safety of all true believers who have been removed from this world*. We are told that when our Lord appeared in glory, Moses and Elijah were seen with Him, standing and speaking with Him. Moses had been dead nearly fifteen hundred years. Elijah had been taken up by a whirlwind from the earth more than nine hundred years before this time. Yet here these holy men were seen once more alive, and not only alive, but in glory!

Let us take comfort in the blessed thought that there is a resurrection and a life to come. All is not over, when the last breath is drawn. There is another world beyond the grave. But, above all, let us take comfort in the thought, that until the day dawns, and the resurrection begins, the people of God are safe with Christ. There is much about their present condition, no doubt, which is deeply mysterious.—Where is their local habitation?—What knowledge have they of things on earth? These are questions we cannot answer. But let it suffice us to know that Jesus is taking care of them, and will bring them with Him at the last day. He showed Moses and Elijah to His disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, and He will show us all who have fallen asleep in Him, at His second advent. Our brethren and sisters in Christ are in good keeping. They are not lost, but gone before.

In the third place, this passage shows us that *the Old Testament saints in glory take a deep interest in Christ's atoning death*. We are told that when Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration, they "talked with Him." And what was the subject of their conversation? We are not obliged to make conjectures and guesses about this. St. Luke tells us, "they spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." They knew the meaning of that death. They knew how much depended on it. Therefore they "talked" about it.

It is a grave mistake to suppose that holy men and women under the Old Testament knew nothing about the sacrifice which Christ was to offer up for the sin of the world. Their light, no doubt, was far less clear than ours. They saw things afar off and indistinctly, which we see, as it were, close at hand. But there is not the slightest proof that any Old Testament saint ever looked to any other satisfaction for sin, but that which God promised to make by sending Messiah. From Abel downwards the whole company of old believers appear to have been ever resting on a promised sacrifice, and a blood of almighty efficacy yet to be revealed. From the beginning of the world there has never been but one foundation of hope and peace for sinners—the death of an Almighty Mediator between God and man. That foundation is the centre truth of all revealed religion. It was the subject of which Moses and Elijah were seen speaking when they appeared in glory.—They spoke of the atoning death of Christ.

Let us take heed that this death of Christ is the ground of all our confidence. Nothing else will give us comfort in the hour of death and the day of judgment. Our own works are all defective and imperfect. Our sins are more in number than the hairs of our heads. (Psalm xl. 12.) Christ dying for our sins, and rising again for our justification, must be our only plea, if we wish to be saved. Happy is that man who has learned to cease from his own works, and to glory in nothing but the cross of Christ! If saints in glory see in Christ's death so much beauty, that they must needs talk of it, how much more ought sinners on earth!

In the last place, the passage shows us *the immense distance between Christ and all other teachers whom God has given to man*. We are told that when Peter, "not knowing what he said," proposed to make three tabernacles on the mount, one for Jesus, one for Moses, and one for Elias, as if all three deserved equal honour, this proposal was at once rebuked in a remarkable way: "There came a voice out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son, hear Him." That voice was the voice of God the Father, conveying both reproof and instruction. That voice proclaimed to Peter's ear that however great Moses and Elijah might be, there stood One before him far greater than they. They were but servants; He was the King's Son. They were but stars; He was the Sun. They were but witnesses; He was the Truth.

For ever let that solemn word of the Father ring in our ears, and give the key note to our religion. Let us honour ministers for their Master's sake. Let us follow them so long as they follow Christ. But let it be our principal aim to hear Christ's voice, and follow Him whither-soever He goeth. Let some talk, if they will, of the voice of the Church. Let others be content to say, "I hear this preacher, or that clergyman." Let us never be satisfied unless the Spirit witnesseth within us that we hear Christ Himself, and are His disciples.

NOTES. LUKE IX. 28-36.

28.—[*After these sayings.*] This expression seems to make it plain that the words, "seeing the kingdom of God," in the preceding verse, were spoken with special reference to the vision of the transfiguration.

[*Peter, and James, and John.*] Let it be noted that these three disciples were chosen to be witnesses on three special occasions, the raising of Jairus' daughter, the agony in the garden, and the transfiguration.

[*A mountain.*] It is a common tradition that this mountain was Tabor. But the opinion of well-informed modern travellers is unfavourable to the tradition.

29.—[*As he prayed.*] Let it be noted, that we are specially told that it was when our Lord was "praying" at His baptism the Holy Ghost descended and the Father's voice was heard. So also prayer ushers in the great vision of glory in this place.

Bishop Hall remarks, "Behold how Christ entered upon all His great works, with prayers in His mouth. When He was to enter into that great work of His humiliation in

His passion, He went into the garden to pray. When He is to enter into this great work of His exaltation in His transfiguring, He went up into the mountain to pray. He was taken up from His knees to both. O noble example of piety and devotion to us!"

[*The fashion.*] This expression is only used six times in the New Testament, and in other places is translated "shape," "sight," or "appearance." (John v. 37. 2 Cor. v. 7. 1 Thess. v. 22.)

[*Was altered.*] This is a peculiar expression. It would be more literally rendered, "other," that is, "other than it generally appeared." (See Mark xvi. 12.)

[*Glistening.*] This word is only used once in the New Testament. Parkhurst explains it as meaning, "to emit flashes of light, to shine or glisten as lightning." See Nahum iii. 3.

- 30.—[*Moses and Elias.*] It is a true and common remark that Moses in this vision represented the law, and Elijah the prophets. Both agreed in acknowledging and recognizing Christ, as Him of whom the law and the prophets testified.

It is also highly probable that they were meant to be types and emblems of the saints who will appear with Christ in glory at His second advent. Moses is the type of those who are found dead, and will be raised at the Lord's coming. Elijah is the type of those who are found alive, and "caught up to meet the Lord in the air." 1 Thess. iv. 17.

- 31.—[*His decease.*] This expression is remarkable. It means literally, his "Exodus," or departure. It is used for "death" by St. Peter, speaking of his own death. (2 Pet. i. 15.) It is also remarkable that in Acts xiii. 24, we have a Greek word used for our Lord's "coming" to take the office of a Saviour, which might be translated literally His "entrance." Both expressions are singularly applicable to Him who came into the world and was made flesh, and after doing the work He came to do, left the world and went to the Father. The beginning of His ministry was an "Eisodus," or entrance; His death, an "Exodus," or departure.

[*He should accomplish.*] This expression would be more literally rendered, "He should fulfil." It is a very peculiar form of speech, and singularly applicable to Christ. Watson remarks, "to depart from life is the common lot: but to *fulfil* his decease or departure from the world, was peculiar to Christ, because His death was the grand subject of prophecy, and the event upon which the salvation of the world was suspended."

- 32.—[*Were heavy with sleep.*] Let it be noted, that the very same disciples who here slept during a vision of glory, were also found sleeping during the agony in the garden of Gethsemane. Flesh and blood does indeed need to be changed before it can enter heaven! Our poor, weak bodies can neither watch with Christ in His time of trial, nor keep awake with Him in His glorification. Our physical constitution must be greatly altered before we could enjoy heaven.

[*When they were awake, they saw.*] It is evident that they awoke before the vision was over, and saw and heard much of what happened.

- 33.—[*It is good for us to be here.*] There is doubtless much to be blamed in this expression of Peter's;—partly because he placed Moses and Elijah on a level with his divine Master, and partly because he would fain have tarried in the mount, and kept his Master there when there was work to be done in the world. The comment of St. Luke, "not knowing what he said," is a gentle hint that his wish was not commendable, but blameworthy. Nevertheless we cannot but admire the outburst of Peter's delight when he saw his Master surrounded with such glory, and with such glorified companions. It was the outburst of a truly burning heart. Archbishop Usher remarks, "When Peter saw Moses and Elias with Christ in His transfiguration, though he had but a glimpse of glory, yet

he says, 'It is good for us to be here.' But Oh! how infinitely good will it be to be in heaven. How shall we then be rapt up with glory, when we shall be for ever with the Lord!"

- 35.—[*Hear him.*] There can be no doubt that this expression was meant to point to the prophecy of Moses in Deuteronomy, where Moses says of the prophet like unto himself, "Unto him shall ye hearken," (Deut. xviii. 15.) and that under so great a penalty that all who refused should be "destroyed from among the people."

Calvin remarks, "We are placed under His tuition alone, and commanded from Him alone to seek the doctrine of salvation, to depend upon and listen to One—to adhere to One—in a word, as the terms import, to hearken to One only."

- 36.—[*Jesus was found alone.*] The disappearance of Moses and Elias, together with the words, "Hear him," were doubtless meant to teach that the law of ceremonies was about to pass away, and that the true Lamb of God and true prophet was come.