EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

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

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LUKE 9:37–45

37. And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met him.

38. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is mine only child.

39. And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him.

40. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and they could not.

41. And Jesus answering said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither.

42. And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare *him*. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.

43. And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples,

44. Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.

45. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying

THE event described in these verses took place immedi­ately after the transfiguration. The Lord Jesus, we should remark, did not tarry long on the Mount of Olives. His communion with Moses and Elias was very short. He soon returned to His accustomed work of doing good to a sin-stricken world. In His life on earth, to receive honour and have visions of glory was the exception. To minister to others, to heal all who were oppressed by the devil, to do acts of mercy to sinners, was the rule. Happy are those Christians who have learned of Jesus to live for others more than for themselves, and who understand that it is “more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts xx. 35.)

We have, first, in these verses, an example of what a parent should do when he is troubled about his children. We are told of a man in sore distress about his only son. This son was possessed by an evil spirit, and grievously tormented by him, both in body and soul. In his distress the father makes application to our Lord Jesus Christ for relief. “Master” he says,” I beseech Thee look upon my son: for he is mine only child.”

There are many Christian fathers and mothers at this day who are just as miserable about their children as the man of whom we are reading. The son who was once the “desire of their eyes,” and in whom their lives were bound up, turns out a spendthrift, a profligate, and a companion of sinners. The daughter who was once the flower of the family, and of whom they said, “this same shall be the comfort of our old age,” becomes self-willed, worldly-minded, and a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. Their hearts are well-nigh broken. The iron seems to enter into their souls. The devil appears to triumph over them, and rob them of their choicest jewels. They are ready to cry, “I shall go to the grave sorrow­ing. What good shall my life do to me?”

Now what should a father or mother do in a case like this? They should do as the man before us did. They should go to Jesus in prayer, and cry to Him about their child. They should spread before that mer­ciful Saviour the tale of their sorrows, and entreat Him to help them. Great is the power of prayer and inter­cession! The child of many prayers shall seldom be cast away. God’s time of conversion may not be ours. He may think fit to prove our faith by keeping us long waiting. But so long as a child lives, and a parent prays, we have no right to despair about that child’s soul.

We have, secondly, in these verses, an example of Christ’s readiness to show mercy to young persons. We are told in the case before us, that the prayer of the afflicted parent was graciously granted. He said to him, “Bring thy son hither.” And then “He rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.” We have many similar cases in the Gospels. The daughter of Jairus, the nobleman’s son at Capernaum, the daughter of the Canaanitish woman, the widow’s son at Nain, are all instances of our Lord’s interest in those who are young. The young are exactly those whom the devil labours to lead captive and make His own. The young seem to have been exactly the persons whom our Lord took a special delight in helping. Three He plucked out of the very jaws of death. Two, as in the case before us, He rescued from the complete dominion of the devil.

There is a meaning in facts like these. They are not recorded without a special purpose. They are meant to encourage all who try to do good to the souls of the young. They are meant to remind us that young men and young women are special objects of inte­rest to Christ. They supply us with an antidote to the common idea that it is useless to press religion on the attention of young people. Such an idea, let us remember, comes from the devil and not from Christ. He who cast out the evil spirit from the child before us, still lives, and is still mighty to save. Let us then work on, and try to do good to the young. Whatever the world may think, Jesus is well pleased.

We have, lastly, in these verses, an example of the spiritual ignorance which may be found even in the hearts of good men. We are told that our Lord said to His disciples, “The son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.” They had heard the same thing from His lips little more than a week before. But now, as then, the words seemed lost upon them. They heard as though they heard not. They could not realize the fact that their Master was to die. They could not realize the great truth that Christ was to be “cut off” before He was to reign, and that this cutting off was a literal death upon the cross. It is written, “They understood not this saying,”—“it was hid from them,”— “they perceived it not. ”

Such slowness of understanding may surprise us much at this period of the world. We are apt to forget the power of early habits of thought, and national prejudices, in the midst of which the disciples had been trained. “The throne of David,” says a great divine, “did so fill their eyes that they could not see the cross.” Above all, we forget the enormous difference between the position we occupy who know the history of the crucifixion and the Scriptures which it fulfilled, and the position of a believing Jew who lived before Christ died and the vail was rent in twain. Whatever we may think of it, the ignorance of the disciples should teach us two useful lessons, which we shall all do well to learn.

For one thing, let us learn that men may understand spiritual things very feebly, and yet be true children of God. The head may be very dull, when the heart is right. Grace is far better than gifts, and faith than knowledge. If a man has faith and grace enough to give up all for Christ’s sake, and to take up the cross and follow Him, he shall be saved in spite of much ignorance. Christ shall own him at the last day.

Finally, let us learn to bear with ignorance in others, and to deal patiently with beginners in religion. Let us not make men offenders for a word. Let us not set our brother down as having no grace, because he does not exhibit clear knowledge. Has he faith in Christ? Does he love Christ? These are the principal things. If Jesus could endure so much weakness in His disciples, we may surely do likewise.

NOTES. LUKE IX. 37–45.

38—[Cried out.] The Greek word so translated implies a crying out with a very loud voice. It is the same word that is used of our Lord’s “crying with a loud voice” on the cross; (Matt, xxvii. 46. ) and “the multitude crying out to Pilate to do as he had ever done to them.” (Mark xv. 8. )

[Mine only child. ] Let us remember that the daughter of Jairus, whom our Saviour raised from the dead, was an only daughter, and the widow’s son at Nain an only son. These things are worth notice. St. Luke is the only Gospel writer who specially mentions them.

39—[Hardly.] Let it be noted that this word must be taken with “departed.” It means “scarcely,” or “with difficulty.”

40—[They could not. ] The reality of Satanic possession is shown by this fact. We read of no disease which the disciples could not cure. But here we are told of a demoniac whose case baffled them. There was a degree of Satanic possession, with which their weak faith was unable to grapple. It was evidently something quite distinct from any merely bodily ailment.

41—[O faithless and perverse generation.] The question has been often raised, “To whom were these words addressed? and with what purpose were they spoken?” Were they meant to apply to the disciples only, and to be a rebuke to their unbelief? This is the opinion of Origen. —Were they, on the other hand, ad­dressed to the whole multitude of the Jews, as well as to the disciples? This is the opinion of Hilary, Chrysostom, and Jerome.—Did our Lord refer to the contrast between the vision of glory he had just left in the Mount of Transfiguration, in the company of Moses and Elias, and the unbelief and wicked­ness of the generation among whom He was sojourning? This is the opinion of Burgon.

It may however be doubted whether these words could fairly be applied to the man whose son was afflicted. He did what he could. He brought his son to the disciples. If the cure was not wrought, the fault was surely their’s more than his. In fact, when the disciples, as recorded by St. Matthew, xvii. 20, asked our Lord why they could not cast out this devil, He answered them at once, “Because of your unbelief.” The father, on the contrary, when our Lord said to him, “If thou canst believe all things are possible,” cried out,” Lord I believe.”

The words of our Lord would therefore appear to be directed partly to His own disciples, and partly to the whole generation of the Jews among whom He lived.

44.—[Let these sayings sink down into your ears.] The literal translation of these words would be, “Put these sayings into your ears. ”