

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,

VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

ST. LUKE. VOL. I.

LONDON:

WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUKE IX. 51–56.

51 And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem,	saw <i>this</i> , they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?
52 And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.	55 But he turned, and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.
53 And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.	56 For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save <i>them</i> . And they went to another village.
54 And when his disciples James and John	

LET us notice in these verses, *the steady determination with which our Lord Jesus Christ regarded His own crucifixion and death*. We read that “when the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” He knew full well what was before Him. The betrayal, the unjust trial, the mockery, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the spitting, the nails, the spear, the agony on the cross,—all, all were doubtless spread before His mind’s eye, like a picture. But He never flinched for a moment from the work that He had undertaken. His heart was set on paying the price of our redemption, and going even to the prison of the grave, as our surety. He was full of tender love towards sinners. It was the desire of His whole soul to procure for them salvation. And so, “for the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.” (Heb. xii. 2.)

For ever let us bless God that we have such a ready and willing Saviour. For ever let us remember that as He was ready to suffer, so He is always ready to save. The man that comes to Christ by faith should never doubt Christ’s willingness to receive Him. The mere fact that the Son of God willingly came into the world to die, and willingly suffered, should silence such doubts entirely. All the unwillingness is on the part of man, not of Christ. It consists in the ignorance, and pride, and unbelief, and half-heartedness of the sinner himself. But there is nothing wanting in Christ.

Let us strive and pray that the same mind may be in us which was in our blessed Master. Like Him, let us be willing to go anywhere, do anything, suffer anything, when the path of duty is clear, and the voice of God calls. Let us set our faces steadfastly to our work, when our work is plainly marked out, and drink our bitter cups patiently, when they come from a Father’s hand.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, *the extraordinary conduct of two of the apostles, James and John*. We are told that a certain Samaritan village refused to show hospitality to our Lord. “They did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.” And then we read of a strange proposal which James and John made. “They said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume

them, even as Elias did?"

Here was zeal indeed, and zeal of a most plausible kind,—zeal for the honour of Christ! Here was zeal, justified and supported by a Scriptural example, and that the example of no less a prophet than Elijah! But it was not a zeal according to knowledge. The two disciples, in their heat, forgot that circumstances alter cases, and that the same action which may be right and justifiable at one time, may be wrong and unjustifiable at another. They forgot that punishments should always be proportioned to offences, and that to destroy a whole village of ignorant people for a single act of discourtesy, would have been both unjust and cruel. In short, the proposal of James and John was a wrong and inconsiderate one. They meant well, but they greatly erred.

Facts like this in the Gospels are carefully recorded for our learning. Let us see to it that we mark them well, and treasure them up in our minds. It is possible to have much zeal for Christ, and yet to exhibit it in most unholy and unchristian ways. It is possible to mean well and have good intentions, and yet to make most grievous mistakes in our actions. It is possible to fancy that we have Scripture on our side, and to support our conduct by Scriptural quotations, and yet to commit serious errors. It is clear as daylight, from this and other cases related in the Bible, that it is not enough to be zealous and *well-meaning*. Very grave faults are frequently committed with good intentions. From no quarter perhaps has the Church received so much injury as from ignorant but well-meaning men.

We must seek to have knowledge as well as zeal. Zeal without knowledge is an army without a general, and a ship without a rudder. We must pray that we may understand how to make a right application of Scripture. The word is no doubt "a light to our feet, and a lantern to our path." But it must be the word rightly handled, and properly applied.

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, *what a solemn rebuke our Lord gives to persecution carried on under colour of religion*. We are told that when James and John made the strange proposal on which we have just been dwelling, "he turned and rebuked them, and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Uncourteous as the Samaritan villagers had been, their conduct was not to be resented by violence. The mission of the Son of man was to do good, when men would receive Him, but never to do harm. His kingdom was to be extended by patient continuance in well doing, and by meekness and gentleness in suffering, but never by violence and severity.

No saying of our Lord's, perhaps, has been so totally overlooked by the Church of Christ as that which is now before us. Nothing can be imagined more contrary to the will of Christ than the religious wars and persecutions which disgrace the annals of Church history. Thousands and tens of thou-

sands have been put to death for their religion's sake all over the world. Thousands have been burned, or shot, or hanged, or drowned, or beheaded, in the name of the Gospel, and those who have slain them have actually believed that they were doing God service! Unhappily, they have only shown their own ignorance of the spirit of the Gospel, and the mind of Christ.

Let it be a settled principle in our minds, that whatever men's errors may be in religion, we must never persecute them. Let us, if needful, argue with them, reason with them, and try to show them a more excellent way. But let us never take up the "carnal" weapon to promote the spread of truth. Let us never be tempted, directly or indirectly, to persecute any man, under pretence of the glory of Christ and the good of the Church. Let us rather remember, that the religion which men profess from fear of death, or dread of penalties, is worth nothing at all, and that if we swell our ranks by fear and threatening, in reality we gain no strength. "The weapons of our warfare," says St. Paul, "are not carnal." (2 Cor. x. 4.) The appeals that we make must be to men's consciences and wills. The arguments that we use must not be sword, or fire, or prison, but doctrines, and precepts, and texts. It is a quaint and homely saying, but as true in the Church as it is in the army, that "one volunteer is worth ten pressed men."

NOTES. LUKE IX. 51-56.

51.—[*The time that he should be received up.*] The Greek word so translated is peculiar, and is only found here in the New Testament. It would be rendered more literally, "the days of his reception up." About the meaning of the expression there is a curious difference of opinion.

Some think, with Heinsius and Hammond, that the meaning is, "the time of his death and being lifted up upon the cross."

Others think, with Suicer and Bengel, that the meaning is, "the time of his ascension, or being taken up to heaven."

This latter sense seems far the more probable of the two, and is confirmed by the fact that the Syriac and Arabic versions both render the word, "his ascension." Besides this, the Greek verb which is several times used to describe the ascension, is the very verb from which the word before us is derived. See Mark xvi. 19. Acts i. 2. xi. 22.

53.—[*They did not receive him.*] The wretched state of feeling between the Samaritans and the Jews is painfully illustrated by the circumstance here mentioned. Charity was indeed well-nigh extinct, where such a state of things existed. Those who wish to see the origin of the estrangement between the Jews and Samaritans, should read 2 Kings xvii; and Ezra iv.

54.—[*His disciples, James and John, &c.*] There is something very remarkable in the spirit exhibited by these two disciples on this occasion. It shows us that it was not without good reason that our Lord called them Boanerges, or sons of thunder, when He first ordained them to be apostles. Mark iii. 17. It shows us also the gradually transforming power of the grace of God in John's character. Three times we have sins against charity recorded in the Gospels as committed by John. Once we find him and his brother asking to sit at Christ's right and left hand in His kingdom, and to be preferred before all the other apostles.—

Once we find him forbidding a man to cast out devils, because he did not follow the apostles.—Here again we find him showing a fierce and cruel spirit against the Samaritan villagers for not receiving our Lord. Yet this was the apostle who proved at last most remarkable for preaching love and charity. No change is too great for the Lord to work.

[*Even as Elias did.*] Appeals to the Old Testament, like this, have often been made by fanatical men in order to justify violent actions. The case of Oliver Cromwell and many of his followers will naturally occur to some readers.

The examples of men who were raised up to do special works in the times of the Old Testament must not be followed in all things. The man who presumes to imitate Joshua and Elijah in all their dealings with the enemies of God, must furnish proof of his call and commission to walk in their steps.

55.—[*He turned and rebuked them, &c.*] Our Lord's entire disapproval of all persecution for religion's sake is very plainly taught in this passage. Whatever we may think of men's doctrines or practices, we are not to persecute them.

Poole says, "Christ did not approve of the Samaritan worship, yet he did not think that the way to change their minds was to call for fire from heaven against them. It is not the will of God that we should approve of any corrupt worship, and join with those who use it. But neither is it his will that we should by fire and sword go about to suppress it, and bring men off from it."

Quesnel remarks, "It often happens that the ministers of the Church, under pretence of zeal for her interests, offend against Christian meekness. The Church knows no such thing as revenge, and her ministers ought not to know it either. Their wrath should be incensed against sin, not against the sinner. The fire of heaven is one day to come down to purify the world by destruction. At present it comes down only to sanctify it by edification."

[*What manner of spirit ye are of.*] The disciples were forgetting the nature of that Spirit by whom they professed, as Christ's disciples, to be guided. They were forgetting that He was a Spirit of love and meekness and gentleness, and that all acts of a revengeful and violent character were grievous to Him. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness." (Gal. v. 22.) Their own Master had taught them that if any man smote them on one cheek they were to turn to him the other also. (Matt. v. 39.) But all this for the time was forgotten. A fierce temper and a sense of injured dignity make men bad reasoners, and drive good instruction out of their memories.

Bengel remarks, that we should compare with the conduct of these two disciples "the fact that when Jesus prayed on the cross, employing the very words of the twenty-second and thirty-first Psalms, he did not pray against his enemies, but for them."

It is an interesting fact, that the apostle John, at a later period in his life, came down to Samaria in a very different spirit. He came with Peter on a special mission from Jerusalem, to confer spiritual blessings on Samaritan believers. And we are told that he "preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans." (Acts viii. 25.)