

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS  
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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MATTHEW XXII. 1–14.

1 And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,

2 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,

3 And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

4 Again he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings *are* killed, and all things *are* ready: come unto the marriage.

5 But they made light of *it*, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:

6 And the remnant took his servants, and entreated *them* spitefully, and slew *them*.

7 But when the king heard *thereof*, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.

8 Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.

9 Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.

10 So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all, as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.

11 And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

12 And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

14 For many are called, but few *are* chosen.

THE parable related in these verses is one of very wide signification. In its first application it unquestionably points to the Jews.—But we may not confine it to them. It contains heart-searching lessons for all among whom the Gospel is preached. It is a spiritual picture which speaks to us this day, if we have an ear to hear. The remark of a learned divine is wise and true: “Parables are like many-sided precious stones, cut so as to cast lustre in more than one direction.”

Let us observe, in the first place, that *the salvation of the Gospel is compared to a marriage feast*. The Lord Jesus tells us that “a certain king made a marriage for his son.”

There is in the Gospel a complete provision for all the wants of man’s soul. There is a supply of everything that can be required to relieve spiritual hunger and spiritual thirst. Pardon, peace with God, lively hope in this world, glory in the world to come,—are set before us in rich abundance. It is “a feast of fat things.” All this provision is owing to the love of the Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. He offers to take us into union with Himself, to restore us to the family of God as dear children, to clothe us with His own righteousness, to give us a place in His kingdom, and to present us faultless before His Father’s throne at the last day. The Gospel, in short, is an offer of food to the hungry, of joy to the mourner, of a home to the outcast, of a loving friend to the lost. It is glad tidings. God offers, through His dear Son, to be at one with sinful man. Let us

not forget this. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John iv. 10.)

Let us observe, in the second place, that *the invitations of the Gospel are wide, full, broad and unlimited*. The Lord Jesus tells us in the parable, that the king’s servants said to those who were bidden, “All things are ready: come unto the marriage.”

There is nothing wanting on God’s part for the salvation of sinners’ souls. No one will ever be able to say at last that it was God’s fault, if he is not saved. The Father is ready to love and receive; the Son is ready to pardon and cleanse guilt away; the Spirit is ready to sanctify and renew; angels are ready to rejoice over the returning sinner; grace is ready to assist him; the Bible is ready to instruct him; heaven is ready to be his everlasting home. One thing only is needful, and that is,—the sinner must be ready and willing himself. Let this also never be forgotten. Let us not quibble and split hairs upon the point. God will be found clear of the blood of all lost souls. The Gospel always speaks of sinners as *responsible* and accountable beings. The Gospel places an open door before all mankind. No one is excluded from the range of its offers. Though efficient only to believers, those offers are sufficient for all the world. Though few enter the strait gate, all are invited to come in.

Let us observe, in the third place, that *the salvation of the Gospel is rejected by many to whom it is offered*. The Lord Jesus tells us that those whom the king’s servants bade to the wedding “made light of it, and went their way.”

There are thousands of hearers of the Gospel who derive from it no benefit whatever. They listen to it Sunday after Sunday, and year after year, and do not believe to the saving of the soul. They feel no special need of the Gospel. They see no special beauty in it. They do not perhaps hate it, or oppose it, or scoff at it, but they do not receive it into their hearts. They like other things far better. Their money, their land, their business, or their pleasures, are all far more interesting subjects to them than their souls.—It is an awful state of mind to be in, but awfully common. Let us search our own hearts, and take heed that it is not our own. Open sin may kill its thousands, but indifference and neglect of the Gospel kill their tens of thousands. Multitudes will find themselves in hell, not so much because they openly broke the ten commandments, as because they made light of the truth. Christ died for them on the cross, but they neglected Him.

Let us observe, in the last place, that *all false professors of religion will be detected, exposed, and eternally condemned at the last day*. The Lord Jesus tells us that when the wedding was at last furnished with guests, the king came in to see them, and “saw a man which had not on a

wedding garment.” He asked him how he came in there without one, and he received no reply; and he then commanded the servants to “bind him hand and foot, and take him away.”

There will always be some false professors in the Church of Christ, as long as the world stands. “In this parable,” it has been truly remarked, “one single castaway represents all the rest.” It is impossible to read the hearts of men: deceivers and hypocrites will never be entirely excluded from the ranks of those who call themselves Christians. So long as a man professes subjection to the Gospel, and lives an outwardly correct life, we dare not say positively that he is not clothed in the righteousness of Christ. But there will be no deception at the last day. The unerring eye of God will discern who are His own people, and who are not. Nothing but true faith shall abide the fire of His judgment. All spurious Christianity shall be weighed in the balance and found wanting: none but true believers shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb. It shall avail the hypocrite nothing that he has been a loud talker about religion, and had the reputation of being an eminent Christian among men. His triumphing shall be but for a moment. He shall be stripped of his borrowed plumage, and stand naked and shivering before the bar of God, speechless, self-condemned, hopeless, and helpless. He shall be cast into outer darkness with shame, and reap according as he has sown. Well may our Lord say, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Let us learn wisdom from the solemn pictures of this parable, and give diligence to make our calling and election sure. We ourselves are among those to whom the word is spoken, “All things are ready, come to the marriage.” Let us see that we refuse not Him that speaketh. Let us not sleep as others do, but watch and be sober. Time hastens on. The King will soon come in to see the guests: have we or have we not got on the wedding garment? Have we put on Christ? That is the grand question that arises out of this parable. May we never rest till we can give a satisfactory answer! May those heart-searching words daily ring in our ears, “Many are called, but few are chosen!”

MATTHEW XXII. 15–22.

15 Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk.

16 And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men.

17 Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Cæsar, or not?

18 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?

19 Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

20 And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription?

21 They say unto him, Cæsar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's.

22 When they had heard *these words*, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way.

WE see, in this passage, the first of a series of subtle attacks which were made on our Lord during the last days of His earthly ministry. His deadly foes, the Pharisees, saw the influence which He was obtaining, both by His miracles and by His preaching. They were determined by some means to silence Him, or put Him to death. They therefore endeavoured to “entangle Him in His talk.” They sent forth “their disciples with the Herodians,” to try Him with a hard question. They wished to entice Him into saying something which might serve as a handle for an accusation against Him. Their scheme, we are told in these verses, entirely failed. They took nothing by their aggressive movement, and retreated in confusion.

The first thing which demands our attention in these verses is *the flattering language with which our Lord was accosted by His enemies*. “*Master,*” they said, “we know that Thou are true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man; for thou regardest not the person of men.”—How well these Pharisees and Herodians talked! What smooth and honeyed words were these! They thought, no doubt, that by good words and fair speeches they would throw our Lord off His guard. It might truly be said of them, “The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.” (Psalm lv. 21.)

It becomes all professing Christians to be much on their guard against flattery. We mistake greatly if we suppose that persecution and hard usage are the only weapons in Satan's armoury: that crafty foe has other engines for doing us mischief, which he knows well how to work. He knows how to poison souls by the world's seductive kindness, when he cannot frighten them by the “fiery dart” or the sword. Let us not be ignorant of his devices. “By peace he destroys many.”

We are only too apt to forget this truth: we overlook the many examples which God has given us in Scripture for our learning. What brought

about the ruin of Samson? Not the armies of the Philistines, but the pretended love of a Philistine woman.—What led to Solomon’s backsliding? Not the strength of outward enemies, but the blandishment of his numerous wives.—What was the cause of king Hezekiah’s greatest mistake? Not the sword of Sennacherib, or the threats of Rab-shakeh, but the flattery of the Babylonian ambassadors.—Let us remember these things, and be on our guard. Peace often ruins nations more than war; sweet things occasion far more sickness than bitter; the sun makes the traveller cast off his protective garments far sooner than the north wind. Let us beware of the flatterer. Satan is never so dangerous as when he appears as an angel of light. The world is never so dangerous to the Christian as when it smiles. When Judas betrayed his Lord, it was with a kiss. The believer that is proof against the world’s frown does well; but he that is proof against its flattery does better.

The second thing that demands our attention in these verses is the *marvellous wisdom of the reply which our Lord made to His enemies*. The Pharisees and Herodians asked whether it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not. They doubtless thought that they had put a question which our Lord could not answer without giving them an advantage.—Had He simply replied that it was *lawful* to pay tribute, they would have denounced Him to the people as one who dishonoured the privileges of Israel, and considered the children of Abraham no longer free, but subjects to a foreign power.—Had He, on the other hand, replied that it was *not lawful* to pay tribute, they would have denounced Him to the Romans as a mover of sedition, and a rebel against Cæsar, who refused to pay his taxes.—But our Lord’s conduct completely baffled them. He demanded to see the “tribute-money:” He asks them whose head is on that coin. They reply, “Cæsar’s.” They acknowledge that the Roman emperor Cæsar has some authority over them, by using money bearing his image and superscription, since he that coins the current money is ruler of the land where that money is current. And at once they receive an irresistibly conclusive answer to their question: “Render to Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s, and unto God the things which are God’s.”

The principle laid down in these well-known words is one of deep importance. There is *one* obedience owing by every Christian to the civil government under which he lives, in all matters which are temporal, and not purely spiritual. He may not approve of every requirement of that civil government but he must submit to the laws of the commonwealth, so long as those laws are unrepealed. He must “render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar’s.”—There is *another* obedience which the Christian owes to the God of the Bible in all matters which are purely spiritual. No temporal loss, no civil disability, no displeasure of the powers that

be, must ever tempt him to do things which the Scripture plainly forbids. His position may be very trying; he may have to suffer much for his conscience sake, but he must never fly in the face of unmistakable requirements of Scripture. If Cæsar coins a new Gospel, he is not to be obeyed. We must “render to God the things that are God’s.”

The subject unquestionably is one of great difficulty and delicacy. It is certain that the Church must not swallow up the State. It is no less certain that the State must not swallow up the Church. On no point, perhaps, have conscientious men been so much tried. On no point have good men disagreed so much as in solving the problem, “where the things of Cæsar end, and where the things of God begin.”—The *civil* power, on the one side, has often encroached terribly on the rights of conscience,—as the English Puritans found to their cost in the unhappy times of the Stuarts. The *spiritual* power, on the other side, has often pushed its claims to an extravagant extent, so as to take Cæsar’s sceptre out of his hands,—as it did when the Church of Rome trampled on our own English king John. In order to have a right judgment in all questions of this kind, every true Christian should constantly pray for “wisdom from above.” The man whose eye is single, and who daily seeks for grace and practical common sense, will never be allowed greatly to err.

MATTHEW XXII. 23–33.

23 The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him,

24 Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

25 Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother:

26 Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

27 And last of all the woman died also.

28 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

29 Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

31 But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying,

32 I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.

33 And when the multitude heard *this*, they were astonished at his doctrine.

THIS passage describes a conversation between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Sadducees. These unhappy men, who said that there was “no resurrection,” attempted, like the Pharisees and Herodians, to perplex our Lord with hard questions. Like them, they hoped “to entangle Him in His talk,” and to injure His reputation among the people: like them, they were completely baffled.

Let us observe, in the first place, that *absurd sceptical objections to Bible truths are ancient things*. The Sadducees wished to show the absurdity of the doctrine of the resurrection and the life to come. They therefore came to our Lord with a story which was probably invented for the occasion. They told Him that a certain woman had married seven brothers in succession, who had all died and left no children. They then asked, “whose wife” this woman would be in the next world, when all rose again?—The object of the question was plain and transparent. They meant, in reality, to bring the whole doctrine of a resurrection into contempt. They meant to insinuate, that there must needs be confusion, and strife, and unseemly disorder, if, after death, men and women were to live again.

It must never surprise us, if we meet with like objections against the doctrines of Scripture, and especially against those doctrines which concern another world. There never probably will be wanting “unreasonable men,” who will “intrude” into things unseen, and make imaginary difficulties their excuse for unbelief. *Supposed cases* are one of the favourite strongholds in which an unbelieving mind loves to entrench itself: such a mind will often set up a shadow of its own imagining, and fight with it, as if it was a truth. Such a mind will often refuse to look at the overwhelming mass of plain evidence by which Christianity is supported,

and will fasten down on some one single difficulty, which it fancies is unanswerable. The talk and arguments of people of this character should never shake our faith for a moment. For one thing, we should remember that there must needs be deep and dark things in a religion which comes from God, and that a child may put questions which the greatest philosopher cannot answer; for another thing, we should remember that there are countless truths in the Bible which are clear and unmistakable. Let us first attend to them, believe them, and obey them: so doing, we need not doubt that many a thing now unintelligible to us will yet be made plain; so doing, we may be sure that, "what we know not now we shall know hereafter."

Let us observe, in the second place, what a *remarkable text our Lord brings forward in proof of the reality of a life to come*. He places before the Sadducees the words which God spake to Moses in the bush: "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." (Exod. iii. 6.) He adds the comment, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." At the time when Moses heard these words, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been dead and buried many years; two centuries had passed away since Jacob, the last of the three, was carried to his tomb, and yet God spoke of them as being still His people, and of Himself as being still their God. He said not, "I *was* their God," but "I *am*."

Perhaps we are not often tempted to doubt the truth of a resurrection, and a life to come, but, unhappily, it is easy to hold truths theoretically, and yet not realize them practically. There are few of us who would not find it good to meditate on the mighty verity which our Lord here unfolds, and to give it a prominent place in our thoughts. Let us settle it in our minds that the dead are in one sense still alive. From our eyes they have passed away, and their place knows them no more, but in the eyes of God they live, and will one day come forth from their graves to receive an everlasting sentence. There is no such thing as annihilation. The idea is a miserable delusion. The sun, moon, and stars,—the solid mountains, and deep sea, will one day come to nothing, but the weakest babe of the poorest man shall live for evermore in another world. May we never forget this! Happy is he who can say from his heart the words of the Nicene Creed: "I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come."

Let us observe, in the last place, *the account which our Lord gives of the state of men and women after the resurrection*. He silences the fancied objections of the Sadducees, by showing that they entirely mistook the true character of the resurrection state. They took it for granted that it must needs be a gross, carnal existence, like that of mankind upon earth. Our Lord tells them that in the next world we may have a real material

body, and yet a body of very different constitution, and different necessities, from that which we have now. He speaks only of the saved, be it remembered. He omits all mention of the lost. He says, “In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.”

We know but little of the life to come in heaven. Perhaps our clearest ideas of it are drawn from considering what it will *not* be, rather than what it will be. It is a state in which we shall hunger no more, nor thirst any more; sickness, pain, and disease, will not be known: wasting old age, and death will have no place. Marriages, births, and a constant succession of inhabitants, will no more be needed. They who are once admitted into heaven shall dwell there for evermore.—And, to pass from negatives to positives, one thing we are told plainly: we shall be “as the angels of God.” Like them, we shall serve God perfectly, unhesitatingly, and unweariedly; like them, we shall ever be in God’s presence; like them, we shall ever delight to do His will; like them, we shall give all glory to the Lamb. These are deep things: but they are all true.

Are we ready for this life? Should we enjoy it, if admitted to take part in it? Is the company of God, and the service of God pleasant to us now? Is the occupation of angels one in which we should delight? These are solemn questions. Our hearts must be heavenly on earth, while we live, if we hope to go to heaven when we rise again in another world. (Coloss. iii. 1-4.)

MATTHEW XXII. 34–46.

34 But when the Pharisees had heard that he had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together.

35 Then one of them, *which was* a lawyer, asked him a *question*, tempting him, and saying,

36 Master, which *is* the great commandment in the law?

37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

42 Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, *The Son of David*.

43 He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying,

44 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?

45 If David then call him, Lord, how is he his son?

46 And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any *man* from that day forth ask him any more *questions*.

IN the beginning of this passage we find our Lord replying to the question of a certain lawyer, who asked Him which was “the great commandment of the law?” That question was asked in no friendly spirit, but we have reason to be thankful that it was asked at all. It drew from our Lord an answer full of precious instruction. Thus we see how good may come out of evil.

Let us mark *what an admirable summary these verses contain of our duty towards God and our neighbour*. Jesus says, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind:” He says again, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;” and He adds, “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

How simple are these two rules, and yet how comprehensive! How soon the words are repeated, and yet how much they contain! How humbling and condemning they are! How much they prove our daily need of mercy and the precious blood of atonement! Happy would it be for the world if these rules were more known and more practised.

Love is the grand secret of true obedience to God. When we feel towards Him as children feel towards a dear father, we shall delight to do His will. We shall not find His commandments grievous, or work for Him like slaves under fear of the lash. We shall take pleasure in trying to keep His laws, and mourn when we transgress them. None work so well as they who work for love. The fear of punishment, or the desire of reward, are principles of far less power. They do the will of God best who do it from the heart. Would we train children right? Let us teach them to *love God*.

Love is the grand secret of right behaviour towards our fellow men. He who loves his neighbour will scorn to do him any wilful injury, either in person, property, or character.—But he will not rest there: he will desire in every way to do him good. He will strive to promote his comfort and happiness in every way. He will endeavour to lighten his sorrows, and increase his joys. When a man loves us, we feel confidence in him: we know that he will never intentionally do us harm, and that in every time of need he will be our friend. Would we teach children to behave aright towards others? Let us teach them to “love everybody as themselves, and do to others as they would have others do to them.”

But how shall we obtain this love towards God? It is no natural feeling. We are “born in sin,” and as sinners, are afraid of Him: how then can we love Him? We can never really love Him till we are at peace with Him through Christ. When we feel our sins forgiven, and ourselves reconciled to our holy Maker, then, and not till then, we shall love Him and have the Spirit of adoption. Faith in Christ is the true spring of love to God: they love most who feel most forgiven. “We love him because He first loved us.” (1 John iv. 19.)

And how shall we obtain this love towards our neighbour? This also is no natural feeling. We are born selfish, hateful, and hating one another. (Titus iii. 3.) We shall never love our fellow men aright till our hearts are changed by the Holy Ghost. We must be born again. We must put off the old man, and put on the new, and receive the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then, and not till then, our cold hearts will know true God-like love towards all. “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” (Gal. v. 22.)

Let these things sink down into our hearts. There is much vague talk in these latter days about “love” and “charity.” Men profess to admire them and desire to see them increased, and yet hate the principles which alone can produce them. Let us stand fast in the old paths. We cannot have fruits and flowers without roots. We cannot have love to God and man without faith in Christ, and without regeneration. The way to spread true love in the world, is to teach the atonement of Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost.

The concluded portion of the passage contains a *question put to the Pharisees by our Lord*. After answering with perfect wisdom the inquiries of His adversaries, He at last asks them, “What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?” They reply at once, “The Son of David.” He then asks them to explain why David in the Book of Psalms calls Him Lord. (Psalm cx. 1.) “If David then call Him Lord, how is He his Son?” At once His enemies were put to silence: “No man was able to answer Him a word.” The Scribes and Pharisees no doubt were familiar with the Psalm He quoted, but they could not explain its application. It could only

be explained by conceding the pre-existence and divinity of the Messiah. This the Pharisees would not concede. Their only idea of Messiah was that He was to be a man like one of themselves. Their ignorance of the Scriptures, of which they pretended to know more than others, and their low, carnal view of the true nature of Christ, were thus exposed at one and the same time. Well may Matthew say, by the Holy Ghost, "From that day forth durst no man ask Him any more questions."

Let us not leave these verses without making a practical use of our Lord's solemn question, "What think ye of Christ?" What do we think of His person, and His offices? What do we think of His life, and what of His death for us on the cross? What do we think of His resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the right hand of God? Have we tasted that He is gracious? Have we laid hold on Him by faith? Have we found by experience that He is precious to our souls? Can we truly say, "He is my Redeemer and my Saviour, my Shepherd and my Friend"?

These are serious inquiries. May we never rest till we can give a satisfactory answer to them! It will not profit us to read about Christ, if we are not joined to Him by living faith. Once more then let us test our religion by this question: "What think we of Christ?"