

THE AGONY IN GETHSEMANE.

– MAY 5, MARK 14:32-42; – MATT. 26:36-46; LUKE 22:39-46;
JOHN 18:1. –

Golden Text – "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

AS we consider the solemn scenes of this lesson, let it be with reverence and deep gratitude, remembering it was our load the Master bore, that it was the chastisement of our peace that was upon him, and that with his stripes we are healed.

The narrative, so familiar to every Christian, is one full of precious lessons, especially to those who, by his grace, are endeavoring to follow in the Lord's footsteps. We observe (1) that when the Master realized that his hour of betrayal and fierce temptation was close at hand, having first comforted, counselled, and prayed for and with his disciples, his next strong impulse was to seek a solitary place for prayer and communion with God, that he might find grace to help in time of need. (2) We note also his love for his disciples, and his desire for their love and sympathy in return. "Having loved his own, he loved them to the end." And because he loved them, and knew that they loved him, he permitted them to accompany him to the place of prayer, that they might watch and pray with him. Leaving all but Peter and James and John at the entrance of the garden, as a sort of outer guard against the sudden intrusion of his betrayer upon his last hour of prayer, he advanced with the three – the three in whose ardent natures he seemed to find the most active and consoling sympathy – and, with an earnest appeal to them to watch and pray, he left them and went about a stone's throw beyond. Three times did he rise from prayer and return to them in anguish of soul to feel the touch of human sympathy, saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." It was a sorrow, an agony, which, of itself, would have worn him out shortly – an intense

mental and nervous strain which caused him to sweat great drops of blood.

It was no sign of weakness in the Master that he thus craved human sympathy. His was no coarse, stoical nature, insensible to pain and shame and loss; nor was it a proud, self-centered nature which stood aloof from human fellowship, although those with whom he associated were so far beneath his glorious perfection. Gracefully he condescended to men of low estate, and esteemed them brethren beloved, of whom he was not ashamed. His was a refined nature, keenly appreciative of all that is lovely and pure and good, [R1801 : page 96] and correspondingly sensitive to pain from everything to the contrary of these. Human degradation and human woe must continually have borne heavily upon him during all his earthly life. But in this awful hour all the griefs and burdens of the whole world were rolled upon his shoulders, and he was to suffer as though he himself were the sinner – to suffer death, extinction of being, trusting alone in the Father's grace for a resurrection. Into this one hour were crowded, not only the mental realization of death and the physical agony and shame, the cruelty and torture of a horrible death, but also the sense of desolation to be experienced when even his beloved disciples, overcome by fear and dismay, should forsake him; and the sorrowful reflections upon the irretrievable loss of Judas, and upon the course of the Jewish nation – "his own" people, who despised him and were about to call down upon their own heads the vengeance of his blood, saying, "His blood be upon us and on our children." He foresaw the terrible calamities that in consequence must soon overwhelm them. Then the degradation of a whole guilty world, which must continue to groan and travail in pain until by his sacrifice he should gain deliverance for them from sin and death, caused him to feel the burden of responsibility to an extent which we can only approximate, but cannot fully comprehend. And in addition to all this was his knowledge of the fact that every jot and tittle of the law with reference to the sacrifice must be perfectly fulfilled according to the pattern in the typical sacrifice of the day of atonement.* If he should fail in any part

of the work, all would be lost, both for himself and for men. And yet, though a perfect man, he realized that the flesh, however perfect, was unequal to the task.

See TABERNACLE SHADOWS, page T39.

How much depended upon our Lord's fortitude in that awful hour, alone and defenceless in the darkness of overwhelming night, awaiting the certain arrival of his betrayer and the will of his persecutors maddened with hate and full of the energy of Satan! Oh, how the destinies of the world and of himself seemed to tremble in the balances! Even the perfect human nature was not equal to such an emergency without divine aid, therefore it was that he offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him from death, by a resurrection. The necessary comfort was provided through the Prophet Isaiah (42:1,6), by whom Jehovah said, "Behold my servant whom I uphold, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: ...I, the Lord, have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee [from falling or failure], and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles....He shall not fail nor be discouraged."

When the fearful ordeal in Gethsemane strained the powers of endurance almost to their utmost tension his prayer was only, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done." Then, though the cup might not pass from him, an angel came and ministered to him. Just how, we know not, but probably by refreshing his mind with the precious promises and prophetic pictures of the coming glory, which none of his disciples had sufficiently comprehended to thus comfort him in this hour when the gloom of thick darkness settled down upon his soul, crowding out hope and bringing a sorrow exceeding great, "even unto death." Ah, it was Jehovah's hand upholding him, blessed by his holy name! according to his promise, that he might not fail nor be discouraged.

The result of that blessed ministry was a reinforced courage which commands the deepest admiration. It was not a courage born of stoical indifference to pain and shame and loss, but a courage born of that faith which is anchored fast within the vail of the divine promises and power. With his eye of faith upon the glorious victory of truth and righteousness, when he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied – satisfied with the eternal joy and blessedness of a redeemed world, with the welcome and wealth of the Father's blessing, and the love and gratitude of every loyal creature in heaven and in earth – yes, comforted and encouraged thus with a realizing sense of the rewards of faith and faithful endurance to the end, he could now calmly and even courageously, go forth to meet the foe. Yes, this was the victory by which he overcame, even his faith, and so we also are to overcome.

Now commenced the realization of the dreadful forebodings of Gethsemane. Mark his calm, dignified fortitude, as he addresses Judas and the Roman soldiers, and its effect upon them. They were so overpowered with the grandeur and nobility of this wonderful man that they could not have taken him had he not voluntarily placed himself in their hand. Notice, too, his kind consideration for the bewildered and weary disciples, and his loving excuse for them, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak," and his request to the Roman soldiers at the time of his arrest that they might be permitted to go their way (John 18:8), that so they might escape sharing in his persecutions. So through all the trial and mocking, and finally the crucifixion, his courage and solicitude for the welfare of others never failed.

As we thus view our Lord under a trial so crucial, and mark how the hand of Jehovah upheld him, let it strengthen the faith of all who are endeavoring to walk in his footsteps, to whom he says, Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world: and this is the victory that overcometh, even your faith. (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4.) Has not the Lord, Jehovah, commissioned his angels also to bear up the "feet" of the body of Christ, lest at any time they be dashed against a stone (lest some overwhelming trial should prove too much for them)? (Psa.

91:11,12.) Yes, as surely as his hand upheld the Head, our Lord Jesus, so surely will he bear up the feet. "Fear not, little flock: it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom," though through much tribulation ye shall enter it. The angels are all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation. Though their ministry is unseen [R1802 : page 96] by us, it is not therefore unreal, but potent for good. Our fellow-members, too, in the body of Christ are all the Lord's active messengers to each other, thus in turn sharing the privilege of bearing up the feet.

But to have this help in time of need we must invoke it. Every day and every hour is indeed a time of need; hence our necessity of living in an atmosphere of prayer – to pray without ceasing. And if the Lord needed often to seek retirement from the busy scenes of his active life to be *alone* with God, to keep the close bond of loving sympathy established, surely we need to do so; and in so doing we shall always find grace to help in time of need. In seasons of heavy trial the darkness may indeed so deepen upon the soul, as in our dear Lord's case, as almost to shut out the stars of hope; yet if, like the Lord, we hold on to the omnipotent arm of Jehovah and meekly say, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done," his grace will always be sufficient; and with the Psalmist we can say, Though my flesh and my heart fail, yet God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever (Psa. 73:26); and, with the Lord, our hearts will respond – "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"
