

[R2467 : page 115]

THE LORD BETRAYED.

MAY 14. – JOHN 18:1-14.

"He is despised and rejected of men." – Isa. 53:3.

AFTER the Last Supper, and after his discourse to the disciples respecting the Vine and the branches, came our Lord's beautiful prayer recorded in John's 17th chapter. Then, probably about midnight, Jesus, with the eleven, passed outside the gate of Jerusalem, crossed the little brook called Cedron, and on the farther hill above it entered the olive orchard known as the Garden of Gethsemane: perhaps it was a public garden, or possibly the property of some one friendly to our Lord. What purports to be its site is now maintained as a garden, and has been for centuries. It is in charge of monks who take pleasure in receiving visitors to view it. There are about six or eight very large and evidently very old olive trees in this garden at the present – they give evidence of being at least one thousand years old, but possibly are much older.

While talking with his disciples and praying for them our Lord seemingly was full of good courage: while exhorting them that their hearts be not troubled evidently his own heart was not cast down. But as the little company wended its way to Gethsemane we may well suppose that a great weight fell upon our dear Redeemer's sensibilities. We can imagine him saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." (Matt. 26:38.) The present visit to Gethsemane, therefore, was evidently very different from previous visits. Some appreciation of the momentous occasion was no doubt inspired in the hearts of the Apostles by the Master's dejection, and yet they probably but slightly comprehended what was about to come to pass.

Arrived at the Garden, we glean from other Evangelists that our Lord left eight of the Apostles near the gate, taking Peter, James and

John, his closest companions, a little farther with him, and cautioning them all to watch and pray, because it was an hour of special trial. Going a little farther by himself, he communed with the Father in secret. His feelings were not and could not be shared even by his beloved disciples; they could not appreciate the trial through which he was passing; they had not yet been begotten of the spirit. Thus in his most trying hour Jesus was alone – "Of the people there was none with me." – Isa. 63:3.

It is difficult for the majority, even of Christian people, to appreciate the true character of our dear Lord's trial, which in this instance so wrought upon his nervous system as to produce a bloody sweat. Many compare our Lord's course with that of some of his martyr followers who have gone forth into death with remarkable courage, and in contrasting matters they are inclined to wonder why our Lord, who was perfect, should have endured so much more a passion of suffering than his imperfect followers. To grasp the true situation it is necessary that several things be borne in mind: –

(1) For our Lord, who had a perfect right to life, to lay it down in death, was a very different matter from the laying down of a forfeited and impaired life on the part of those who could not hope to keep it long anyway. (2) Our race, already nine-tenths dead, has but a feeble appreciation of the great value of life – all of its experience having been in connection with dying, it has come to regard death with equanimity. But not so our Lord, the "prince of life," who had been with the Father from the beginning, and by whom all things were made – he realized life as a very precious boon, privilege, enjoyment. To him, therefore, death must have been much more terrible than to us who are already nine-tenths dead, and correspondingly blunted in all of our sensibilities. True he had the Father's [R2467 : page 116] assurance that if faithful unto death he should have a resurrection, and unquestionably he believed the Father's promise – all of his course in life gives abundant evidence of his implicit faith in the Father. And yet in his case this must have been a crucial trial to

faith, much more so than with us. As we have only a shred of a forfeited life to lay down, so we have on the other hand, not only the Father's promise of a future life through Christ, but we have the example of the Father's power in the resurrection of our dear Redeemer: but our Lord Jesus had no such evidence of the divine power; he himself, according to the divine promise, was to be the "first-born from the dead," a first-fruit unto God of his creatures. – Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 15:20.

But all this had already been counted, weighed and accepted from the very beginning of his ministry. He had already informed the disciples that it was necessary that he should lay down his life for the sheep, and that he was about to do so. (John 10:15.) We are not to assume, therefore, when our dear Redeemer prayed, "Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me," that he meant if it were possible he might escape dying. He well knew, and had already explained to the Apostles, that the drawing of the world could not take place except he were lifted up as the sin-offering – that it was absolutely necessary that he should die for our sins and enter into his glory. – John 3:14; 12:32.

The cup which he prayed might pass from him, if possible, we must therefore suppose to have been the shame and ignominy of arrest as a law-breaker, a public trial and conviction, and subsequent crucifixion as a malefactor. It was one thing to die for our sins, as men generally die, without special shame or contumely; it was another thing that he should die with such extreme shame, dishonor and contempt. Quite probably in the Father's wisdom this last feature was kept more or less hidden from our dear Redeemer until just about the time of its accomplishment. And apparently our Lord Jesus did not see any absolute *necessity* for his suffering more than the sinner suffered, in order to pay man's ransom price. Hence his prayer for a time was, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." The Apostle also notes this distinction, saying, he "became obedient unto death," and then adds "even the death of the cross." – Phil. 2:8.

The death of the cross, with its attendant dishonor, reproach, etc., so far as we may be able to judge, was not necessary as our ransom price, because the penalty did not read, In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die with public reprobation and dishonor by crucifixion. Since the penalty was death (Gen. 2:17), we may suppose that our Lord's death by any means would have fully paid man's ransom price. However, the additional features were deemed necessary by the Father, and the "cup" did not pass. The Father required this extreme of obedience as a test, a proof not only to himself but before all his intelligent creatures of the absolute loyalty of heart of his "well beloved Son," upon whom he designed shortly thereafter to confer the great blessing and high exaltation of his own divine nature and joint-heirship in his Kingdom. And the loyalty of our dear Redeemer was fully attested, as the Apostle declares; he "despised the shame," that is to say, the shame was as nothing in his sight in comparison with the accomplishment of the Father's purposes, the pleasing of the Father. (Heb. 12:2.) So long as he thought there was a possibility of the elimination of the shame feature, he was nervously anxious to have it so, if possible; but as soon as he realized that this was not the Father's will his heart instantly responded, "Not my will but thine be done." Decision respecting the Father's will immediately brought strength; he was now prepared for any experience, "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might."

Meanwhile Judas, who some days before had engaged with the high-priest to betray Jesus, and who left the upper room immediately after the Supper to carry out his nefarious plan, had received of the chief priests and Pharisees a band of men, with a person in charge as an officer, whose mission it was to arrest Jesus in the night and to secure his execution before the Passover. We must wholly disagree with the common thought that this "band" consisted of an army of three to six hundred Roman soldiers. They certainly acted very differently from soldiers ordinarily under such circumstances. Besides, the record by all of the Evangelists is that this band was sent, not by Pilate nor by Herod, the Roman representatives, but by the

chief priests and Pharisees, who we know had no command whatever of the Roman garrison. To our understanding this band which apprehended Jesus was very similar to the one mentioned in John 7:32-46.

It would appear that the Jewish Sanhedrin exercised a certain amount of authority in respect to religious matters, and were permitted to make arrests, but not to execute criminals without the consent of the Roman governor. We remember that the apostles were arrested on several occasions by such officers of the Jews. – See Acts 5:17,18,22,25-40.

Both Matthew and Mark speak of this aggregation, under officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, as a "multitude," and our Lord's words indicate that they were armed with sticks and swords such as were common to the people in general, and he does not mention spears, which would probably have been a part of the armament of a band of Roman soldiers. This [R2467 : page 117] thought is further emphasized by the fact that it was [R2468 : page 117] the high priest's servant who evidently made the first assault upon Jesus, and received a blow from Peter's sword. If Roman soldiers had the matter in charge the high priest's servant no doubt would have been less officious.

It is presumed, and apparently on good grounds, that this company seeking Jesus, under the guidance of Judas, went first to the upper room which our Lord and the Apostles had left probably less than an hour before. Finding that Jesus and the eleven were gone, Judas knew that he would be most likely to find them in the Garden of Gethsemane, for "Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with his disciples." John's account omits the particulars of the betrayal given by the other Evangelists: possibly the loving disciple felt so much ashamed of the facts that he preferred not to mention them. Certainly very few acts of treachery ever paralleled this one, and all mankind, even in their perverted condition of mind, seem to realize that the

position of traitor is amongst the most despicable on the calendar, and such treachery as that of Judas, against such kindness and love and goodness as that of his Master, we may be thankful is not so very common. And yet there are correspondencies in the experiences of the Lord's people, "in perils amongst false brethren." It behooves us each to look to it that we permit nothing akin to the spirit of Judas to rankle in our hearts. Our Lord puts the "members of his body" in such matters on a plane with himself, and assures us that whoever shall injure one of the least of these his brethren, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. – Matt. 18:6.

Of course there will always be a *motive*, good or bad, back of every deed done to the under-members of his body as well as to the Head. To find strong motives is not to find valid excuses for treacheries. So far as our experience and judgment go, the lesson is that such treachery from "false brethren" usually has its spring in covetousness, lust for influence, power or position, and the desire to glorify such unholy ambitions cannot fail to corrupt any heart which entertains them. As one has said: –

"Sow a thought, you reap an act;
Sow an act, you reap a habit;
Sow a habit, you reap a character;
Sow a character, you reap a destiny."

Judas had been doing some of this sowing of evil thoughts for a considerable time before his thoughts took outward shape in evil acts. He was covetous of wealth and of influence; he became the treasurer of the little group of disciples, and the intimation of the Scriptures is that he purloined to his own private uses a portion of the contributions. As usual, his love for money increased the more he exercised it, until he was willing to betray his Master for thirty pieces of silver – equivalent to about twenty dollars of our money, tho representing in value of labor a much larger sum. It would seem, too,

that Judas was looking forward to the promised Kingdom, and probably anticipated a high position as royal treasurer of that Kingdom.

It is quite possible, indeed probable, we think, that Judas was seriously disappointed in respect to the result of his betrayal. Apparently he expected that our Lord would deliver himself by miraculous power from the hands of his enemies. This is the most charitable view we would know how to take of his treacherous conduct: it relieves the blackness of the act only a very little, however, for he who would be willing to despitefully use his best friend, even temporarily, for a money consideration, gives evidence of having prostituted every good and noble sentiment of his being to his love of money. Indeed, the love of honor may have had considerable to do with the matter, for he may have hoped by bringing about this crisis that our Lord would be compelled to set up the long-promised Kingdom, or else to own that all his claims and promises were fraudulent.

Judas surely did succeed in expediting matters, and in bringing about the installation of the embryo Kingdom of God; but not in the manner he expected, nor in any degree to his own honor or advantage. Thus it must be with those who receive the truth and who profess discipleship under it – not in the love of the truth, but in the love of honors hoped for, either present or future. Let us all who have named the name of Christ take heed and watch and pray lest there should be in any of us any of the elements of this vile character. And let us remember that there are various secret ways, as well as the more outward ones, in which we may betray the Lord and the "brethren."

The evangelist declares that Jesus knew in advance all things that would come upon him. We are elsewhere told that while he prayed, "There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." (Luke 22:43.) This ministry may have consisted in informing him of the Father's will in respect to what things he should suffer, and how

they were to be expected, and this knowledge that the matter was settled, and the assurance that the Father would overrule it all, strengthened his heart and gave him the great calmness which we observe in all his subsequent course.

The "band" sent to apprehend him evidently expected that they might be obliged to seek for him in the shadows of the trees, etc., and hence they were provided with torches and lanterns. Unquestionably [R2468 : page 118] they were greatly surprised that our Lord, instead of fleeing from them, advanced to them, and inquired whom they sought. Quite possibly some of those in the "band" had previous knowledge of the Lord – of his miracles, power over devils, etc., and this may have been the reason for their manifestation of weakness in retreat and falling to the ground. Or it is possible that our Lord exercised over them a superior mental power which produced this effect, for the purpose of showing that he had full power to resist them if he had chosen to use it.

The same lesson, we believe, is taught by Peter's use of the sword upon the high priest's servant. We are to remember that one of the Evangelists records that our Lord instructed the apostles to take swords with them, and that when two were found he said, "It is enough." (Luke 22:36,38.) Our Lord had no thought of having his disciples war a carnal warfare on his behalf, as he subsequently stated, "If my kingdom were of this world then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews." (John 18:36.) The two swords were sufficient to show that our Lord's apprehension was not because there were no means of defence, nor because of cowardice on the part of his disciples, but merely because of his submission – knowing that his hour was come, and that thus it behooved him to suffer for our sins and to enter into his glory. – Luke 24:46.

After this one manifestation of power, as indicating his full ability to cope with that multitude, and indeed his power to have more than twelve legions of angels to defend him, had he so desired (Matt.

26:53), we find our Lord fully submitting himself to capture, merely making condition that the disciples might go their way. How grand the character which at such a moment, under such trying conditions, could so fully forget self and feel interested merely in the welfare of others! How like what we should expect of Him!

"That the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me I have lost none." We understand the writer to mean that here again in the Master's course we find an exemplification of his care for his disciples, as enunciated in his prayer just before leaving the upper room. While the thought of his prayer was chiefly in respect to their spiritual interests, that none of them should be lost, we do well to notice this as a corroborative illustration of our Lord's care of the physical interests of all who become his disciples. Not a hair of their heads shall fall; nothing shall be permitted to injure them – every event and affair of life will be overruled for their highest good. – Matt. 6:32,33.

It was probably when Jesus began to be bound that Peter drew his sword in his defence; perhaps he remembered the Lord's words of a few hours previous, to the effect that his followers would all forsake him, and his own promise, "Although all shall be offended, yet will not I." (Mark 14:29.) Noble, zealous Peter! We love him for his noble expression of sentiment, and for his heroic defence of the Master with the sword against superior numbers. It is the custom of many to decry Peter's action, as another of his rash errors. We are to remember, however, that the Apostles had not yet received the holy Spirit and therefore could not clearly appreciate the fact that the Kingdom to which they were called is a spiritual Kingdom. Besides, as we have seen, he was merely following the Lord's counsel in taking the sword with him, and evidently also carrying out the divine purpose in using it. We see nothing to blame, everything to commend. It was a sign of larger import than Peter and the others there realized.

But having permitted the matter to go thus far, our Lord restrained Peter, saying, "Suffer yet thus far. Put up thy sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" And so saying he touched his wounded enemy and healed him. The disciples were to see, understand, be fully assured, that our Lord, in delivering himself to his enemies, did it voluntarily, and hence the proceedings were so pantomimed as to enforce this lesson.

How the grace of humility shines out in all the little affairs of our dear Redeemer's ministry; even at this moment of his surrender to his enemies he does not boast that his course is a voluntary one, nor seek praise as a martyr! He declares the simple truth, [R2469 : page 118] that the Father required this of him as an evidence of his personal loyalty to him. He confesses himself a servant of God, a son who learned obedience by the things which he suffered. "The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Indeed, this was the strength of his victory – his will was fully submitted to the Father's will, and his faith grasped the fact that the Father permitted no unnecessary evils to come upon him, but only such as he could and would overrule for good.

There is a valuable lesson here for all who are seeking to walk in the footsteps of the great High Priest, – for all the Royal Priesthood. We also are to remember that so long as we abide in Christ, and seek to walk in his footsteps, all the trying experiences of life are carefully measured for us by the Lord – that he does not pour into our cup of sorrow and trial any bitter experiences that are not needful to us, and that will not subsequently work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Cor. 4:17.) With these assurances, and with the evidences of the Father's faithfulness to our glorified [R2469 : page 119] Master and Forerunner, we indeed may have strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us in the Gospel. – Heb. 6:18-20.

The healing of the smitten ear, our Lord's last miracle, was most beautifully illustrative of his character and teachings. It exemplified his words, "Love your enemies, do good to them that persecute you." It showed that he was filled with the divine love which his teachings inculcated, and that he had no bitterness toward those who spitefully used and persecuted him.

The binding of our Lord seems to have been entirely unnecessary, except as the "band" might desire to make an exhibition of their prowess to those who had sent them. Our Lord seems to have remonstrated in respect to this, as per the account given in Mark 14:48,49: "Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves, to take me? I was daily with you in the Temple, teaching, and ye took me not. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." It was then that the eleven forsook him and fled. Judas continuing with the band went to the house of Annas the priest, who doubtless had bargained with Judas, and no doubt it was at this time that the thirty pieces of silver were paid over, Judas having now shown a fulfilment of the contract. Poor wretched man! The Son of man indeed went to death, as it had been written of him, but this made none the less horrible the treachery, the covetousness and murderous spirit that delivered him up to his enemies. So with the members of the body of Christ: it must needs be that offences come – it is a part of the divine plan that the body of Christ should fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of the Head (Col. 1:24) – but this makes none the less sinful the conduct of those who have to do with such betrayals – especially if they be "false brethren" who have enjoyed some knowledge of the truth. In every instance, however, it will be observed that altho the trials worked out blessing for the Lord and will do so also for all the faithful who suffer with him, the rewards of unrighteousness sought by those who take Judas' course never yield them the honors and blessings they coveted, and for which they sold themselves to work evil.
