

THE GREAT HIGH PRIEST ARRAIGNED.

– MAY 21. – JOHN 18:15-27. –

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not." – John 1:11.

ALTHO it is declared that all the disciples fled, John points out that Peter and himself followed at a distance. Their deep interest in the Master would not permit them to go to their homes; they must keep him in sight, and note how things would go with him to the very last. They were powerless to assist him against such great odds, and in the face of his own refusal to be assisted, but they were not powerless to love still. John, it seems, was somewhat acquainted at the high priest's palace, and readily gained entrance, not only for himself but for Peter.

But these favors and privileges became tests to Peter, and led to his denial of the Lord. And so it is with some of the Lord's followers of to-day. When they are by themselves, or with others of like precious faith, they are bold and courageous to confess the Lord and to serve him, but if perchance they get into palaces or amongst the servants and officers and high priests of nominal Christianity they are ashamed of the Master and fear to confess him, lest they should be cast out of the privileges enjoyed in the society of those who have not yet recognized the truth. Far better would it have been for poor Peter had he openly declared, "Yes, I am one of his disciples, and since I presume that none such are wanted here I will go out." How much so honorable and proper a course would have reflected to his credit in the eyes of all just persons, and how much blessing it would have brought to him!

Peter's failure to take the proper course brought him later to a still more trying situation, when a kinsman of the man whose ear he had cut off asked him point-blank the question, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" Matters were getting pretty close for poor Peter. It was more now than a question of leaving the fire and the privileges and honor of the high priest's court: it was now a question of his

identity as the one who had defended Jesus with a sword, and hence a question of his own arrest and trial at the same tribunal with the Master. One false step leads naturally to another; to have now declared for Jesus would have been a public testimony that he was a liar, in addition to leading to his apprehension, and so Peter concluded that in self-defence he must not only repeat the lie, and again deny the Master, but to make the matter more strong before his accusers he began to curse and to swear that he knew not Jesus.

Poor Peter! Truly, as our Lord told him, Satan had desired to have him, to sift him, and surely he was being severely sifted at this time. It seems almost a miracle that he recovered his balance and repented and found forgiveness for his sins. It would seem that our Lord's prayer on his behalf operated through his previous announcement to Peter of this denial, for after he had thus denied, and after he had noticed the cock crow, Peter remembered the Lord's words, "The cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice." With feelings better imagined than they can be described, Peter hastily left the High Priest's apartments now of his own accord, going out into the shadows of early morning, that he might weep bitterly and entreat the Lord's forgiveness.

There is a lesson for us in the fact that Peter's failure was along the very line of his strength. He was naturally courageous, had boasted of it, and yet **[R2469 : page 120]** failed for lack of courage. "When I am weak then I am strong," implies that he who feels himself strong is really weak, as in Peter's case. Let us all learn to specially guard our supposedly strong points of character, remembering that we have a wily foe. We are to realize our weakness, our vulnerableness at any point, except as we keep watch at every point and rely upon the great Captain of our salvation to assist us.

John does not tell the whole of the story; he omits reference to Peter's cursing and swearing. His love for Brother Peter evidently influenced him to omit that portion of the narrative not absolutely necessary to confirm the Lord's prediction. The account of the cursing

and swearing is given by Mark, whose Gospel record is supposed to have been indited by Peter himself, Mark being in a large measure Peter's amanuensis. – Mark 14:66-72.

Jesus was examined of the High Priest: that functionary, however evil and murderously disposed at heart, felt bound to at least preserve the forms of justice, altho from the records elsewhere we know that himself and his associates amongst the priests and Pharisees had already determined that Jesus must be put to death because his influence amongst the people was inimical to their own; – because his teachings cast theirs into the shade and exposed their hollowness, bigotry and hypocrisy. Our Lord answered his questions accordingly; refusing to make any specific explanations he merely referred to his teachings, appealing thus to his rights as a Jew. His answer was the perfectly proper and legal one; he had been arrested without just cause, and the judge was now seeking to *find* a cause. Our Lord merely pointed out that the cause for the arrest must be shown to have been something which preceded the arrest.

It is not necessary for us to suppose that the officer who struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, and reproved him for improper language toward the Chief Priest, was intentionally unjust in the matter. Rather we may suppose that, influenced by his desire to appear zealous in support of the High Priest's position and judgment, this accentuated his mental unbalance as a fallen man, and led him to imagine evil where there was none. This circumstance, however, gives us the opportunity for discerning just what our Lord meant by his expression in the sermon on the mount, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39.) Our Lord did not literally turn the other cheek to the man and ask him to smite that also, nor did he even receive the smiting [R2470 : page 120] in silence. He was not willing that his good conduct and proper language should be evil spoken of without at least a proper endeavor to correct the matter. Hence he asked his smiter to point out wherein he had spoken evil, and suggested to him that if he could not point out the evil

he should acknowledge his wrong in having improperly smitten for an evil which could not be pointed out.

In the light of this illustration the Lord's people are to understand the command, to turn the other cheek, to mean simply that they are not to resist evil with evil; rather, they are to receive more evil than return it in kind. On the contrary, however, they are to resist evil with good; they are to expostulate with evil-doers, as the Master did, endeavoring with kindness and gentleness to have them see the right and the wrong of the questions in dispute.

It would appear that our Lord's trial by the Jews was held before Caiaphas, the acting High Priest, the son-in-law of Annas, the proper High Priest according to the Jewish law; and the fourteenth verse identifies Caiaphas as the one who had previously declared, "'It is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' And this spake he not of himself, but being High Priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." – John 11:50-53.

Here is an illustration of how a great truth may be seen from two opposite standpoints. The prophecy of Caiaphas was strictly true, – in strict accord with all the declarations of the Lord's Word, and was sent through one of the channels which the Lord had been in the habit of using (the High Priest's office) yet the person occupying that office, being out of heart-harmony with the Lord, was out of harmony also with the various features of the divine plan, and became an instigator and cooperator in an evil work, which nevertheless was working out in harmony with the divine foreknowledge and program.

There is a lesson in this also for all of the Lord's people in respect to every feature of divine truth. It is not sufficient that we see certain facts; it is necessary also that we be in heart-harmony with the Lord, else we might, like Caiaphas, aid in fulfilling the Lord's plan but

nevertheless taking a wrong position may be bringing ourselves, with others, under a curse, while still cooperating in the fulfilment of the divine plan. Let all who are of the light, and who have received the truth, seek more and more to walk in the light and in the Master's footsteps, carefully avoiding the evils which we see illustrated in the cases of Judas, Peter and Caiaphas.

The trial before the Jews was of three parts: –

(1) The examination before Annas the *legal* High Priest which was wholly unofficial. He sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas the *official* High Priest of Roman [R2470 : page 121] appointment, and as such the President of the Sanhedrin, whose court room was probably in the same palace, across the corridor, where Peter stood warming himself.

(2) The preliminary trial before Caiaphas is supposed to have been held between two or three o'clock on Friday morning – the members of the Sanhedrin or Jewish Court having been summoned by messengers as soon as Jesus was apprehended. This hearing was preliminary in the sense that it examined Jesus and formulated and decided upon the charges on which it would convict at the formal meeting at dawn, about five o'clock. For the Jewish law forbade a trial by night. – Luke 22:66-71.

(3) The formal trial before the Sanhedrin at dawn was merely a ceremony – a farce. The determination to kill Jesus having been reached long before his arrest, the matter of his condemnation was rushed through for two reasons. (a) The great Jews feared the common people would defend Jesus against their trumped up charges, which were the only ones even they could formulate. (b) The Passover was at hand and they wanted him killed before it. Ah! how little did they realize that they were being permitted of God to exercise the evil desires of their hearts and thus to fulfil types and prophecies to the very day.

A lesson on this for God's people is, that it is not sufficient that we go through a form or ceremony of justice; nor is it sufficient that we know in advance that we cannot circumvent the divine plan or hinder its fulfilment. Many will find in the day of reckoning and revealing, that they have served God's purposes without honor or profit – in a manner that brought upon them condemnation instead of approval. Even the great Adversary Satan will ultimately find (but not in any degree to his credit or blessing) that all his opposition to God, to Christ, and to "the brethren," has been overruled by divine wisdom and power for *good*, by him who "maketh the wrath of man to praise him."

It is all-important then, that we have more than forms of justice, of righteousness; we must have the *spirit* of righteousness, a *love* of righteousness, – a sincere desire to know and to do God's will, else like as the Jews condemned and killed the Just One we might with forms of justice condemn and injure his "brethren." And to have the desirable condition of *love* for God and for righteousness implies a full consecration of heart to the Lord. Thus every examination of the subject brings us back to the fact that *full* consecration to the Lord, *full* self-surrender to his will as revealed in his Word, is the only proper and only safe course for any to pursue if they would hope to hear the Master's words, "Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joys of thy Lord."

It was during the interim between the 3 A.M. examination and the 5 A.M. formal conviction of our Lord by his influential enemies, that he was subjected for two hours to the mockery and insults described by three of the Evangelists. (Matt. 26:67,68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65.) These insults were committed by the "servants" and well illustrate the fact that low minds delight in the misfortunes of those whom they realize to be their superiors. These servants manifested the *same spirit* as their masters – the chief priests and Pharisees – their methods were ruder because they were more ignorant and coarse. The spirit of Christ, the spirit of love, on the contrary, whether in the educated or

in the ignorant, is a spirit of love, of gentleness, of sympathy, of kindness. By their fruits both spirits may be known. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his."
