

"I HAVE PRAYED FOR THEE."

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." – Luke 22:31,32.

AS the Passover season approached our Lord not only said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death," and found himself pleading "with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him out of death;" but additionally he had great solicitude for his dear followers, and sought to arouse them to an appreciation of the hour of temptation into which they were entering, saying, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Not only was that the most trying time of our Lord's earthly experience, but it was also the most trying time for his apostles, and particularly for Judas and Peter. Both of these men were prominent amongst the apostles, the one as the treasurer and purchasing agent of the little group, the other as a specially bold champion of the Lord's cause, who had, as the mouthpiece of the twelve, announced their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and who had publicly declared that although all men should forsake the Lord he would not do so. From the human standpoint it would have been surmised that any temptation that might come upon those thirteen would have been upon the weaker and less prominent ones and not upon the three most prominent.

THREE TEMPTED – VARIANT RESULTS

We may draw some valuable lessons from noting the course of the three specially tempted. Our Lord's course was the proper one, humility, fear, an appreciation of the trials leading to watchfulness and prayer. He escaped and came out of the trial stronger every way, and on the day of his public arraignment

before the priests and Pilate, and when he was crucified before the multitude, he was the calmest of the calm, for the Lord had strengthened him. He is our pattern: our course should similarly be one that would not deny dangers, would not boast of our courage, strength, but would lean upon the arm of the Lord and through his grace come off conquerors.

Peter's case we remember well: A good man of strong character, he realized not his danger, and hence was not prepared for the arts of Satan, by which he was placed in so trying a position that his boasted courage fled, his wonted strength of character vanished, he denied his Lord even with profanity. What a lesson to us of human frailty, and of how we ourselves might be overtaken and ensnared by the wiles of the devil. How much each one needs to watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation – lest we succumb to temptation. How much we each need to remember the prayer the Lord gave us as an ensample, "Abandon us not in temptation, but deliver us from the evil one."

That was a fateful time for Judas: If the Adversary could so juggle, deceive and mislead the true-hearted **[R3760 : page 119]** Peter because he was off his guard in watching and praying, what might we not expect he might be able to accomplish with Judas, whose heart was not right, who was selfish, self-seeking, ambitious, covetous? We cannot wonder that Satan's victory over Judas was soon accomplished – that he fell quickly into the snare of the Adversary, and lent his heart and energy to the betrayal of the Master for thirty pieces of silver. His case was very different from that of Peter, the loyal, the true, for the moment bewildered and off his guard and fearful. The cases of the two men are very different because, although the danger was the same, their hearts were in different conditions.

"TAKE HEED TO YOURSELVES"

Is it not so with all of the Lord's followers? Is not this the secret of the differing results of temptation as they surely come to each one of us? The Judas class of today and always are those who when temptation comes receive it, entertain it, enter into the spirit of the ambition or otherwise wrong allurements, and are swallowed up by it. The Peter class is also with us ever since; and today the true-hearted, but not sufficiently watching and praying and on guard against the Adversary's allurements, are at times taken unawares, and for a moment not only dishonor the Lord but dishonor their own hearts and consciences also. The difference between these two classes is the heart condition: the Peter class do those things which they do not wish to do, or leave undone those things which they really desire to do, and their difficulty lies evidently in the weakness of their flesh, in the power of the Adversary, and in their failure to lay hold upon the help which the Lord has promised, the succor in their time of need.

The Judas class are those whose hearts are not loyal but selfish, and who therefore enter into the Adversary's scheme heartily, and are not, in their wrong course, going contrary to their own wills but in harmony therewith. The difference in God's sight is seen in that, although both Peter and Judas repented, the one was accepted back to divine favor, the other was not – the one who was merely entrapped, but who at heart was not disloyal, was restored and blessed; the other, though not without conscience, as shown by his later remorse, was without the genuine loyalty of heart which in the Lord's sight is indispensable, and the absence of which, considering Judas' intimate acquaintance with the Lord, was inexcusable.

Our Lord's words in our text give us the assurance that, because of this difference in the hearts of the two men, he could

properly be the advocate of the one before the Father but not the advocate of the other. He could stand for and represent the one who at heart was loyal to him, however weak his flesh, however careless he might be of the divine provision for his protection. He was still one of the Lord's sheep, therefore subject to the Shepherd's care. He was still one of the Lord's members, therefore subject to the oversight and interest of the Head in his welfare. He was still one of the members of the Lord's espoused virgin Church, whom he loved and for whom he gave his life, and for whom, therefore, he might properly and did make supplication as the betrothed Bridegroom.

But in the case of Judas, his heart alienated through selfishness, any appreciation for the Lord and love for him which he possessed at the beginning of the ministry had evidently died, been swallowed up of selfishness and ambition – and into that heart thus fully withdrawn from the Lord we are told Satan entered. By thus willingly withdrawing his heart and strength and consecration from the Lord and lending the same of deliberate intention to self-seeking, he became a tool of the Adversary. As our Master said, "It must needs be that offences come" – that he should be crucified – "but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh."

SIMILAR CONDITIONS TODAY

In our experience the Passover season has always been one of special danger, special besetment to the Lord's consecrated people. For some reason unknown to us the Adversary seems to be permitted to have special power at this time. We have noticed time after time that, as we approach the Passover season, Satan's activity has been manifested by some kind of an attack upon the Truth and by some kind of a special trial or test upon the Truth in connection therewith. Although we know in advance that none of the Lord's disciples true at heart will be plucked out of

his hand by the Adversary, nevertheless we fancy that we can sympathize to some extent with our Lord's feelings when he exhorted the disciples to watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation.

True, Jesus knew who it was that should betray him, and was, therefore, not surprised or disconcerted in respect to Judas' course; and yet, undoubtedly, the thought that one who had eaten bread with him should "lift up his heel against him" (John 13:18), one who had been his companion, helper, familiar friend, should become his enemy (Psalms 41:9), all this must have had a saddening effect upon our dear Master, who could assuredly sympathize with even his bitterest enemies as well as with those who, Peter-like, failed at the first to withstand the Adversary's assault but who subsequently are recovered by divine mercy and aid.

Since the body of Christ is one, and since our Lord declares that whatsoever is done to one of the least of his members is done to him, it follows that the Judas class and the Peter class all down through the Gospel age to the present moment have been betraying the Lord in proportion as they have betrayed or denied his members. We, therefore, should note the significance of his statement to Peter, "I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

For all of the Peter class the Lord is the Head, the Representative, the Advocate before the Father. Without his aid, without appearance for us and application to us of the merit of his own sacrifice, none of us could stand, all would be judged unworthy, unfit to have part or lot in the great blessings which the Lord has invited **[R3760 : page 120]** us to share with Jesus. And as the Master prayed for such, intercedes for such, makes good the unwilling imperfections of such, so should all who have his Spirit feel generously, kindly, sympathetically, speak

helpfully to the Peter class. But as the Master had no such words of sympathy for Judas, the open and premeditated enemy and traitor, so likewise, whatever our sorrowful feelings for such may be, there is no room for any expression of sympathy or cooperation in their evil work: as for any of the apostles to cooperate with Judas would have meant a share in his evil deeds.

"SIFT YOU AS WHEAT"

However much sympathy we may feel with Peter and others of similar character and experience – since, however much we may rejoice with him that the Lord prayed for him so that his carelessness in the matter of watching and praying for himself did not result in his undoing and his loss of relationship to the Lord – nevertheless we should strive not to be of the Peter class, but of the class represented by our Lord himself. Let us be of the watching, praying and faithful kind, who will not be overtaken by the Adversary's temptations of the present time.

We are in the "harvest" time; the separation of the wheat from the tares is due, and, more than this, the separation of the chaff from the wheat is also due – a sifting process. While this figure may to some extent fit to the experiences of the Church in the past, we are sure that it does specially apply to the Church in the "ends of the ages" – to those who were living in the end or harvest of the Jewish age, and to those who are now living in the end or harvest of the Gospel age. And our Lord is pleased to permit these siftings; they are necessary, apparently, that the Judas class may be entirely sifted out, and that the Peter class may be so thoroughly stirred up by the trials and difficulties and realization of their own weaknesses, and the knowledge that they would utterly fail without the Lord's sustaining grace, that these lessons may prove profitable to them, developing in them more and more of meekness, watchfulness, prayerfulness and trust in our all-powerful Head.

We remember in this connection our Lord's words which indicate that the present will be a time of trial which "will try all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth." (Rev. 3:10.) We remember the Apostle's statement also that it will be a time of fiery trial upon those who are of the true Church, saying, "Every man's work shall be tried so as by fire," and his assurance is that only the gold, silver and precious stones of faith, hope and love will abide the fiery trial. – I Cor. 3:13.

"THE FIRE OF THAT DAY"

Wherever perfect love has not been attained the "fire" of this day, the siftings of this day, will manifest it – the Lord will separate the deficient ones. This may cause us sorrow, as earthly ties are severed and fond hopes blighted; nevertheless the Lord's message to us on the subject is figuratively represented in the command which he gave to Aaron and his sons, when two of the under-priesthood perished because they offered strange fire before the Lord which he had not commanded them. (Lev. 10:1.) Moses as the Lord's mouthpiece declared that the survivors in the priesthood must make no mourning or lamentation for those whom the Lord had cut off. To have done so would have implied disloyalty to the Lord and a failure to appreciate his wisdom and justice and love in the matter. – Lev. 10:6.

How searching will be the tests which will prove our love and loyalty to the Lord and his divine arrangements is clearly intimated in our Lord's prophecy respecting our day when he said that the sifting would be of such a kind as would "deceive if it were possible the very elect." It will not be possible to deceive the very elect, because for these our glorious Head stands **[R3761 : page 120]** sponsor. They are his followers, they are his betrothed, they are his members; he is their Head and Representative and Ambassador; he intercedes, supplicates,

prays for them, and their faith will fail not because they are his, because – however imperfect they may be as respects the flesh – at heart they are perfect, thoroughly loyal to him and to his cause, to their fellow-members.

So, then, we sound again, as we have previously done at this season of the year, the Master's words, "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Our words, like the Master's will fall on two classes – some will make light of the warning and expose themselves to danger; others will hearken to the warning of the Master's voice, and to them it will be a part of the power of God unto their preservation.
