

## TEST OF THE APOSTLES AND ITS LESSON

**"Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."  
– Mark 14:38.**

WE RECOGNIZE these as words spoken by the Master in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night in which He was betrayed. They were addressed especially, and with much force, to the eleven Apostles who were with Him, and more particularly to the three whom He had called apart to be a little nearer to Him, as He went a little further on in the Garden to pray. The Master seemed to realize that wonderful events were to take place that night. But the Apostles did not grasp the situation. Their ears were dull of hearing. They were not without loyalty – it was not a matter of indifference with them, but they did not comprehend.

We are to remember that at this time the Apostles were not begotten of the Holy Spirit, and could not, therefore, so fully watch with the Lord and pray with Him as if they had been spiritually enlightened. Jesus had told them that He would be crucified, but they had taken this statement as one of His dark sayings. They had heard very many of the parables which He had given to the people, which they were not able to understand. He had told them that when the Holy Spirit should come it would guide them into all Truth and show them things to come.

Amongst those dark sayings Jesus had told them that He was the Bread that come down from Heaven. This they did not understand, nor how He was like unto the Manna of olden times; neither did they understand how the eating of this Bread would give them life. These things had been so mysterious that they could not accept them, and, as a result, many of those once interested fell away from Him. They said, How *could* the whole world eat His flesh or drink His blood? – it is ridiculous! So they walked no more with

Him. But the Apostles and a few hundred brethren continued to have faith in Him. They said, There is some deep meaning in His words, and some hidden reason for His strange course; perhaps, as Jesus says, we shall in time understand. We see so many evidences that He is the Son of God that we must not stumble over these things. Thus they continued to believe in Him, and to hold these obscure statements in abeyance in their minds.

### **IMPULSIVE PETER'S MISTAKE**

So, when Jesus told them that the Son of Man must go up to Jerusalem, and that the Jews would crucify Him, and that the third day He would rise again from the dead, they could not understand. He had already intimated that all the glorious promises referring to Messiah were applicable to Him. How, then, *could* He be crucified? Accordingly Peter began to upbraid Him, saying, What strange things you speak! It shall not thus be done unto Thee. But Jesus said unto him, "Get thee behind Me, adversary; thou art an offense unto Me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." – Matt. 16:23.

Peter, of course, recognized the rebuke and knew that he had made a mistake. He had thought that some evil might happen to the Master, but no such thing as that He would be *crucified*. A few days before a multitude of people had cried, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21:9.) There were a million or more Jews in Jerusalem who had hailed Him as King. Therefore the Apostles thought that the chief priests would not *dare* to do anything against Him. And now they had partaken of the Passover Supper, and Jesus had said to them that He desired to eat the Passover with them before He should suffer. Peter had declared that, though all should deny him, yet would he never deny his Master. Evidently Peter said to himself, What would there be to make me deny Him? I could not think of doing such a thing!

The disciples had thought that everything was propitious – so much so that Jesus found them disputing amongst themselves as to who would be the greatest in the Kingdom. And they had been so engrossed with these things they were discussing that they could not think of washing each other's feet. Then the Master and the Apostles had walked across the brook Kidron and to the Mt. of Olives. After they had entered the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus took Peter and James and John with Him and said, "Tarry ye here, while I go and pray yonder." Then He had returned to them, and finding them asleep had said, "Watch, and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." But they could not think of any temptation into which they *could* enter in that peaceful spot.

### **TRIAL AND VICTORY IN GETHSEMANE**

Jesus had agonizing experiences in the Garden. He was fearful lest in some way He might have violated the Law. He feared lest He had made some mistake and had not come up to the standard – the full requirements of the Father, in respect to the new life which He had begun. In such case His whole human life would be a failure, not for Himself only, but for the world of mankind whom He had come into the world to save from sin and death. After the Lord had passed through His trial-experiences in the Garden, God sent Him special help. An angel came and ministered unto Him. We do not know the nature of this help; but if we can read between the lines, the angel gave Him the assurance that He had fulfilled His part – He had rendered *full obedience* to the Father's will.

Just as soon as Jesus received this assurance, He became very calm. If He had the *Father's* favor, the *Father's* blessing, He could pass through *any experience*, no matter what it might be! Then he returned to His **[R5331 : page 312]** disciples intimating that He had gotten the victory. He was no longer in trouble. He *had* said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death." But *now* confidence had come, in the assurance God had given Him.

No longer would it be necessary to watch and pray, so far as He was concerned.

## **RESISTING TEMPTATION AUGMENTS STRENGTH**

We note that to the disciples this exhortation was specially needful at that time. With such peculiar trials and testings before them, if they had been watching and praying to God for wisdom and grace, lest they should *fall* in their temptations – *enter into* them – they would have had help to resist them. They would have fallen into temptation the same, but they would not have *entered* into it. Temptations may be presented to us many times a day, and when they come we may be deceived and misled. But a temptation *resisted* makes us so much the *stronger* to resist the next. And so the Apostle James says that we are to "count it all joy when we fall *into* divers temptations." (James 1:2.) But no one could count a *temptation* a *joy* if, when it should come upon him, he would *fall* in it – *enter into* it.

St. Peter could never look back without regret to the moment when he denied his Master. If he had been watching and praying for guidance, he would have come off conqueror when Jesus was arraigned before the tribunal; he would not have thought of denying his Lord. He would have been stronger when the temptation came, and would have said, No, I will never deny the Lord! I will cast in my lot with Him! Afterward he might have said, I tell you, brethren, it was a *tight place!* But I am rejoicing that I fell into that temptation and was yet able to come off conqueror in that terrible hour!

But Satan was desiring to have him, to sift him out, as it were. If, after he had denied the Lord, Peter had said, I will not back down now, I will give the Lord up entirely, and pass right out! then he would indeed have lost *everything*. But, although he was caught in the temptation, he ultimately gained the victory. It was cock-crowing time, and Peter, hearing the cock crow, said to himself,

There, that is just what Jesus said – that before the cock should crow I would deny Him thrice. So St. Peter went out and wept bitterly; and, after he had it out with God in tears and prayers, he started again in the good way. And so *our* entering into temptation may not mean our utter rout. But the more we *resist* temptation, not allowing it to overcome us, the stronger characters we will become.

### **TEXT NOW APPLICABLE IN A SPECIAL SENSE**

The experiences of the disciples in connection with this text have been, in the broad sense of the word, applicable to all of God's people throughout this Gospel Age, but they are particularly so today. Now is the time for the Church to be specially on the alert, to be attentive, to fortify themselves against the wiles of the world, the flesh and the Adversary. As the poet Longfellow has expressed it,

"Be not like dumb, driven *cattle*;  
Be a *hero* in the strife!"

We might be in the Lord's army and yet be *like* driven cattle. But we are to be intelligent. The Lord has given us an understanding of His Plan. In this we have at the present time an advantage over the Apostles, for they had not yet seen the great Divine Plan of the **[R5332 : page 312]** Ages and the significance of the sufferings of the Church. We have much advantage in this way. Jesus had explained to them about Himself: "Thus it behooveth the Son of Man to suffer and to enter into His glory." And He had opened the Scriptures to them as far as they were able to understand, and had indicated the *necessity* of His suffering. Still they could not clearly understand. But we have an advantage in that we know what the Lord's Plan is; and so the words of our Lord are more forceful in their application to *us* than to the early Church.

Let us be watchful, active, alert, and co-labor with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to consider the offer made to us – the great High calling – the most wonderful thing ever known in

all creation! We shall never have another opportunity of showing God and our Lord Jesus our zeal for righteousness and our earnestness of spirit. The present opportunity is a special one. God has made it possible for all of us, who are in harmony with Him, to grow in grace and in knowledge, and thus to be more intelligent in our service. And we are to pray in harmony with that intelligence.

What may be the character of the temptations which shall come upon us, we may not clearly discern in advance; for if we knew all about them beforehand, they would be but slight temptations and easily overcome. Watch, therefore, and pray always. The only safe way is to be *always prepared*; for our Adversary, the Devil, is seeking whom he may devour. He knows our weak points better even than we do, and is ever ready to take advantage of them. Each of us needs the Spirit of the Lord in his heart, as well as His "grace to help in time of need," if we would be overcomers. Our daily exhortation to self should be,

"My soul, be on thy guard,  
Ten thousand foes arise;  
The hosts of Sin are pressing hard  
To draw thee from the prize."

=====