

Matthew 26 Commentary-C H Spurgeon

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MATTHEW 26:1-5 THE KING PROPHESYING: HIS ENEMIES PLOTTING

Matthew 26:1-2. AND it came to pass, when JESUS had finished all these sayings, he said unto his disciples, Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified

Our Lord, having finished all these sayings about the destruction of Jerusalem, his own Second Advent, and the great Day of Judgment, brought back the thoughts of his disciples to his own death. He had often foretold what the end of his life would be; he now states definitely when it would be: "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover." In a sense that they probably did not fully comprehend, the passover, the one great passover, was about to be observed. After two days, the Paschal Lamb of God, "Christ our passover", would be slain. His betrayal was so certain and so near, that it might be spoken of as already accomplished: "the Son of man, is betrayed to be crucified." The time for Christ to be delivered up into the hands of sinners had almost arrived; and when once his enemies had him in their power, they would never rest until he was crucified.

Matthew 26:3-5. They assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people, unto the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him. But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

While Jesus was prophesying, his enemies were plotting. Thus was fulfilled Psalm 2:2, "The rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed." Their aim was that they might kill him; but they consulted how they might take Jesus by subtilty. They decided not to arrest him "during the feast" (R.V.); yet the evil deed was to be postponed, not from any religious regard for the passover, but "lest there be an uproar among the people." Their plan was contrary to Christ's prophecy; but the event proved that he was right and they were wrong, for he was crucified at the time he foretold.

MATTHEW 26:6-13 THE KING ANOINTED FOR HIS BURIAL

Matthew 26:6, 7. Now when Jesus was in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, there came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, he sat at meat.

We do not know who Simon the leper was, nor whether this woman was Mary, the sister of Lazarus, though I believe she was the one who came to Jesus, having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat. The beauty of this woman's act consisted in this, that it was all for Christ. All who were in the house could perceive and enjoy the perfume of the precious ointment; but the anointing was for Jesus only.

Matthew 26:8, 9. But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation saying, To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.

When you do the best you can do, from the purest motives, and your Lord accepts your service, do not expect that your brethren will approve all your actions. If you do, you will be greatly disappointed. There was never a more beautiful proof of love to Christ than this anointing at Bethany; yet the disciples found fault with it: they had indignation, saying, "To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor." According to John's account, it was Judas who asked, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" The same evangelist gives the reason for the traitor's question, "This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." The complaint having been started by Judas, others of the disciples joined in it. If this devoted and enthusiastic woman had

waited for the advice of these prudent people, she would neither have sold the ointment, nor poured it out. She did well to take counsel with her own loving heart, and then to pour the precious nard upon that dear head which was so soon to be crowned with thorns. She thus showed that there was, at least, one heart in the world that thought nothing was too good for her Lord! and that the best of the best ought to be given to him. May she have many imitators in every age until Jesus comes again!

Matthew 26:10. When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman she hath wrought a good work upon me.

She kind been very happy in the act; probably it was the happiest hour in all her life when she gave this costly gift to the Lord she loved so well. But a cloud passed over her bright face as the whispered complaints reached her ear. Jesus perceived that the murmuring of the disciples troubled the woman, so he rebuked them, and commended her: "Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me." She did something we cannot do, for Christ is not now here in person, to be anointed by those who love him as this woman did. We can perform good works upon others for his sake; and he will accept them as though they were done unto himself

Matthew 26:11. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

Our Lord always cared for the poor; he was himself poor, he was the poor people's Preacher, he fed the hungry poor, and healed the sick poor. He would always have his people show their love to him by caring for the poor; but he had reached the one occasion in his life when it was seemly that something should be done specially for himself, and this woman, by the intuition of love, did that very thing. Oh, that we might all love Christ as intensely as she did!

Matthew 26:12, 13. For in that she hath poured this ointment my body, she did it for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also, this that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.

She probably did not know all that her action meant when she anointed her Lord for his burial. The consequences of the simplest action done for Christ may be much greater than we think. Go thou, my sister, and do what God bids thee; and it shall be seen that thou hast done far more than thou knowest. Obey the holy impulse within thy spirit, my brother; and thou mayest do ten thousand times more than thou hast ever imagined to be possible.

This woman's outburst of affection, this simple-hearted act of love to Christ himself, is one of those things which are to live as long as the gospel lives. The aroma of this loving deed is to abide as long as the world itself endures.

MATTHEW 26:14-16 THE BETRAYER'S BARGAIN

Matthew 26:14-16 Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him.

What a contrast to the incident we have just been considering! The anointing of Jesus is to be the theme of admiration wherever the gospel is preached; but his betrayal by Judas will be a subject for execration to all eternity. It was one of the twelve, who went unto the chief priests, to bargain for the price of his Lord's betrayal. He did not even mention Christ's name in his infamous question, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?", "The amount agreed upon, thirty pieces of silver, was the price of a slave; and showed how little value the chief priests set upon Jesus, and also revealed the greed of Judas in selling his master for so small a sum. Yet many have sold Jesus for a less price than Judas received; a smile or a sneer has been sufficient to induce them to betray their Lord.

Let us, who have been redeemed with Christ's precious blood, set high store by him, think much of him, and praise him much. As

we remember, with shame and sorrow, these thirty pieces of silver, let us never undervalue him, or forget the priceless preciousness of him who was reckoned as worth no more than a slave.

MATTHEW 26:17-30 THE LAST PASSEOVER AND THE NEW MEMORIAL

Matthew 26:17, 18. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, unto the City to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.

How truly royal was Jesus of Nazareth even in his humiliation! He had no home of his own wherein he could "Keep the passover" with his disciples; he was soon to be put to a public and shameful death; yet he had only to send two of his disciples "into the city to such a man", and the guest-chamber, furnished and prepared, was at once placed at his disposal. He did not take the room by arbitrary force, as an earthly monarch might have done; but he obtained it by the diviner compulsion of almighty love. Even in his lowest estate, our Lord Jesus had the hearts of all men beneath his control. What power he has now that he reigns in glory!

Matthew 26:19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.

If Christ's disciples always loyally did as Jesus appointed them, they would always speed well on his errands. There are many more people in the world ready to yield to Christ than some of us think. If we would only go to them as Peter and John went to this man in Jerusalem, and say to them what "the Master saith", we should find that their hearts would be opened to receive Christ even as this man's house was willingly yielded up at our Lord's request.

Matthew 26:20, 21. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

Our Lord remained in seclusion until the evening, and then went to the appointed place, and sat down, or rather, reclined at the paschal table, with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, "Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." This was a most unpleasant thought to bring to a feast, yet it was most appropriate to the passover, for God's commandment to Moses concerning the first paschal lamb was, "With bitter herbs they shall eat it." This was a painful reflection for our Lord, and also for his twelve chosen companions: "One of you", and his eyes would glance round the table as he said it, "One of you shall betray me."

Matthew 26:22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?

That short sentence fell like a bombshell among the Savior's body-guard. It startled them; they had all made great professions of affection for him, and, for the most part, those professions were true. And they were exceeding sorrowful: and well they might be. Such a revelation was enough to produce the deepest emotions of sorrow and sadness. It is a beautiful trait in the character of the disciples that they did not suspect one another, but every one of them enquired, almost incredulously, as the form of the question implies, "Lord, is it I?" "No one said, "Lord, is it Judas?" Perhaps no one of the eleven thought that Judas was base enough to betray the Lord who had given him an honorable place among his apostles.

We cannot do any good by suspecting our brethren; but we may do great service by suspecting, ourselves. Self-suspicion is near akin to humility.

Matthew 26:23, 24. And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.

A man may get very near to Christ, ay, may dip his hand in the same dish with the Savior, and yet betray him. We may be high in office, and may apparently be very useful, as Judas was; yet we may betray Christ.

We learn from our Lord's words that divine decrees do not deprive a sinful action of its guilt: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed. " His criminality is just as great as though there had been no "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." "It had, been good for that man if he had not been borne. " The doom of Judas is worse than non-existence. To have consorted with Christ as he had done, and then to deliver him into the hands of his enemies, sealed the traitor's eternal destiny.

Matthew 26:25. Then Judas, which betrayed him answered and said, Master is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said

Judas appears to have been the last of the twelve to ask the question, "Is it I ?" Those who are the last to suspect themselves are usually those who ought to be the first to exercise self-suspicion. Judas did not address Christ as "Lord", as the other disciples had done; but called him Rabbi, "Master ".

Otherwise, his question was like that of his eleven companions; but he received from Christ an answer that was given to no one else: He said unto him thou hast said. " Probably the reply reached his ear alone, and if he had not been a hopeless reprobate, this unmasking of his traitorous design might have driven him to repentance; but there was nothing in his heart to respond to Christ's voice. He had sold himself to Satan before he sold his Lord.

Matthew 26:26-28. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

The Jewish passover was made to melt into the Lord's supper, as the stars of the morning dissolve into the light of the sun. As they were eating, while the paschal supper was proceeding, Jesus instituted the new memorial which is to be observed until he comes again How simple was the whole ceremony! Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body. " Christ could not have meant that the bread was his body, for his body was reclining by the table; but he intended that broken bread to represent his body which was about to be broken on the cross. Then followed the second memorial, the cup, filled with "the fruit of the vine", of which Christ said, "Drink ye all of it. " There is no trace here of any altar or priest; there is nothing about the elevation or adoration of the host; there is no resemblance between the Lord's supper and the Romish mass. Let us keep strictly to the letter and spirit of God's Word in everything; for, if one adds a little, another will add more, and if one alters one point, I and another alters another point, there is no telling how far we shall get from the truth.

The disciples had been reminded of their own liability to sin; now their Savior gives them a personal pledge of the pardon of sin, according to Mark's record of his words, "This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

Matthew 26:29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Thus Jesus took the great Nazarite vow never to drink of the fruit of the vine till he should drink it new with his disciples in his Father's kingdom.

He will keep his tryst with all his followers, and they with him shall hold high festival for ever.

Matthew 26:30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

Was it not truly brave of our dear Lord to sing under such circumstances?

He was going forth to his last dread conflict, to Gethsemane, and Gabbatha, and Golgotha; yet he went with a song on his lips. He must have led the singing, for the disciples were too sad to start the hallel with which the paschal feast closed: And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. Then came that desperate struggle in which the great Captain of our salvation wrestled even to a bloody sweat, and prevailed.

MATTHEW 26:31-35 THE KING AGAIN PROPHESYING: PETER PROTESTING

Matthew 26:31, 32. Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.

Observe our Lord's habit of quoting Scripture. He was able to speak words of infallible truth, yet he fell back upon the Inspired Record in the Old Testament. His quotation from Zechariah does not seem to have been really necessary, but it was most appropriate to his prophecy to his disciples: "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered! abroad." Jesus was the Shepherd who was about to be smitten, and he foretold the scattering of the sheep. Even those leaders of the flock that had been first chosen by Christ, and kind been most with him, would stumble and fall away from him on that dread night; but the Shepherd would not lose them, there would be a reunion between him and his sheep: "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee." Once again he would resume, for a little while, the character of their Shepherd-King, and with them he would revisit some of their old haunts in Galilee, ere he ascended to his heavenly home. "I will go before you," suggests the idea of the Good Shepherd leading his flock after the Eastern manner. Happy are his sheep in having such a Leader, and blessed are they in following him whithersoever he goeth.

Matthew 26:33. Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.

This was a very presumptuous speech, not only because of the self confidence it betrayed, but also because it was a flat contradiction of the Master's declaration. Jesus said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night; "but Peter thought he knew better than Christ, so he answered, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." No doubt these words were spoken from his heart; but "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked." Peter must have been amazed, the next morning, as he discovered the deceitfulness and wickedness of his own heart, as manifested in his triple denial of his Lord.

He who thinks himself so much stronger than his brethren, is the very man who will prove to be weaker than any of them, as did Peter, not many hours after his boast was uttered.

Matthew 26:34. Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Jesus now tells his boastful disciple that, before the next morning's cockcrowing, he will thrice deny his Lord Not only would he stumble and fall with his fellow-disciples, but he would go beyond them all in his repeated denials of that dear Master whom he professed to love with intenser affection than even John possessed. Peter declared that he would remain true to Christ if he were the only faithful friend left; Jesus foretold that, of all the twelve, only Judas would exceed the boaster in wickedness.

Matthew 26:35. Peter said unto him, Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee. Likewise also said all the disciples.

Here again Peter contradicts his Master straight to his face. It was a pity that he should have boasted once after his Lord's plain prophecy that all the disciples would that night be offended because of him; but it was shameful that Peter should repeat his self-confident declaration in the teeth of Christ's express prediction concerning him. He was not alone in his utterance, for likewise

also said all the disciples. They all felt that under no circumstances could they deny their Lord. We have no record of the denial of Christ by the other ten apostles, although they all forsook him and fled, and thus practically disowned him. Remembering all that they had seen and heard of him, and especially bearing in mind his most recent discourses, the communion in the upper room, and his wondrous intercessory prayer on their behalf, we are not surprised that they felt themselves bound to him for ever. But, alas! Notwithstanding their protests, the King's prophecy was completely fulfilled, for that night they were all "offended", or "caused to stumble" (R.V. margin), and Peter thrice denied his Lord.

MATTHEW 26:36-46 THE KING BENEATH THE OLIVE-TREES

Here we come to the Holy of Holies of our Lord's life on earth. This is a mystery like that which Moses saw when the bush burned with fire, and was not consumed. No man can rightly expound such a passage as this; it is a subject for prayerful, heart-broken meditation, more than for human language. May the Holy Spirit graciously reveal to us all that he can be permitted to see of the King beneath the olive-trees in the garden of Gethsemane!

Matthew 26:36. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciple, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

Our Lord directed eight of his disciples to keep watch either outside or near the entrance of Gethsemane, "the olive-press." This garden had been Christ's favorite place for private prayer, and it was well selected as the scene of his last agonizing supplication. "'Twas here the Lord of life appeared, And sigh'd, and groan'd, and pray'd, and fers'd; Bore all incarnate God could bear, With strength enough, and none to spare."

Matthew 26:37, 38. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

The three disciples who had been with him on the Mount of Transfiguration were privileged to be nearer to him than the rest of their brethren; but even they must not be actually with him. His sorrow was so great that he must bear it alone; and there was also that Scripture to be fulfilled, "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me."

Yet would he have his three choicest companions near him, that he might derive such slight solace from their presence as they could convey to him.

They had never before seen their Lord overwhelmed with Atlantic billows of sorrow like those that rolled in upon him as he began to be sorrowful and very heavenly. He was bowed down as if an enormous weight rested on his soul, as indeed it did. 'This was the soul travail, the soul-offering for sin, which was completed on the cross; and well might he say, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." The sorrow of his soul was the very soul of his sorrow; his soul was full of sorrow, until he seemed to reach the utmost limit of endurance, and to be at the very date of death. In such dire distress he needed faithful friends at hand, so he said to Peter, James, and John, "Tarry ye here, and watch with me." He must bear alone the awful burden of his people's sin; but his disciples might show their sympathy with him by watching at a respectful distance, and adding their poor prayers to his mighty wrestlings. Alas! they did not prize the privilege Christ gave them: have not we been too much like them when our Savior has bidden us watch with him?

Matthew 26:39. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Was he heard? Yes, verily, and especially in that which was the very pith and marrow of his prayer: "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." This was the vital part of his petition, its true essence; for much as his human nature shrank from the "cup", still more did he shrink from any thought of acting contrary to his Father's will. Christ's sense of sonship was clear and undimmed even in that dark hour, for he began his prayer with the filial utterance, "O my father."

Matthew 26:40. And he cometh unto the disciples and findeth them asleep and saith unto Peter. What could ye not watch with me one hour?

We cannot tell how long he had been wrestling alone in prayer; but it was long enough for the disciples to fall asleep. Peter had constituted himself the spokesman of the company, therefore to him our Lord addressed his gentle rebuke, which was meant also for his companions: "What, could ye, not catch with me one hour?" According to Mark 14:37, the question was put personally to Peter, "Simon, sleepest thou?" It was bad enough for James and John to be slumbering instead of watching; but after all Peter's boasting, it seemed worse in his case. He who had made the loudest protestations of devotion deserved to be the most blamed for his unfaithfulness.

Matthew 26:41. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak..

It was truly kind on Christ's part to find an excuse for his weak and weary disciples; it was just like him to say anything that he could in their praise even though they had slept when they ought to have watched. Yet he repeated the command, "Watch " for that was the special duty of the hour; and he added, "and pray, " for prayer would help them to watch, and watching would aid them in praying. Watching and praying were enjoined for a special purpose: "that ye enter not into temptation. " He knew what sore temptations were about to assail them, so he would have them doubly armed by— "Watching unto prayer."

Matthew 26:42. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

These calm, simple words scarcely convey to our minds a full idea of the intense agony under which they were uttered. Luke mentions that our Savior, in his second supplication, "prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." The tension upon his whole frame became so great that his life seemed oozing away through every pore of his body; and he was so weak and faint, through the terrible strain, that he might well fear that his human nature would sink under the awful trial, and that he would die before his time. Yet even then he recognized his sonship: "O my Father! " and he absolutely surrendered himself to his Father's will: "Thy will be done. "

Matthew 26:43, 44. And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.

Great sorrow produces different results in different persons. In the Savior's case, it aroused him to an awful agony of earnestness in prayer; in the disciples' case, it sent them to sleep. Luke says that they were "sleeping for sorrow." Their Master might find an excuse for their neglect; but oh! how they would blame themselves afterwards for missing that last opportunity of watching with their wrestling Lord! As he could get no comfort from them, he left them, and went away again, and prayed: the third time, saying the same words. Those who teach that we should pray but once, and not repeat the petition that we present to the Lord, cannot quote our Savior's example in support of their theory, for thrice on that dread night he offered the same supplication, and even used the same language. Paul, also, like his Master, "besought the Lord thrice" that the "thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan," might depart from him.

Matthew 26:45, 46. Then cometh he to his disciples and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take your rest: behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.

I do not think Jesus was speaking ironically when he said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest: " but that he allowed them to take a little sleep while he sat by, and watched. Not long did he sit, or did they sleep; for through the olives he could see the glare of the approaching torches, and the stillness of the night was broken by the tramping and shouting of the rabble throng that had come to arrest him. He gently wakened his drowsy disciples by saying, "Rise, let us be going: " adding words that must have struck terror to

their sorrowing hearts: "Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me " The crushing in "the olivepress" was over. The long looked for "hour " of betrayal had come; and Jesus went calmly forward, divinely strengthened to meet the terrible trials that yet awaited him ere he could fully accomplish the redemption of his chosen people.

MATTHEW 26:47-56 THE KING'S BETRAYAL

Matthew 26:47-49 And while he yet spake, lo, Judas one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master; and kissed him.

It is a remarkable fact that we do not read, in the New Testament, that any one of the twelve, except Judas ever kissed Jesus. It seems as if the most impudent familiarity was very near akin to dastardly treachery. This sign of Judas was typical of the way in which Jesus is generally betrayed!. When men intend to undermine the inspiration of the Scriptures, how do they begin their books? Why, always with a declaration that they wish to promote the truth of Christ! Christ's name is often slandered by those who make a loud profession of attachment to him, and then sin foully as the chief of transgressors. There is the Judas-kiss first, and the betrayal afterwards. Thus Judas said, "Hail, master " and kissed him much (R.V. margin); betraying him by the act that ought to have been the token of firmest friendship.

Matthew 26:50. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him.

The meek and lowly Jesus spake not as any mere man might have done under such circumstances. He did not address Judas as, "Wretch! "or, "Miscreant!" but his first word, after receiving the traitor's kiss, was, "Friend!" He did not denounce him as the vilest of mankind, but quietly said, "Wherefore art thou come? " or, "Do that for which thou art come." (R.V.) Right royally did our King behave in that trying hour. Then came they, and, laid hands on Jesus, and took him. He offered no resistance, although the whole multitude would have been powerless to seize him unless he had been willing to be taken. They came to take him, so he shielded his disciples from arrest while he yielded up himself to his captors, saying, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." Jesus was always thoughtful of others; he was so in the garden, and even when hanging on the cross.

Matthew 26:51, 52. And behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto him. Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.

A good man s hand is never more out of place than when it is on the sword-hilt; yet there is always a tendency, even among Christians, to draw the sword from its scabbard. It would have been far better if Peter's hands had been clasped in prayer. That act of cutting off the ear of Malchus helped to identify him as one who was with Christ in the garden, and directly led to one of his denials of his Lord (John 8:26,27). The sword never helps to establish Christ's kingdom; all that is ever done by it will have to be undone. Brute force will throw down what brute force has built up.

Matthew 26:53, 54 . Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?

How royally our King speaks! He was the true Master of the situation. He had but to pray to his Father, and "more than twelve legions of angels "would come flashing down from the court of heaven. Each timid disciple might have found himself captain of an angelic legion, while their Lord might have had as many more as he chose. There was, however, one difficulty in the way: "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? " Jesus thought more of fulfilling the Scriptures than of being delivered from the hands of wicked men. Neither Jewish bands nor Roman ropes could have held him captive if he had not been under the bond of

a. mightier force, even that eternal covenant into which he and entered on behalf of his people.

Matthew 26:55. In that same hour said Jesus to the multitudes, Are ye come out as against a thief with swords and staves for to take me? I sat daily with you teaching in the temple, and ye laid no hold on me..

Luke says that this question was put to “the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders.” Yet even to them Jesus only addressed a mild expostulation, instead of the terrible denunciation that their conduct deserved. It did seem a great farce for multitudes with swords and staves to go out from Jerusalem, at midnight, to arrest “the Man of Sorrows”, who would not allow one of his followers to draw a sword in his defense. Yet even his foes knew that he possessed extraordinary power if he only chose to exert it; and their numbers, arms, and authority were so many unconscious tributes to his royal dignity and might.

Matthew 26:56. But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.

Our Lord’s one great concern was that he might finish the work he had come to perform, and that so the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled.

Jesus was not surprised that all the disciples forsook him, and fled; for he had foretold that they would do so. He knew them better than they knew themselves, so he prophesied that the flock would be scattered when the Shepherd should be smitten. So it was; for when the fierce wolves came and seized him, the sheep all fled.

It would have been to the eternal honor of any one of the disciples to have kept close to Christ right up to the last; but neither the loving John nor the boastful Peter stood the test of that solemn time. Human nature is such poor stuff, even at the best, that we cannot hope that any of us would have been braver or more faithful than the apostles were.

MATTHEW 26:57-68 THE KING BEFORE THE JEWISH HIGH PRIEST

Matthew 26:57. And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled.

Some of the chief priests and elders were so enraged against Christ that they went to Gethsemane with the Roman cohort that was sent to arrest Jesus; the rest of them met at the house of Caiaphas the high priest, waiting for their victim to be brought to them. It was night, or early morning; but they were only too willing to sit up to judge the Lord of glory, and put the King of Israel to shame.

Matthew 26:58. But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end.

Peter was not to be blamed because he followed afar off, for at first he and John were the only two disciples who followed their captive Master. John went with Jesus into the high priest’s palace, and by his influence Peter was also admitted. Attracted by the fire, Peter sat with the servants; a dangerous place for him, as it soon proved. When a servant of Christ by his own choice sits with the servants of the wicked, sin and sorrow speedily follow.

Matthew 26:59-61. Now the chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness against Jesus, to put him to death; but found none: yea, though many false witnesses, came, yet found they none. At the last came two false witnesses, and said, This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days.

The enemies of Jesus wanted to put him to death; they must therefore have at least two witnesses against him, for by

the law of Moses the evidence of one witness was not sufficient to convict any person accused of a crime deserving the death penalty. The chief priests, and elders, and all the council, sought false witness, but found none; until at the last came two false witnesses, who wrested Christ's words, and misrepresented his meaning; but even they did not agree in their testimony (Mark 14:59), and therefore Jesus could not be condemned.

Matthew 26:62. And the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee?

What was the use of answering? There really was nothing to answer except palpable and willful misrepresentation. Our Lord also knew that the council had determined to put him to death; and beside that, there was another prophecy to be fulfilled: "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

Matthew 26:63, 64. But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

The time for Christ to speak had come. First he answered the high priest's solemn adjuration, and declared that he was "The Christ the Son of God. " There was no longer any reason for concealing that fact Then he uttered a prophecy that must have startled his accusers. He stood there bound, apparently alone and helpless before his powerful enemies, who expected soon to put him to death; yet the Prophet-King declared that they should be witnesses of his future glory, and see him "sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. " His hearers rightly understood him to claim to be divine, and gladly do we acknowledge the justice of his claim.

Matthew 26:65, 66. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

If he had not been God Incarnate, he would have been guilty of blasphemy, and would have deserved to die. By the law of Moses, a blasphemer was to be stoned to death (Leviticus 24:16). Christ's works had proved that he was God, so his words were not those of a blasphemer; but his confession gave his enemies the opening they were seeking, and they declared him to be unworthy to live: They answered and said, "He is guilty of death. " He had foretold that he would be crucified, whereas the punishment for blasphemy was death by stoning; so further forms of trial must be gone through before the end would come.

Matthew 26:67, 68. Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands, saying, Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?

Put together these two texts: Then did they spit in his face,— " And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them." In the day of his humiliation, they struck him, and mocked him, saying, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee? " Unless they repented of their wickedness, the day will come when the Divine Judge will point out each one of them who then abused him, and he will say, "Thou art the man!"

Oh, what shameful indignities and cruelties were heaped upon our precious Savior! "See how the patient Jesus stands Insulted in hid lowest case!

Sinners have bound the Almighty hands, And spit in their Creator's face."

MATTHEW 26:69-75 THE KING DENIED BY HIS DISCIPLE

Matthew 26:69, 70. Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest.

While our Lord was in the high priest's house, Peter sat without in the palace. In the courtyard overlooked by the rooms of the palace, the servants and officers had lighted a fire to warm themselves while they waited to see what would be done with Jesus.

Peter joined the company, and a damsel, who had let him in at John's request, said to him, "Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee." Now came the test of his confident boast to his Lord, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." But he denied before them all saying, "I know not what thou sayest." Whatever the consequences of confessing Christ might have been to Peter, they could not have been as bad as this base denial was.

Matthew 26:71, 72. And when he was gone out unto the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.

There were so many who had seen Peter with Christ that he was easily recognized as one of the companions of the Nazarene. His second denial differed from the first, in that he added an oath to the lie, and declared concerning Christ, "I do not know the man." Perhaps the oath was meant to prove that he was no follower of him who said, "Swear not at all;" or it may have been a return to Peter's old habit before his conversion. When once a child of God gets on the downward road, no man can tell how fast and how far he will fall unless almighty grace be vouchsafed to him.

Matthew 26:73. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee.

Even when Peter swore, there was something of the brogue of Galilee in his utterance, so that these people in Jerusalem detected his provincial dialect, and said to him, "Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee." If a child of God begins to swear, he will not do it as the ungodly do, and he will be sure to be found out.

Matthew 26:74, 75. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I now not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.

Lying led to swearing, and swearing to cursing; no one but the Lord knows how much further Peter would have fallen if he had not been divinely arrested in his sinful career. Many men heard the cock crow that morning but to Peter it carried a solemn reminder of his Lord's prophetic warning, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." There was something else that affected Peter more than the crowing of the cock. Luke tells us that "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." Peter must have looked up at the Lord or he would not have seen that look of sorrow, pity, love, and forgiveness that the Lord gave him, ere he went out and wept bitterly.

If any one of us has denied the Lord that bought him, let him look up to him who now looks down from heaven, ready to pardon the backslider who cries with the returning prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no worthy to be called thy son." more This same Peter, when reinstated in his Lord's favor, preached on the day of Pentecost the sermon that led to the conviction and conversion of thousands of his hearers.