

THE WEAKENED CHRIST STRENGTHENED

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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“And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.”
Luke 22:43.

I SUPPOSE that this incident happened immediately after our Lord's first prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. His pleading became so fervent, so intense, that it forced from Him a bloody sweat. He was, evidently, in a great agony of fear as He prayed and wrestled even unto blood. We are told by the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that He “was heard in that He feared.” It is probable that this angel came in answer to that prayer. This was the Father's reply to the cry of His fainting Son, who was enduring an infinity of sorrow because of His people's sin; and who must, therefore, be divinely upheld as to His manhood, lest He should be utterly crushed beneath the terrible weight that was pressing upon His holy soul.

Scarcely had our Savior prayed before the answer to His petition came. It reminds us of Daniel's supplication, and of the angelic messenger who was caused to fly so swiftly that, as soon as the prayer had left the prophet's lips, Gabriel stood there with the reply to it. So, brethren and sisters, whenever your times of trial come, always take yourselves to your knees. Whatever shape your trouble may take—if, to you, it should even seem to be a faint representation of your Lord's agony in Gethsemane, put yourselves into the same posture as that in which He sustained the great shock that came upon Him. Kneel down, and cry to your Father who is in heaven, who is able to save you from death, who will prevent the trial from utterly destroying you, who will give you strength that you may be able to endure it, and will bring you through it to the praise of the glory of His grace.

That is the first lesson for us to learn from our Lord's experience in Gethsemane—the blessing of prayer. He has bidden us pray, but He has done more than that, for He has set us the example of prayer; and, if example is, as we are sure it is, far more powerful than precept, let us not fail to imitate our Savior in the exercise of potent, prevalent, repeated supplication, whenever our spirits are cast down, and we are in sore distress of soul. Possibly, you have sometimes said, “I feel so sorrowful that I cannot pray.” No, brother, that is the very time when you must pray. As the spices, when bruised, give forth all the more fragrance because of the bruising, so let the sorrow of your spirit cause it to send forth the more fervent prayer to the God who is both able and willing to deliver you. You must express your sorrow in one way or another; so let it not be expressed in murmuring, but in supplication. It is a vile temptation, on the part of Satan, to keep you away from the mercy seat when you have most need to go there; but do not yield to that temptation. Pray till you can pray; and if you find that you are not filled with the Spirit of supplication, use whatever measure of the sacred bedewing you have; and so, by and by, you shall have the baptism of the Spirit, and prayer shall become to you a happier and more joyful exercise than it is at present. Our Savior said to His disciples, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death;” yet then, above all times, He was in an agony of prayer; and, in proportion to the intensity of His sorrow was the intensity of His supplication.

In our text, there are two things to note. First, *our Lord's weakness*; and, secondly, *our Lord's strengthening*.

I. First, then, let us meditate for a little while upon OUR LORD'S WEAKNESS.

That He was exceedingly weak, is clear from the fact that an angel came from heaven to strengthen Him, for the holy angels never do anything that is superfluous. They are the servants of an eminently practical God, who never does that which it is unnecessary for Him to do. If Jesus had not needed strengthening, an angel would not have come from heaven to strengthen Him. But how strange it sounds, to our

ears, that the Lord of life and glory should be so weak that He should need to be strengthened by one of His own creatures! How extraordinary it seems that He, who is “very God of very God,” should, nevertheless, when He appeared on earth as Immanuel, God with us, so completely take upon Himself our nature that He should become so weak as to need to be sustained by angelic agency! This struck some of the older saints as being derogatory to His divine dignity; so some manuscripts of the New Testament omit this passage; it is supposed that the verse was struck out by some who claimed to be orthodox, lest, perhaps, the Arians should lay hold upon it, and use it to bolster up their heresies. I cannot be sure who struck it out, but I am not altogether surprised that they should have done so. They had no right to do anything of the kind, for whatever is revealed in the Scriptures must be true. But they seemed to shudder at the thought that the Son of God should ever have been so weakened as to need the support of an angelic messenger to strengthen Him.

Yet, brethren and sisters, *this incident proves the reality of our Savior’s manhood*. Here you can perceive how fully He shares the weakness of our humanity—not in spiritual weakness, so as to become guilty of any sin—but in mental weakness, so as to be capable of great depression of spirit; and in physical weakness, so as to be exhausted to the last degree by His terrible bloody sweat. What is extreme weakness? It is something different from pain, for sharp pain evidences at least some measure of strength; but perhaps some of you know what it is to feel as if you were scarcely alive; you were so weak that you could hardly realize that you were actually living. The blood flowed, if it flowed at all, but very slowly in the canals of your veins; everything seemed stagnant within you. You were very faint, you almost wished that you could become unconscious, for the consciousness you had was extremely painful; you were so weak and sick that you seemed almost ready to die. Our Master’s words, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death,” prove that the shadow of impending dissolution hung darkly over His spirit, soul, and body, so that He could truly quote the 22nd Psalm, and say, “You have brought Me into the dust of death.” I think, beloved, that you ought to be glad it was so with your Lord, for now you can see how completely He is made like unto His brethren, in their mental depression and physical weakness, as well as in other respects.

It will help you to get an idea of the true manhood of Christ if you remember that *this was not the only time when He was weak*. He, the Son of man, was once a babe; and, therefore, all the tender ministries that have to be exercised because of the helplessness of infancy were necessary also in His case. Wrapped in swaddling bands, and lying in a manger, that little child was, all the while, the mighty God, though He condescended to keep His omnipotence in abeyance in order that He might redeem His people from their sins. Doubt not His true humanity, and learn from it how tenderly He is able to sympathize with all the ills of childhood, and, all the griefs of boyhood, which are not so few or so small as some people imagine.

Besides being thus an infant and gradually growing in stature just as other children do, our Lord Jesus was often very weary. How the angels must have wondered as they saw Him, who sways the scepter of universal sovereignty, and marshals all the starry hosts according to His will, as He, “being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well” at Sychar, waiting for the woman whose soul He had gone to win, and wiping the sweat from His brow, and resting Himself after having traveled over the burning acres of the land. The prophet Isaiah truly said that, “the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, faints not, neither is weary.” That is the divine side of His glorious nature. “Jesus, therefore, being wearied with His journey, sat thus on the well.” That was the human side of His nature. We read that “He did eat nothing” during the forty days’ temptation in the wilderness, and “He afterwards hungered.” Have any of you ever known what it has been to suffer the bitterness of hunger? Then, remember that our Lord Jesus Christ also endured that pang. He, whom we rightly worship and adore as “God blessed forever,” as the Son of man, the Mediator between God and men, hungered; and He also thirsted, for He said to the woman at the well, “Give Me to drink.”

In addition to this, our Savior was often so weary that He slept, which is another proof of His true humanity. He was so tired, once, that He slept even when the ship was tossing to and fro in a storm, and was ready to sink. On one occasion, we read that the disciples “took Him even as He was in the ship,” which seems to me to imply even more than it says, namely, that He was so worn out that He was scarcely able to get into the ship; but “they took Him even as He was,” and there He fell asleep. We know, moreover, that “Jesus wept”—not merely once, or twice, but many times; and we also know what completes the proof of His humanity—that He died. It was a strange phenomenon that He, to whom the Father has given “to have life in Himself,” should have been called to pass through the gloomy shades of death, that

He might in all points be made like unto His brethren, and so be able to fully sympathize with us. O you weak ones, look how weak your Lord became that He might make you strong! We might read that familiar passage, “though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might be rich;” in a slightly different way, “though He was strong, yet for your sakes He became weak, that you through His weakness might be strong.” Therefore, beloved, “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

What was *the reason for the special weakness of our Savior when in the garden of Gethsemane*? I cannot now go fully into that matter, but I want you to notice what it was that tried Him so severely there. I suppose, first, it was contact with sin. Our Savior had always seen the effects of sin upon others, but it had never come home to Him so closely as it did when He entered that garden; for there, more than ever before, the iniquity of His people was made to meet upon Him, and that contact aroused in Him a holy horror. You and I are not perfectly pure, so we are not as horrified at sin as we ought to be; yet sometimes, we can say, with the psalmist, “Horror has taken hold upon me because of the wicked that forsake Your law;” but for our gracious Savior—listen to the inspired words, they are none of mine—to be “numbered with the transgressors,” must have been an awful thing to His pure and holy soul. He seemed to shrink back from such a position, and it needed that He should be strengthened in order that He might be able to endure the contact with that terrible mass of iniquity.

But He had, in addition, to bear the burden of that sin. It was not sufficient for Him to come into contact with it; but it is written, “The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all;” and as He began fully to realize all that was involved in His position as the great Sin-bearer, His spirit seemed to droop, and He became exceedingly weak. Ah, sir! If you have to bear the burden of your own sin when you appear before the judgment seat of God, it will sink you to the lowest hell; but what must Christ’s agony have been when He was bearing the sin of all His people? As the mighty mass of their guilt came rolling upon Him, His Father saw that the human soul and the human body both needed to be upheld, otherwise they would have been utterly crushed before the atoning work had been accomplished.

Contact with sin and the bearing of sin’s penalty, were reason enough to produce the Savior’s excessive weakness in Gethsemane; but, in addition, He was conscious of the approach of death. I have heard some people say that we ought not to shrink from death; but I assert that, in proportion as a man is a good man, death will be distasteful to him. You and I have become, to a large extent, familiarized with the thought of death. We know that we must die—unless the Lord should come soon—for all who have gone before us have done so, and the seeds of death are sown in us, and, like some fell disease, they are beginning to work within our nature. It is natural that we should expect to die, for we know that we are mortal. If anybody were to tell us that we should be annihilated, any reasonable and sensible man would be horrified at the idea, for that is not natural to the soul of man. Well, now, death was as unnatural to Christ as annihilation would be to us. It had never come to be a part of His nature, His holy soul had none of the seeds of death in it; and His untainted body—which had never known any kind of disease or corruption, but was as pure as when, first of all, “that holy thing” was created by the Spirit of God—that also shrank back from death. There were not in it any of the things which make death natural; and, therefore, because of the very purity of His nature, He recoiled at the approach of death, and needed to be especially strengthened in order to meet “the last enemy.”

Probably, however, it was the sense of utter desertion that was preying upon His mind, and so produced that extremity of weakness. All His disciples had failed Him, and presently would forsake Him. Judas had lifted up his heel against Him, and there was not one of all His professed followers who would faithfully cleave to Him. Kings, princes, scribes, and rulers were all united against Him, and of the people, there were none with Him. Worst of all, by the necessity of His expiatory sacrifice, and His substitution for His people, His Father Himself withdrew from Him the light of His countenance; and, even in the garden, He was beginning to feel that agony of soul which, on the cross, wrung from Him that doleful cry, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” And that sense of utter loneliness and desertion, added to all that He had endured, made Him so exceedingly weak that it was necessary that He should be specially strengthened for the ordeal through which He had still to pass.

II. Now, in the second place, let us meditate for a little while upon OUR LORD’S STRENGTHENING: “There appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him.”

It is night, and there He kneels, under the olives, offering up, as Paul says, “prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death.” While wrestling there, He

is brought into such a state of agony that He sweats great drops of blood; and, suddenly, there flashes before Him, like a meteor from the midnight sky, a bright spirit that had come straight from the throne of God to minister to Him in His hour of need.

Think of *the condescension on Christ's part to allow an angel to come and strengthen Him*. He is the Lord of angels as well as of men. At His bidding, they fly more swiftly than the lightning flash to do His will. Yet, in His extremity of weakness, He was succored by one of them. It was a wondrous stoop for the infinitely-great and ever-blessed Christ of God to consent that a spirit of His own creation should appear unto Him, and strengthen Him.

But while I admire the condescension which permitted one angel to come, I equally admire *the self-restraint which allowed only one to come*; for, if He had so pleased, He might have appealed to His Father, and He would at once have sent to Him "more than twelve legions of angels." No, He did not make such a request; He rejoiced to have one to strengthen Him, but He would not have any more. Oh, what matchless beauties are combined in our blessed Savior! You may look on this side of the shield, and you will perceive that it is of pure gold. Then you may look on the other side of it, but you will not discover that it is brass, as in the fable, for it is gold all through. Our Lord Jesus is "altogether lovely." What He does, or what He refrains from doing, equally deserves the praises of His people.

How could the angel strengthen Christ? That is a very natural inquiry; but it is quite possible that when we have answered that question as well as we can, we shall not have given a full and satisfactory reply to it. Yet I can conceive that, in some mysterious manner, an angel from heaven *may have actually infused fresh vigor into the physical constitution of Christ*. I cannot positively affirm that it was so, but it seems to me a very likely thing. We know that God can suddenly communicate new strength to fainting spirits; and, certainly, if He willed it, He could thus lift up the drooping head of His Son, and make Him feel strong and resolute again.

Perhaps it was so; but, in any case, it must have strengthened the Savior *to feel that He was in pure company*. It is a great joy to a man, who is battling for the right against a crowd who love the wrong, to find a comrade by his side who loves the truth as he loves it himself. To a pure mind, obliged to listen to the ribald jests of the licentious, I know of nothing that is more strengthening than to get a whisper in the ear from one who says, "I, too, love that which is chaste and pure, and hate the filthy conversation of the wicked." So, perhaps, the mere fact of that shining angel standing by the Savior's side, or reverently bowing before Him, may in itself have strengthened Him.

Next to that, was *the tender sympathy which this angelic ministration proved*. I can imagine that all the holy angels leant over the battlements of heaven to watch the Savior's wondrous life; and now that they see Him in the garden, and perceive, by His whole appearance, and His desperate agony, that death is drawing to Him, they are so astonished that they crave permission that at least one of their number shall go down to see if He cannot carry succor to Him from His Father's house above. I can imagine the angels saying, "Did we not sing of Him at Bethlehem when He was born? Did not some of us minister to Him when He was in the desert, and among wild beasts, hungry after His long fast and terrible temptation? Has He not been seen of angels all the while He has been on earth? Oh, let some one of us go to His relief!" And I can readily suppose that God said to Gabriel, "Your name means, 'The strength of God,' go and strengthen your Lord in Gethsemane," "and there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven strengthening Him;" and I think that He was strengthened, at least in part, by observing the sympathy of all the heavenly host with Him in His season of secret sorrow. He might seem to be alone as man; but, as Lord and King, He had on His side an innumerable company of angels who waited to do His will; and here was one of them come to assure Him that He was not alone, after all.

Next, no doubt, our Savior was comforted by *the angel's willing service*. You know, dear brothers and sisters, how a little act of kindness will cheer us when we are very low in spirit. If we are despised and rejected of men, if we are deserted and defamed by those who ought to have dealt differently with us, even a tender look from a child will help to remove our depression. In times of loneliness, it is something even to have a dog with you, to lick your hand, and show you such kindness as is possible from him. And our blessed Master, who always appreciated, and still appreciates, the least service rendered to Him—for not a cup of cold water, given to a disciple, in Christ's name, shall lose its reward—was cheered by the devotion and homage of the ministering spirit that came from heaven to strengthen Him. I wonder if the angel worshipped Him—I think that He could do no less; and it must have been something to worship the blood-red Son of God. Oh, that any one of us could have paid Him such homage as that! The time for such

special ministry as that is over now; yet my faith seems to bring Him back here, at this moment, just as if we were in Gethsemane. I adore You, blessed eternal God—never more Godlike than when You did prove Your perfect manhood by sweating great drops of blood in the awful weakness of Your depression in the garden of sorrow!

Perhaps, too, the angel's presence comforted and strengthened the Savior *as being a sort of foretaste of His final victory*. What was this angel but the pioneer of all the heavenly host that would come to meet Him when the fight was over? He was one who, in full confidence of His Lord's victory, had flown before the rest, to pay homage to the conquering Son of God, who would tread the old dragon beneath His feet. You remember how, when Jesus was born, first there came one angel who began to speak of Him to the shepherds, "and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The first angel had, as it were, stolen a march upon his brethren, and got there before them; but, no sooner was the wondrous news spread through heaven's streets, than every angel resolved to overtake him before his message was completed. So, here again is one that had come as an outrider, to remind His Lord of His ultimate victory, and there were many more afterwards to come with the same glad tidings; but, to the Savior's heart, that angel's coming was a token that He would lead captivity captive; and that myriads of other bright spirits would crowd around Him, and cry, "Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be you lifted up, you everlasting doors; that the King of glory, fresh from His blood-red shame, may enter into His heavenly and eternal inheritance!"

Yet once more, *is it not very likely that this angel brought the Savior a message from heaven?* The angels are generally God's messengers, so they have something to communicate from Him; and, perhaps, this angel, bending over the Savior's prostrate form, whispered in His ear, "Be of good cheer; you must pass through all this agony, but You will thereby save an innumerable multitude of the sons and daughters of men, who will love and worship You and Your Father forever and forever. He is with You even at this moment. Though He must hide His face from You, because of the requirements of justice that the atonement may be complete, His heart is with You, and He loves You always." Oh, how our Lord Jesus must have been cheered if some such words as these were whispered into His ears!

Now, in closing, let us try to learn the lessons of this incident. Beloved brothers and sisters, you and I may have to pass through great griefs—certainly ours will never be so great as those of our Divine Master—but we may have to follow through the same waters. Well, at such times, as I have already said, let us resort to prayer, and *let us be content to receive comfort from the humblest instrumentality*. "That is too simple an observation," you say. It is a very simple one, but it is one that some people have need to remember. You remember how Naaman, the Syrian was healed through the remark of a little captive girl; and, sometimes, great saints have been cheered by the words of very little people. You recollect how Dr. Guthrie, when he was dying, wanted "a child's hymn"? It was just like him, great, glorious, simple-minded child-man that he was. He said what you and I must sometimes have felt that we wanted—a child's hymn—a child's joyful song to cheer us up in our hour of depression and sorrow.

There are some people, who seem as if they would not be converted unless they can see some eminent minister. Even that will not suit some of them; they want a special revelation from heaven. They will not take a text from the Bible—though I cannot conceive of anything better than that—but they think that if they could dream something, or if they could hear words spoken, in the cool of the evening, by some strange voice in the sky, then they might be converted. Well, Brothers and Sisters, if you will not eat the apples that grow on trees, you must not expect angels to come and bring them to you. We have a more sure word of testimony in the Bible than we can have anywhere else. If you will not be converted by that Word, it is a great pity; and it is much more than a pity, it is a great sin. If your Lord and Master condescended to receive consolation from an angel whom He had Himself created, you ought to be willing to gather comfort from the feeblest speech of the poorest person—from the least of the people of God when they try to cheer you.

I have known an old professor say of a young minister, "It is no use for me to hear him, for he has not had the experience that I have had, so how can he instruct or help me?" O sirs, I have known many old saints get more comfort out of godly boys than they did from those of their own age! God knows how, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, to perfect praise; and I have never heard that He has done that out of the mouths of old men. Why is that? Because they know too much; but the children do not know

anything; and, therefore, out of their mouths the praise of God is perfect. So let us never despise God's messengers, however humble they may be.

The next lesson is, while you should be thankful for the least comforter; yet, *in your times of deepest need, you may expect the greatest comforters to come to you.* Let me remind you that an angel appeared to Joseph when Herod was seeking Christ's life. Then, later, angels appeared to Christ when the devil had been tempting Him. And now, at Gethsemane, when there was a peculiar manifestation of diabolical malice, for it was the hour of the powers of darkness; then, when the devil was loose, and doing his utmost against Christ, an angel came from heaven to strengthen Him. So, when you are in your heaviest trials, you shall have your greatest strength. Perhaps you will have little to do with angels till you get into deep trouble, and then shall the promise be fulfilled, "He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways. They shall bear you up in their hands, lest you dash your foot against a stone." They are always ready to be your keepers; but, in the matter of spiritual strengthening, these holy spirits may have little to do with some of you until you stand foot to foot with Apollyon, and have to fight stern battles with the evil one himself. It is worthwhile to go through rough places to have angels to bear you up. It is worthwhile to go to Gethsemane, if there we may have angels from heaven to strengthen us. So, be of good comfort, brethren, whatever lies before you. The darker your experience is, the brighter will be that which comes out of it. The disciples feared as they entered the cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration; but when they had passed right into it, they saw Jesus, Moses, and Elijah in glory. O you, who are the true followers of Christ, fear not the clouds that lower darkly over you, for you shall see the brightness behind them and the Christ in them; and blessed shall your spirits be.

But if you are not believing in Christ, I am indeed grieved for you, for you shall have the sorrow without the solace—the cup of bitterness without the angel—the agony, and that forever, without the messenger from heaven to console you. Oh, that you would all believe in Jesus! God help you so to do, for Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: *LUKE 22:14-46.*

Verses 14-16. *And when the hour was come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*

And it is fulfilled, for Christ Himself is the Lamb of our Passover. His blood has been shed and sprinkled; His people have been brought up out of their Egyptian bondage; and, by faith, they feed upon Him, and are glad. How sweetly the Passover melted away into the Lord's Supper, and how graciously did our Savior thus teach us that, as a rule, He does not make violent changes in the development of His people's spiritual life, but He leads them on gradually from one stage to another! There may be, sometimes, very sudden elevations; but, as a general rule, we go from strength to strength, a step at a time; and the truth is revealed to us little by little.

17, 18. *So He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.*

This was the Passover cup—the cup with which they concluded the paschal supper. At such times, they also usually began to chant a Psalm in happy unison. Just at that point, Christ interjected the first part of the celebration of the new ordinance—the Lord's Supper, into which the paschal supper was to melt.

19. *And He took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body, which is given for you: This do in remembrance of Me.*

It was clearly impossible that He could have meant that bread to be literally His body, because His body was there at the table. Therefore, the misunderstanding, or misrepresentation, of the Church of Rome is altogether without excuse. Our Savior plainly intended to say, "This bread represents My body; it is an emblem, a symbol, of My body." If this had been spoken concerning the bread after Christ had been dead and gone, and not before, there might have been some warrant for the teaching of the Papists; but there cannot be any such warrant, as He used the words while He was sitting there with His apostles. Let us be careful not to lose the true meaning of Christ's words, while we combat the false interpretation that has been given to them.

20. *Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you.*

He could not have meant that, literally, that cup was the new covenant; I never heard of anybody who thought He did. Why, then, take one part of the ordinance literally, if not the other? But our Lord did mean that the contents of that cup represented the blood which seals and ratifies the eternal covenant on which our hopes are built.

21. *But, behold, the hand of him that betrays Me is with Me on the table.*

Lamentable circumstance—sad index of what often still occurs! The worst traitors to Christ are not outside, but inside the visible church; there they have the best opportunity for doing mischief; there they can give the unkindest cut of all. God grant that none of us may be among that miserable number!

22. *And truly the Son of man goes, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!*

The fact that it was determined, in the eternal decrees of God, that Christ should die, did not at all diminish the responsibility of all who had a share in bringing about that death. Learn, beloved, to believe firmly in Divine predestination without doubting human responsibility. Even though you may not be able to show how these two things agree, do not be anxious about that matter; be satisfied to believe what you cannot understand. Both these things are true, and they are both of them in this verse.

23, 24. *And they began to inquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*

What a strange thing that it should have been so! Is there any such strife among us here? If so, how utterly unworthy are we to be the disciples of such a Master as our Lord Jesus Christ!

25, 26. *And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But you shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that serves.*

You know, brethren, that it always will be so. If a man tries to be great in the church, somehow or other his brethren generally think very little of him; but he who is willing to serve—whose one ambition it is to lay himself out for the glory of his Master, and for the general good—that man usually has a great deal more honor than he would have expected to receive. The way to be great in the church is to be serviceable to all around us, to be meek and lowly, to be willing to wait upon others. We have good reason for being the servants of our brethren when we remember the humble position that our Lord Himself assumed.

27. *For whether is greater, he that sits at meat, or he that serves? Is not he that sits at meat? But I am among you as He that serves.*

He served in the very humblest capacity, for did He not even wash the disciples' feet? And if He, who was the greatest of all, thus condescended to perform the lowliest service, who among us shall be so lifted up as to suppose that no common work is good enough for him? Brethren, we must be humble, or else we shall be humbled. And let me remark that the latter experience is by no means a pleasant one, while the former experience is most sweet and gracious. God give us the grace to be humble!

28-30. *You are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father has appointed unto Me; that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Yes, there are thrones and a kingdom for those who are faithful to the King of kings; but there is something else to think of beside that kind of glory, for notice our Savior's next words:—

31. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:*

And between us and the kingdom there will be struggles and dangers; and watchfulness and wrestling prayer will be required of us. And here is our only hope of escape from the perils of the way, as it was with poor Peter:—

32-34. *But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not: and when you are converted, strengthen your brethren. And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with You, both into prison, and to death. And He said, I tell you, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before you shall thrice deny that you know Me.*

Though Peter did not really know himself, Christ knew him. That is one of our comforts—that the Lord Jesus Christ foresees all future ill, and so provides against it; He looks down into our nature, and deals with us as we need to be dealt with. It is well for us that we are in His hands.

35-40. *And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked you anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said He unto them, But now, he that has a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And He was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And He said unto them, It is enough. And He came out, and went, as He was known, to the Mount of Olives; and His disciples also followed Him. And when He was at the place, He said unto them, Pray that you enter not into temptation.*

Or, “into trial.” We do not often enough present that petition, “Lead us not into temptation.” We are not able to bear temptation if it goes beyond a certain point; and it is a greater mercy to escape temptation than it is to pass through it, and to overcome it. I mean, of course, only in some respects. We may ask to be delivered from the evil one, if we must be tempted by him; but our first prayer should be that we may not enter into temptation.

41, 42. *And He was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me: nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done.*

We can read these words in a calm, quiet tone; but they were uttered by our Lord with an intensity of agony which we can scarcely call up before our mind’s eye. So terrible was that agony that our Savior became utterly weak and faint through the intensity of His pleading.

43, 44. *And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly:*

More and more intense was that brief prayer as His supplication was continued.

44. *And His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.*

Luke was a physician, you know, so he was the most likely one to record this phenomenon. It has happened—so we have been told—to some other persons in intense fright or agony, that their sweat has been tinged with blood; but we never remember reading or hearing of anyone but our Lord of whom it could be said, “His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

45. *And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow.*

Great sorrow may have quite opposite effects upon different men. You have, perhaps, sometimes noticed that intoxication produces upon some men exactly the opposite effect to that which it produces upon others; some become irritable and noisy, while others become taciturn and quiet. It is also quite a matter of fact that great sorrow has various effects upon different minds. 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.

46. *And said unto them, Why do you sleep? Rise and pray, lest you enter into temptation.*

The great trial for them, as well as for their Lord, was close at hand then. It was late at night, and they were drowsy and sleepy; yet no time is amiss for supplication. Prayer is never out of season, and never unnecessary. We never know when temptation is near, so let us pray without ceasing to Him who is able to preserve us from temptation, or to deliver us out of it.

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