

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR PETER NO. 2620

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 30, 1899,
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
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*“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not.”
Luke 22:32.*

SATAN has a deadly hatred towards all good men and they may rest assured that somewhere or other, he will meet them on their way to the Celestial City. John Bunyan, in his immortal allegory, placed him in one particular spot and described him as Apollyon straddling the road, and swearing by his infernal den that the pilgrim should go no further, but that there and then he would spill poor Christian's soul. But the encounter with Apollyon does not happen in the same place to all pilgrims. I have known some of them assailed by him most fiercely at the outset of their march to Zion. Their first days as Christians have been truly terrible to them by reason of the Satanic attacks they have had to endure, but afterwards, when the devil has left them, angels have ministered to them and they have had years of peace and joy.

You remember that in the case of our Savior, no sooner was He baptized than He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In like manner, there are those whose fiercest trials from the adversary come at the beginning of their public ministry. Others meet with their greatest conflicts in middle life when, perhaps, they are too apt to think themselves secure against the assaults of Satan, and to fancy that their experience and their knowledge will suffice to preserve them against his wiles. I know some, like Martin Luther, in whose voyage of life, the middle passage has been full of storm and tempest, and they have scarcely known what it was to have a moment's rest during all that period.

Then there have been others, the first part of whose career has been singularly calm. Their life has been like a sea of glass, scarcely a ripple has been upon the waters and yet, towards the end, the enemy has made up for it, and he has attacked them most ferociously right up to the last. I have known many instances of eminent saints who have had to die, sword in hand and enter heaven—I was about to say, with the marks of their stern conflict fresh upon them. At any rate, they have been crowned on the battlefield and have fallen asleep at the close of a tremendous fight.

With the most of us who are really going to heaven—I will not say that it is a rule without any exception, but with the most of us at some time or another, we shall know the extreme value of this prayer, “Lead us not into temptation of any kind, but deliver us from *the evil one*, who, beyond all others, is especially to be dreaded.” There is little to be got out of him, even if we conquer him. He usually leaves some mark of his prowess upon us, which we may carry to our graves. It were better to leap over hedge and ditch, and to go a thousand miles further on our pilgrim road than ever to have a conflict with him, except for those great purposes of which I shall presently speak for a moment.

The fight with Apollyon is a terrible ordeal—an ordeal, however, which a brave Christian will never think of shirking. Nay, rather will he rejoice that he has an enemy worthy of his steel, that true Damascus blade with which he is armed. And in the name of God, he will determine, though he wrestles not with flesh and blood, that he will contend against principalities and powers, and with the very leader of them all, that there may be all the more glory to the great King, who makes the weakest of His followers to be so strong that they put the old dragon himself to flight.

So, dear friends, rest assured that Satan hates every good man and woman, and that, some time or other, he is pretty sure to show that hatred in a very cruel and deadly attack upon them.

Further, because of his hatred, Satan earnestly desires to put believers into his sieve that he may sift them as wheat—not that he wants to get the chaff away from them, but simply that he may agitate them. You see the corn in the sieve, how it goes up and down, to and fro. There is not a single grain of it that is allowed to have a moment's rest. It is all in commotion and confusion and the man who is sifting it takes care to sift first one way, and next another way, and then all sorts of ways.

Now, that is just what Satan does with those whom he hates, when he gets the opportunity. He sifts them in all manner of ways and puts their whole being into agitation and turmoil. When he gets a hold of us, it is a shaking and sifting indeed. He takes care that anything like rest or breathing-space shall be denied us.

Satan desires thus to sift the saints in his sieve and at times, God grants his desire. If you look at the Revised Version, in the margin you learn the true idea of Satan having asked, or rather obtained by asking, the power to sift Peter as wheat. God sometimes gives Satan the permission to sift as wheat those who are undoubtedly His people, and then Satan tosses them to and fro indeed.

That record in the Book of Job, of Satan appearing before God, is repeated in this story of Peter, for the devil had obtained from God liberty to try and test poor boasting Peter. If Christ had not obtained of God, in answer to His intercession, the promise of the preservation of Peter, then had it gone ill indeed with the self-confident apostle. God grants to Satan permission to try His people in this way, because He knows how He will overrule it to His own glory and their good. There are certain graces which are never produced in Christians, to a high degree, except by severe temptation.

"I noticed," said one, "in what a chastened spirit a certain minister preached when he had been the subject of most painful temptation." There is a peculiar tenderness without which one is not qualified to shepherd Christ's sheep, or to feed His lambs—a tenderness without which one cannot strengthen his brethren, as Peter was afterwards to do, a tenderness which does not usually come, at any rate, to such a man as Peter, except by his being put into the sieve, and tossed up and down by Satanic temptation.

Let that stand as the preface of my sermon, for I shall not have so much to say upon that as upon another point.

First, observe, in our text, the grand point of Satan's attack. We can see that from the place where Jesus puts the strongest line of defense, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The point of Satan's chief attack on a believer then is his *faith*. Observe, secondly, the peculiar danger of faith, "That thy faith fail not." That is the danger not merely lest it should be slackened and weakened, but lest it should *fail*. And then observe, thirdly, *the believer's grand defense*, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

I. Notice carefully, in the first place, THE GRAND POINT OF SATAN'S ATTACK.

When he assails a child of God, his main assault is upon his faith, and I suppose that the reason is, first, *because faith is the vital point in the Christian*. We are engrafted into Christ by faith and faith is the point of contact between the believing soul and the living Christ. If therefore Satan could manage to cut through the graft just there, then he would defeat the Savior's work most completely.

Faith is the very heart of true godliness, for, "the just shall live by faith." Take faith away and you have torn the heart out of the gracious man. Hence, Satan, as far as he can, aims his fiery darts at a believer's faith. If he can only destroy faith, then he has destroyed the very life of the Christian. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Therefore, if the devil could but get our faith away from us, we should cease to be pleasing to God and should cease to be "accepted in the Beloved." Therefore, brethren, look well to your faith. It is the very head and heart of your being as before God. The Lord grant that it may never fail you!

I suppose that Satan also attacks faith, *because it is the chief of all our divine graces*. Love, under some aspects, is the choicest, but to lead the van in conflict, faith must come first. And there are some things which are ascribed solely and entirely to faith that are never ascribed to love. If any man were to

speak of our being justified by love, it would grate upon the ears of the godly. If any were to talk of our being justified by repentance, those of us who know our Bible would be up in arms against such a perversion of the truth. But they may speak as long as they like of our "being justified by faith," for that is a quotation from the Scriptures.

In the matter of justification, faith stands alone. It lays hold on Christ's sacrifice and His righteousness, and thereby, the soul is justified. Faith, if I may say so, is the leader of the graces in the day of battle and hence Satan says to his demoniacal archers, "Fight neither with small nor great, save only with the King of Israel; shoot at faith, kill it if possible." If faith is slain, where is love, where is hope, where is repentance, where is patience? If, faith is conquered, then it is as when a standard-bearer faints. The victory is virtually won by the arch-enemy if he is able to conquer faith, for faith is the noble chieftain among the graces of a saint.

I suppose again that Satan makes a dead set upon the faith of the Christian, *because it is the nourishing grace*. All the other graces within us derive strength from our faith. If faith is at a low ebb, love is sure to burn very feebly. If faith should begin to fail, then would hope grow dim. Where is courage? It is a poor puny thing when faith is weak. Take any grace you please, and you shall see that its nourishing depends upon the healthy condition of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

To take faith away therefore would be to take the fountain away from the stream. It would be to withdraw the sun from its rays of light. If you destroy the source, of course that which comes out of it ceases. Therefore, beloved, take the utmost possible care of your faith, for I may truly say of it that out of it are the issues of life to all your graces. Faith is that virtuous woman who clothes the whole household in scarlet and feeds them all with luscious and strengthening food. But if faith is gone, the household soon becomes naked, and poor, and blind, and miserable. Everything in a Christian fails when faith ceases to nourish it.

Next to this, Satan attacks faith, *because it is the great preserving grace*. The apostle says, "Above all"—that is, "over all," "covering all"—"taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked." Sometimes, the Eastern soldiers had shields so large that they were like doors, and they covered the man from head to foot. Others of them, who used smaller shields, nevertheless handled them so deftly and moved them so rapidly, that it was tantamount to the shield covering the entire person. An arrow is aimed at the forehead, up goes the shield and the sharp point rings on the metal. A javelin is hurled at the heart, but the shield turns it aside. The fierce foe aims a poisonous dart at the leg, but the shield intercepts it.

Virtually, the shield is all-surrounding and so it is with your faith. As one has well said, "It is armor upon armor, for the helmet protects the head, but the shield protects both helmet and head. The breastplate guards the breast, but the buckler or shield defends the breastplate as well as the breast." Faith is a divine grace to protect the other graces, there is nothing like it, and therefore I do not wonder that Satan attacks faith when he sees its prominent position and its important influence in the entire town of Mansoul.

I cannot help saying also that I wonder not that Satan attacks faith, *because it is the effective or efficient grace*. You know what a wonderful chapter that eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews is. It is a triumphal arch erected in honor of what? Of faith. According to that chapter, faith did everything, it quenched the fire, stopped the mouths of lions, turned to flight the armies of the aliens, received the dead who were raised, and so on. Faith is the soul's right hand. Faith works by love, but still, it is faith that works, and you can do nothing acceptably before God unless you do it by that right hand of faith.

Hence, Satan cannot stand faith. He hates that most of all. Pharaoh tried to have all the male children thrown into the river because they were the fighting force of Israel. He did not mind having the women to grow up to bear burdens, it was the men whom he feared. And in like manner, the devil says, "I must stamp out faith, for that is the secret of strength." He will not trouble himself so much about your other

graces, he will probably attack them when he can, but first of all he says, "Down with faith! That is the man-child that must be destroyed." And he aims his sharpest and deadliest darts at it.

I believe also that faith is attacked by Satan, most of all, *because it is most obnoxious to him*. He cannot endure faith. How do I know that? Why, because God loves it. And if God loves faith and if Christ crowns faith, I am sure that Satan hates it. What are we told concerning the work of Jesus being hindered by unbelief? "He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Now, I will turn that text around and say of Satan, that he cannot do many mighty works against some men because of their faith.

Oh, how he sneaks off when he discovers a right royal faith in a man! He knows when he has met his master and he says, "Why should I waste my arrows upon a shield carried by such a man as that? He believes in God, he believes in Christ, he believes in the Holy Spirit, he is more than a match for me." To those that are under his leadership, he cries, "To your tents." He bids them flee away and escape, for he knows that there can be no victory for them when they come into collision with true God-given faith. He cannot bear to look at it. It blinds him the lustrous splendor of that great shield of faith, which shines as though a man did hang the sun upon his arm and bear it before him into the fray, blinds even the mighty prince of darkness. Satan does but glance at it and straightway he takes to flight, for he cannot stand it. He knows it is the thing which most of all helps to overthrow his kingdom and destroy his power.

Therefore, believer, cling to your faith! Be like the young Spartan warrior who would either bring his shield home with him or be brought home dead upon his shield. "Cast not away your confidence, which has great recompense of reward." Whatever else you have not, "have faith in God." believe in the Christ of God. Rest your soul's entire confidence upon the faithful promise and the faithful Promiser, and if you do so, Satan's attacks upon you will all be in vain.

That is my first point observe the grand point of Satanic attack.

II. Now, secondly, observe THE PECULIAR DANGER OF FAITH. "That thy faith fail not."

Did Peter's faith fail? Yes, and no. It failed in a measure, but it did not altogether fail. It failed in a measure, for he was human, but it did not altogether fail, for, at the back of it, there was the superhuman power which comes through the pleading of Christ. Poor Peter! He denied his Master, yet his faith did not utterly fail and I will show you why it did not. If you and I, beloved, are ever permitted to dishonor God and to deny our Lord, as Peter did, yet may God in mercy keep us from the utter and entire failure of our faith as He kept Peter!

Notice, first, there was still some faith in Peter, even when he had denied his Master, for when the Lord turned and looked at him, *he went out, and wept bitterly*. If there had still not been the true faith in Peter, the Master might have looked upon him long before a tear would have coursed down his cheeks. The Lord not only looked on Judas, but He gave him a sop with Him out of the dish. And He even let the traitor put his lips on Him and kiss Him. But all that had no weight with Judas.

The reason why Christ's look had such an effect on Peter was because there was some faith in Peter still. You may blow as long as you like at the cold coals, but you will get no fire. But I have sometimes seen a servant kneel down when there has been just a little flame left in the coal in a corner of the grate, and she has blown it tenderly and gently so as to revive it. "It is not quite out," she says and at last, there has been a good fire once again. May God grant that we may never come to that sad condition, but if we do, may He, of His grace, grant that there may still be that blessed little faith left, that weak and feeble faith which, through the breathing upon it of the Spirit of God, shall yet be fanned into a flame!

We are sure that there was this faith still in Peter *or else what would he have done?* What did Judas do? Judas did two things. First, he went to a priest, or to priests, and confessed to them. And then he went out and hanged himself, the two things were strangely connected. Peter did neither, yet, if he had not had faith, he might have done both. To publicly deny his Master three times and to support his denial with oaths and curses, even when that Master was close by and in His greatest need, must have put Peter into most imminent peril. And if there had not been, within his heart, faith that his Master could yet

pardon and restore him, he might, in his despair, have done precisely what the traitor Judas did. Or, if he had not gone to that extremity of guilt, he would have hidden himself away from the rest of the apostles.

But instead of doing so, we soon find him again with John. I do not wonder that he was with John. They were old companions, but in addition to that, the beloved John had so often leaned his head on the Master's bosom that he had caught the sweet infection of his Savior's tenderness and therefore, he was just the one with whom Peter would wish to associate.

I think that if I had ever denied my Lord as Peter did, in that public way, I would have run away and hidden myself from all my former companions. But Peter did not, you see. He seemed to say to himself, "The Master, with His dear tender heart, can still forgive me and receive me." So he clings to the disciples and especially to John. Ay, and notice that on the day of our Lord's resurrection, Peter was the first disciple to enter the sepulcher, for, though "the other disciple did outrun Peter" and reach the grave first, "yet he went not in" until Peter led the way.

"The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon," is a remarkable passage. Paul, writing concerning Christ's resurrection, says that, "He was seen of Cephas," that is, Peter. There was some special manifestation of our blessed Master to Simon Peter who was waiting for it, and privileged to witness it and this showed that his faith was kept from failing through the Savior's prayers.

Now, beloved, I say no more about Peter, but I speak to you about your own faith. Are you greatly troubled? Then I pray that your faith may not fail. It is shaken. It is severely tried, but God grant that it may not fail! Something whispers within your heart, "Give up all religion, it is not true." To that lie, answer, "Get you behind me, Satan, for the religion of Jesus Christ is eternally, assuredly, infallibly true." Cling to it, for it is your life. Or, perhaps, the fiend whispers, "It is true enough to others, but it is not meant for you, you are not one of the Lord's people." Well, if you cannot come to Christ as a saint, come to Him as a sinner. If you dare not come as a child to sit at His table, come as a dog to eat the crumbs that fall under it. Only do come and never give up your faith.

If the arch-fiend whispers again "You have been a deceiver. Your profession is all a mistake, or a lie." Say to him, "Well, if it be so, there is still forgiveness in Christ for all who come unto God by Him." Perhaps you are coming to the Savior for the first time—you mean to cast yourself upon the blood and merit of Jesus even if you have never done so before. I pray for you, dear coming one. O gracious Savior, do not let Satan crush out the faith of even the weakest of Your people! Blessed Intercessor, plead for that poor trembler in whom faith is almost dying out! Great High Priest, intercede for him, that his faith may not utterly fail him, and that he may still cling to You!

What is to become of us if we have not faith in Jesus? I know that there are some who seem to get on well without it. So may the dogs. So may the wild beasts. They get on well enough without the children's garments or the children's bread, but you and I cannot. The moment I am unbelieving, I am unhappy. It is not a vain thing for me to believe in Christ, it is my life, it is my strength, it is my joy. I am a lost man and it were better for me that I had never been born, unless I have the privilege of believing.

Give up faith? Remember what Satan said concerning Job, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life"? And our life is wrapped up in our faith in Christ. We cannot give it up and we will not give it up. Come on, fiends of hell or mockers of earth, we will not give it up, we will hold it fast, for it is part of the very warp and woof of our being. We believe in God and in His Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And it is our great concern that our faith should be well-guarded and protected, for we know the peculiar danger to which it is exposed when it is assailed by Satan.

III. Now I will close my discourse by speaking, for only a very few minutes, upon THE BELIEVER'S GREAT PRESERVATIVE AND DEFENSE.

What is the great protection of our faith? Our Savior's intercession. Prayer is always good, it is always a blessed thing, but notice that great letter-word in the text, "I have prayed for thee." It is the intercession of Christ that preserves our faith, and there are three things about it which make it precious beyond all price. It is prevalent, prevenient and pertinent. First, it is *prevalent*, for, if Jesus pleads, He

must prevail. It is *prevenient*, for, *before* the temptation comes to Peter, He says, "I have prayed for thee. Satan has but obtained, by his asking, the permission to tempt you, but I have already prayed for you."

And then, it was *pertinent*, that is, to the point. Christ had prayed the best prayer possible, "that thy faith fail not." Peter would not have known that this was to be the chief point of attack by Satan. He might have thought that Satan would attack his love. The Lord seems to hint at His thought about that by saying to him, afterwards, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" But the Savior knew that the hottest part of the battle would rage around Fort Faith and therefore, He prayed that the fortress might be well-garrisoned and never be captured by the enemy. And it was not.

Whenever I begin to talk to you about the intercession of Christ, I feel inclined to sit down and let you think, and look up, and listen till you hear that voice, matchless in its music, pleading, pleading, pleading, with the Father. It were much better for you to realize it than for me to describe it. It was a blessed thing to hear one's mother pray—by accident, as we say, to pass the door that was ajar and to hear Mother pleading for her boy or her girl. It is a very touching thing to hear your child praying for her father, or your wife breathing out her warm desires for her beloved.

I do not know anything more charming than to hear, now and then, a stray prayer that was never meant to be heard on earth, but only in heaven. I like such eaves-droppings. Oh, but listen! It is Jesus who is praying. He shows His wounds and pleads the merit of His great sacrifice and wonder of wonders, He pleads for me, and for you! Happy man, happy woman, to have our faith preserved by such a mighty preservative as this—the intercession of Christ!

I want you to especially notice that *this intercession is the pleading of One who, in the text, seems directly to oppose Himself to the great adversary*. "Satan hath obtained thee by asking, that he may sift thee as wheat; but I have obtained thee by asking," (so I will venture to paraphrase it) "that thy faith fail not." There stands Satan. You cannot see him and you need not want to, but that grim monster who has made kings and princes tremble, and has plucked angels from their spheres of light, and hurled bright spirits down from heaven to hell, stands there to assail you. And you may well be afraid, for God Himself permits him to sift you.

Ah! but there also stands the ever-blessed One, before whom an angel, fallen or unfallen, is but a tiny spark compared with the sun. There He stands, girt about the chest with the golden girdle of His faithfulness, robed in the fair white linen of His matchless righteousness, upon His head is a crown of glory that far outshines all constellations of stars and suns, and He opposes His divine pleading to the demoniacal asking of the fallen one.

Are you afraid now? It does seem to me unspeakably blessed to see it written here, "Satan hath desired to have thee that he may sift thee as wheat," and then to see over the top of it these words, "but I have prayed for thee." Oh, blessed, "but"! How it seems to cast the fallen angel back into the bottomless pit and to bind him with chains, and set a seal upon his prison, "But I have prayed for thee." Tempt on then, O devil. Tempt at your worst, for there is no fear now when this glorious shield of gold, the intercession of the Savior, covers the entire person of the poor attacked one! "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

And then my last word is this, *it is an intercession which is absolutely certain of success*. In fact, He who offers it anticipates its success and discounts it by giving this precept to His servant, "and when you are converted,"—sure pledge then that he *will be* converted, that he will be turned back, however far he wanders. When you are restored, "strengthen your brethren." Then, for certain, he will be restored, or else the Savior would not have given him a precept which could only be available if a certain, unlikely contingency should occur.

O you who are a true child of God, you may be drenched, but you shall never be drowned! O warrior of the cross, your shield may be covered with fiery darts, thick as the saplings of a young forest grow, but no dart shall ever reach your heart! You may be wounded in head and hand and foot. You may be a mass of scars, but your life is given you. To Christ are you given as a prey, and you shall come out even from between the jaws of death, and you shall overcome Satan by Christ's power. Only trust Christ.

Only trust Him. Cling to your faith, beloved. Cling to your faith! I would like to get a hold of that young man who has lately been listening to skeptical teachers, and to whisper in his ear, "Cling to your faith, young man, for, in losing that, you will lose all."

And to you who, alas! have fallen into sin after having made a profession of religion, let me say that, however far you have gone astray, still believe that Jesus is able to forgive you, and come back to Him and seek His pardon now. And you, my hoary-headed brother, whose hair is whitening for heaven, are you sorely beset by all sorts of temptations?

Well, give me your hand for I, too, know what this warfare means. Let us believe in God, my brother, let us believe in God. Though He should break us down worse than ever, though He should set us up as a target, and let the devil shoot all the arrows from his quiver at us, let us still believe in God, and come to this point to which my soul has come full often, and to which Job came of old, "'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.' Whatever He does to me, if He shall never smile upon me again, I will still believe Him, I can do no other."

I dare not doubt Him. I must confide in Him. Where is there any ground for confidence if it be not in the God that cannot lie, and in the Christ of the everlasting covenant, whom He has set forth to be the propitiation for human sin, and in the Holy Ghost, whose work it is to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us?

May the blessed Trinity save and keep us all, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 22:7-34, 54-62

Verses 7-20. *Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed. And he sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare? And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. 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 be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And 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. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament*

(Or, covenant)—

20-21. *in my blood, which is shed for you. But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.*

What a shadow this revelation must have cast over that solemn feast, over the Savior's heart, and over the minds of all His attached disciples! We can scarcely imagine what pangs tore His loving spirit. He could have used the language of David, with even deeper emphasis, and said, "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was you, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance." "The hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table." O beloved, I pray that you and I may never betray our Master. If ever we should so fail as to deny Him, may the Lord stop us where Peter fell, and never suffer us to betray Him as Judas did!

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

The decree of God does not lessen the responsibility of man for his action. Even though it is predetermined of God, the man does it of his own free will, and on him falls the full guilt of it.

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.*

Be astonished, dear friends, as you read, in such a connection as this, "There was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest." What! While yet the anxious question as to which of them was the traitor was being passed round, "Lord, is it I?" Is it so closely followed by another question, "Which of us shall be highest in the kingdom?" Oh, the awful intrusiveness of pride and ambition! How it will come in and defile the very holy of holies! May God prevent our falling victims to it! The last question for a Christian to ever ask is, "How may I win honor among men?" The one question for a believer should be, "How can I glorify my Master?" Very often, that can best be done by taking the very lowest place in his church.

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 ye 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 doth serve.*

Let every respect be given to the elder and let such as God honors be honored among us, but let no man honor himself, or seek honor for himself. After all, in Christ's kingdom, the way to ascend is to descend. Did not the Master act thus? He descended that He might ascend and fill all things. And so must His disciples do. Less, and less, and less, and less, must we become and so we shall really be, in His sight more, and more, and more, and more.

27. *For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is it not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth.*

For He had just then taken a towel and girded Himself, and washed their feet so becoming *Servus servorum*, the Servant of servants, though He was, in very truth, the King of kings.

28. *Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.*

There is a reward to the righteous, though they serve not for reward, for the Lord says—

29-30. *And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; that ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

Ah, but see what follows! No sooner, in this chapter, does the thought seem to rise than it is dashed down again. The brightness always has a shadow cast across it,

31-32. *And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

We are thinking about thrones and about which of us shall have the loftiest throne, but see how the Master is thinking about the necessary while we are doting upon the superfluous. He thinks of our needs while we are dreaming of something great. What a blessing it is that we have our Savior praying for us when we ourselves may be fancying that we need not pray! Our hands are ready for the scepter and we are anxious to sit down on the throne, when the Lord knows that our proper place is at the footstool, pleading for mercy.

33. *And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.*

That is bravely spoken, Peter, and yet it is very foolishly said, too. He spoke out of his very heart and he meant what he said, but Peter did not know what a poor weak body Peter really was. His Master understood him far better.

34. *And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me.*

And so it came to pass. Let us read a part of the sad story, beginning at the fifty-fourth verse.

54. *Then took they him, and led him, and brought him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off.*

I do not think that Peter was to be blamed for that. I do not see how he could very well have followed any nearer, for he was already a marked man. That sword-cut of his upon the ear of Malchus had made him especially prominent among the apostles, even if he had not been well-known before. He got into the crowd and came after his Master at such a distance as seemed safe for him.

55. *And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them.*

I do think that he was to be blamed for that action, for it brought him into dangerous company. Better be cold, than go and warm your hands in ungodly society.

56. *But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him,*

As the flame came flashing up every now and then, she looked at him, and Peter was troubled by her gaze, she, "earnestly looked upon him."

56-59. *But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaeen.*

For he got to talking to this evil company and his speech had betrayed him.

60. *And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest.*

Another evangelist tells us that he began to curse and to swear, as if that was the surest proof that he could possibly give that he did not know Jesus for, when you hear a man swear, you know at once that he is no Christian, you may conclude that safely enough. So Peter thought that to prove that he was no follower of Christ, he would use such evil language as the ungodly speak.

60-61. *And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter.*

God has all things in His hands. He has servants everywhere and the cock shall crow, by the secret movement of His providence, just when God wills. And there is, perhaps, as much of divine ordination about the crowing of a cock as about the ascending of an emperor to his throne. Things are only little and great according to their bearings and God reckoned not the crowing bird to be a small thing, since it was to bring a wanderer back to his Savior, for, just as the cock crew, "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." That was a different look from the one which the girl had given him, but that look broke his heart.

62. *And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out and wept bitterly.*

How many there are, who sin with Peter, but who never weep with Peter! Oh, if we have ever transgressed in such a way as he did, let us never cease to weep! Above all, let us begin at once to lament it and rest not till the Master looks again, and says by that look, "I have blotted out all your transgressions; return unto Me."

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