

## EVENTS OF THE LAST THURSDAY

Mark 14:27-52

After Christ had instituted the Lord's Supper, and He and His disciples had sung a hymn, they passed from the upper room, and from the city, to the quietude of Olivet. On their way to the slopes of Olivet, Christ told His apostles that they would all desert Him, and He told Peter that he would also deny Him. Christ declared that they were on the verge of forsaking Him in cowardly fear, that He would be smitten and killed and that they would be scattered like sheep. He also informed them that He would rise from the dead and go before them into Galilee. The idea which He expressed was, "I, your Shepherd, will be smitten, and you, my sheep, will be scattered, but, after I have risen, you will be gathered together again, and again as a Shepherd I will lead you."

One of the glorious things about Christ was that there was not anything for which He was not prepared. He was prepared for the opposition, the misunderstanding, the enmity of the orthodox religious people of His day, the betrayal by one of His own inner circle, the pain and the agony of the cross. Perhaps that which hurt Him most was the failure of His friends. It is when a man is up against it that he needs his friends most, but that was the very time when Christ's friends left Him all alone and let Him down. More than anybody Who ever lived, Christ had this quality of fortitude, this ability to remain erect no matter with what blows life assaulted Him, this serenity when there was nothing but heartbreak behind and torture in front.

When Christ foretold this tragic failure of loyalty, the disciples immediately and vehemently protested, Peter being the principal spokesman of their common conviction and intention. Peter's protestation was doubly wrong, for it reflects not only how sure he was of himself, but also that he was not sure of any of the others. We may reasonably suppose that Peter would deny his Lord within four hours of his affirmation of loyalty. Let us not suppose that he did not mean what he said; that all were sincere, but none of them knew his own weakness. It is only under test that some discoveries can be made. It is not the uniform that tests a soldier, but the battle; it is not attending classes that tests a student, but the examination; and, in like manner, it is not hymn-singing that tests a Christian, but the hour of privation, of persecution and of danger.

Peter was not sure. He had forgotten the traps that life can lay for the best of men. He had forgotten that the best of men can step on a slippery place and fall. He had forgotten his own weakness and the strength of Satan's temptations. But there is one thing to be remembered about Peter, he loved Jesus Christ, even if that love failed and rose again.

For Christ to have stayed in the upper room would have been dangerous. With the authorities on the watch for Him, and with Judas bent on treachery, the upper room might have been raided at any time. But Christ had another place to which to go. The fact that Judas knew to look for Him in Gethsemane shows that the Lord Jesus was in the habit of going there.

When our Lord went to Gethsemane there were two things He sorely desired. He wanted human fellowship and He wanted fellowship with God. In time of trouble we want someone with us. We do not necessarily want them to do anything. We only want them there. Christ was like that. It was strange indeed that men who shortly before had been protesting that they would die for Him could not stay awake for Him a single hour.

It is the clear vision of coming anguish that brings Christ into an unequaled agony of mind when they reached the Garden. Anticipating the sufferings of the coming day, Christ meets them with calmness and victorious faith. The "cup" which He wished to escape was His approaching death upon the cross. The "cup" which He was asked to drink consisted in death as "the bearer of sin." He was to be made sin for us, and, while bearing our sin, was to be forsaken of God. No one but Christ can ever know what that meant. In His agony Christ longed for human sympathy. He requested certain of His disciples to watch with Him. Their weariness and sleep pictured the lack of such sympathy. Beyond all the comfort of companionship, sorrow and trial are always experiences of loneliness and isolation.

Leaving eight of His disciples at the entrance of the Garden, Christ again took Peter, James and John with Him. They were to witness His agony of soul as He faced the prospect of His death upon a cross. At a certain spot, our Lord left the three disciples to keep watch for His enemies, for He was anxious not to have His communion with the Father disturbed at that critical moment. Alone in prayer and with deep emotion, Christ dared to express to the Father the wish that He might be spared from the suffering that awaited Him. Knowing full well that He had been sent of God, He quickly submitted to the inevitable as He prayed, "Nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt."

Returning to the three, Christ found them sound asleep. The events of that night had taxed their physical strength and they were tired. Then, too, they did not anticipate the imminent arrest of their Lord. Christ chided them by saying, "Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." He was warning them of the more challenging hours that were yet to come for them. His words went unheeded, for each time He returned He found the disciples sleeping. Finally He said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest: it is enough; the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." There is a strain of irony in the words, "Sleep on now and take your rest." An opportunity to watch, in a crisis, will pass and can never be recovered. If we do not give sympathy and help when it is needed, we forever miss the chance of the hour.

The manner in which Judas concluded his foul crime was in perfect keeping with its essential baseness. He led a crowd, armed with swords and clubs, through the streets of Jerusalem in the stillness of the night and out to the Garden where his Master was wont to retire for prayer, and there betrayed Him with a kiss. Acts of disloyalty to Christ often seem the more repulsive because of the sacredness of the scenes and the protestations of love.

Against the background of the armed band the form of the Saviour stands out in majestic dignity. He resented the implication of their coming to take Him by force. He also protested against the secrecy with which they were securing His arrest. He had never been guilty of violence, and His teachings had been public. He declared, however, that even such unjust treatment accorded with the Scriptures which predicted that He would be numbered with malefactors. The fearless composure of the Master is contrasted also with the conduct of His followers. One of them, with the impulse of mere physical courage, drew his sword and attacked a servant of the high priest, who dodged the stroke, but not with complete success, for the sword caught his ear and severed it. Afraid that they would share the fate of Jesus Christ, the disciples fled. Have you, for any reason whatever, at any time, deserted Christ?