

## WHERE CHRIST IS SEEN CLEARLY

"The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me." I Corinthians 11:23-24.

These are among the most familiar words in the Scriptures. We have read them and heard them quoted scores of times. They are used frequently in connection with the observance of the Lord's Supper. But how many of us read them with the emphasis Paul meant to give them? "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed took bread."

Why did he pick out this incident from among the many that happened that night? Was it only to fix a date? That is what we often do. We fix our dates in the long vista of the past by the things that happened then, and touched us to the quick with joy or with sorrow — the day someone was born, or someone passed away. There are incidents in every life that are landmarks on the face of time; nothing will ever erase them from the memory. The whole landscape of circumstances is lit up there as by a flash of lightning, and that is what makes the details vivid. Was it only for this reason that Paul used this incident of the betrayal of Jesus Christ, fixing a date for the Lord's Supper by the thing which stood out most tragically in all that night of shame? It may have been so.

But if we look a little more closely we will see that Paul had something more in mind. He was not fixing a date, but he was painting a picture. It was a picture of Christ in all His grace and glory. And in painting this picture Paul did what every artist does, namely, put it in the right background to make the subject in the foreground stand out in its true color and perspective. This was just as necessary in the spiritual portrait of Christ as in any picture on canvas. If we are to study Christ fairly and see Him clearly, we must have the right background. We must see Him, for instance, in relation to the times in which He lived and the circumstances in which He moved, and the men and women who crowded around Him in His own day. Many of His wonderful words lose half their meaning unless we know their background. His messages were for all time, but the form of them was often shaped by the circumstances of His own time, and we cannot release the eternal truth unless we know the temporary situation.

But there is another background against which we must see Christ, the background of human life with all its troubles and needs. There is no place where Christ does not shine. Place Him in a marriage feast, and He heightens the joy. Place Him in a simple home like that at Bethany, and He fits into the life of the little family, showing the way to peace and quietness of heart amid the irritations of domestic duty. Place Him in a scene of sorrow, and there are tears in His eyes for human grief that make it bearable. Place Him where the Gospels show Him often, in a situation of storm and crisis, as when the boat was nearly overwhelmed in the lake, and He is master of the situation. The Gospels give us a portrait of Jesus Christ set against an everchanging background of human life, and in every new situation some new aspect of His personality shines out, and gives to us, as we see Him there, the key to the mastery of life. And there is no situation in life for which He cannot give us the key. If you want to know how to overcome in any place or situation, see Christ there, and you have the secret. In Him was life and His life is the light of men.

But there is one occasion where He is at His best; where His whole personality finds release. That is the situation where the world is at its worst, where sin and evil and hatred and cruelty are gathered around Him to bring Him down to death. We cannot see Jesus Christ in all His glory until we see Him there. We cannot see Him fully when we look at Him under the sunshine, teaching, healing and smiling with a happy world, though that is one aspect of His nature. We do not see Him at His greatest and best until we see Him against the background of Calvary. Looking at the oncoming shadow

that was to fall over His life in a great eclipse, He said, "The hour is come when the Son of Man should be glorified." Paul caught this same truth in his picture of Jesus and wrote, "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you."

What is the aspect of Christ that stands out from this background, as we watch Him breaking bread, and giving it to His disciples? Look at the background first. "The same night in which he was betrayed." Many things helped to bring about the death of Christ. Various currents helped to drag Him down to the depths of shame. One immediate cause of it was the betrayal of His friends. With many He was a hero, and it was necessary to take Him unawares in some lonely spot. For that purpose they found a willing tool in Judas, one of those professing friends who had gathered around the table in the upper room for the observance of the passover. Judas had known Christ's friendship through long months. To Him he had sworn undying loyalty. He had been trusted, and now he used this very intimacy to betray Christ to His death. Judas was a traitor, and treachery is the foulest of crimes. It was a black deed; the betrayal of a sacred trust; being false to his best Friend. Judas was not alone in his treachery. At the critical hour they all forsook Him and fled. Even we sometimes betray Him with the kiss of empty sentiment upon our lips, while at the same time we misrepresent Him with our lives. Even though Christ knew the apostles were going to fail Him at the crucial moment, "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."

What is it that shines out here? It is that divine quality of love. If you want to see love at its best, and in its true glory, see it in the day of adversity. Will it stand the strain of conflict, of difference of opinion, of misunderstanding, of apparent neglect? Will our human love stand that strain? That tests it. But will it do more? Will it stand the strain of treachery? It is a hard test, but it is the real test of the quality of love.

What are the beams into which Calvary breaks up the love of Christ so that we see its hidden glory?

One of them was forgiveness of the unforgivable. Is there anything so unforgivable as treachery? And yet He forgave it: that is to say, He refused to let it stand between Him and them. It did stand, of course, so far as they were concerned. When Judas sat there at the passover meal with the crime purposed in his heart he could not know fully the love of Christ. The great friendship of Christ was lost on Judas. For the time being Judas could not see this love. Afterwards he did see. When the love had gone all lengths there came the revelation that was more than he could bear. But though there were clouds between these men and Him, there were none on Christ's side.

Another of those beams was trust in the untrustworthy. Christ was trusting these fallible men, trusting them though their hearts were as unstable as shifting sands, trusting them to carry on His work. Most of us would have given them up, but they were Christ's only trustees or stewards. He entrusted them with the truth which the dying world needs. That trust is another beam of this amazing love of God. Christ trusts us.

Another beam of this love is its constancy in spite of man's fickleness. How fleeting is our love for the Lord; how often it dries up, like a small stream lost in the desert sands! But His love for us flows on. Calvary was the proof to them that Christ would not fail them, that He would not cease to love them. The world is full of change and decay. But there is one thing on which we can depend, and that is His faithful love. "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Behind everything, the Lord Jesus Christ loves. We cannot be sure of ourselves, but we can be sure of Him. Whatever else happens, His love endures. We should know that most of our uncertainty and many of our depressions in religion come through our seeking the assurance of our standing with God in our own feelings about Him. We look within instead of looking to the Lord. We sink the lead into the depths of our own souls and find nothing there that can minister to our confidence or self-respect, even bringing up from these hidden depths things that make us shudder and be ashamed. The deeper we go, the more our prayer becomes the one expressed by the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." But our mistake lies in looking within ourselves for peace, instead of looking to Him. Feeling is the product of religious faith, but it is never the ground of religious confidence. Our assurance for the future is not that we love God; rather, it is that God loves us. That anchor holds. It holds us, and the more we see it the better we are held.

That love is what the Lord's Supper makes clear to us. It reveals the mighty, changeless, forgiving, trusting love of the Lord for us, and that in spite of our fickleness and sin. In and through the Supper Christ says to us, "Realize my love," and "Be assured of My forgiveness." He wants us to remember that His love for us is ever the same. Let us take His love that will not let us go; and in the acceptance of it and utter surrender to Him we shall come into the possession of peace and power.