

LOVE'S LAST APPEAL

Mark 14:17-21

As the day of the Passover approached, Christ Jesus decided that He would take one last opportunity to prepare His disciples for the terrible catastrophe that awaited them. So He sent two of His disciples, Peter and John, (Luke 22:8) ahead of Him to make preparations for the paschal meal. It is quite possible that He used this unusual procedure in directing Peter and John to the appointed place because He did not want the rest of the group to know of the location in advance. If Judas had known, he might have seized the opportunity to advise the chief priests as to the whereabouts of the Lord Jesus. Thus Christ kept secret the location of the upper room, prevented all interruption, postponed His arrest until He had opportunity to give His disciples messages of comfort, and to be alone in the garden with God for awhile.

When the Passover evening had come Christ came and sat down with The Twelve. There was only one change in the old ritual which had been observed so many centuries before in Egypt. At the first Passover Feast in Egypt the meal had been eaten standing (Exodus 12:11). But that was a sign of haste, a sign that they were slaves escaping from slavery. In the time of Christ the regulation was that the meal should be eaten reclining, for that was the sign of a free man with a home and a country of his own.

Christ knew what was going to happen. He manifested supreme courage in those last days. It would have been easy for Him to have escaped, but He refused to do so. Homer tells how the great warrior Achilles was told that if he went out to his last battle he would surely be killed. His answer was, "Nevertheless I am for going on." With a full knowledge of what lay ahead, Christ did not hesitate to go on.

Christ Jesus could see into the heart of Judas. It is rather strange that the other disciples did not seem to have any suspicions. If they had known what Judas was engaged in doing, it is quite likely that they would have prevented him from doing so. It is well to remember that there may be things in which we succeed in hiding from others but we cannot hide them from Christ, Who is the searcher of the hearts of men. He knows all about us.

"Our thoughts lie open to Thy sight;
And naked to Thy glance.
Our secret sins are in the light
Of Thy pure countenance."

It was probably towards the end of the Passover meal that our Lord announced the presence of a traitor in their midst. Evidently the disciples had not suspected Judas Iscariot of disloyalty. At the words of our Lord the disciples began to look at one another, but each man in his own heart, saying, "Is it I?" In response, Christ declared that it was, indeed, one of them, and went on to say, "The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born." This announcement of the betrayal is very brief, but very full; brief in syllables but full of sorrow. That Judas should ever have been an apostle must forever remain a secret of the wisdom of God. But on the human side of the matter, it is strange that none of the other apostles had ever suspected Judas. They must have been intimate for about two years, yet not one of them had the slightest idea that Judas was a scoundrel. Had they known this they would not have suspected themselves. The enemies of Christ did not betray Him; only friends can do that, for betrayal is the outrage of trust.

The knowledge of the secret crime of Judas grieved the Master, whose distress was shared by the disciples, when He told them that one of their number would betray Him. His statement that the treachery of Judas had been predicted does not mean that the sin was a matter of necessity. Judas knew that his treachery was an act of his own free choice. Our Lord pronounced upon him the unparalleled words of doom, "Good were it for that man if he had not been born."

In this passage we see Christ making love's last appeal to Judas. It is as if He were saying to Judas, "I know what you are going to do. Will you not stop even yet?" He was offering Judas a last warning, telling him in advance of the consequences of the thing that was in His heart to do. But there was no compulsion. It is the privilege of man to spurn the appeal of God's love and to disregard the warning of God's voice. In the end there is no one who is responsible for our sins but ourselves.

When the paschal supper was ended, and before the Lord's Supper was instituted, Judas left the room.