

"DO QUICKLY."

A Sermon Delivered at Union Chapel,
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"Then said Jesus unto him, that thou doest, do quickly."—John xiii. 27.

"That thou doest?" Not "art about to do." For, when the die was cast and the resolution fixed, the deed, so far as its doer's responsibility and its effects on his character were concerned, was already done. When David's desire to build the Temple was negatived, it was said to him, "Forasmuch as it was in thine heart" it was counted as performed. Human law deals with acts. All noble morality, and God's law, which is the noblest of all, deals with intentions. And so, not merely because he had already been to the priests, but because he had fixed in his mind to do it, Judas is regarded by Christ as already in course of his base action. The principle holds good in reference to good and to evil purposes. Filled aspirations after good, and thwarted inclinations to evil, are both regarded by him as already done.

But did not Jesus Christ push the man over the precipice by this strange command? No; the man had flung himself over before the command was given. As I tried to show you last Sunday, when speaking about the previous part of this verse, when the sop was given he was tottering on the edge. "After" he had taken "the sop" he had gone over. And what Christ says here has no bearing on the decision to do the deed, but simply on the manner in which it was to be done. The command is not "do," but "do quickly."

But now it seems to me that the point of view from which these words are mainly to be looked at is one which is generally almost ignored. Suppose instead of puzzling ourselves with asking the question how they affected Judas, we ask the question, "What do they say about Jesus?" To me they seem to be far more instructive and illuminative when considered as being almost an instinctive cry from his heart, and having reference to himself, than when we look upon them as being an instruction to the betrayer. The two references are both there, and I think that in order to understand all the deep significance of this strange injunction we have to take both into account. My purpose this morning is just to try to embrace both these elements or points of view in our consideration.

First, then—and, to me, by far the more important—I cannot but hear in this injunction.

I.—THE CRY OF A HUMAN INSTINCT IN THE PROSPECT OF A GREAT PAIN AND SORROW.

"That thou doest, do quickly." Do we not all know that feeling in looking forward to something unwelcome or painful that is impending—"would it were over?" There are few things that try the firmest nerves more than the long anticipation of the leaden footsteps of the slow hours that bring us some great trial, shock, or loss. The cup of bitterness is less bitter when we can drink it off at a gulp; more bitter when it has to be sipped. Anticipated sorrows make men more impatient than do anticipated joys. And it seems to me that here we have just that strange paradox that we all know so well, of stretching out a hand to bring the thing from which we shrink nearer to us, just because we shrink from it. Does it not bring our Lord very near, if we think that he turned to the betrayer, and after he had given up trying to influence him, said in effect: "The one kindness you can still show me is to do your work quickly." He shrank from the Cross, and therefore he desired that it should come swiftly. For he, too, knew the agony of the protracted anticipation, and would fain hasten the slow drip, drip, drip, of the legard moments, and bring, and have done with, that which he knew was coming. If we found such a saying as this recorded in the biography of any great martyr or hero, we should at once come to the conclusion that he was therein expressing that natural, instinctive feeling. Why should we scruple, except from a misplaced reverence, to say that the same feeling is expressed by it when the words come from the lips of Jesus Christ? His death was unique, but he shows us his brotherhood, not only in the fact, but in the manner, of the death, and in his attitude towards it when it was yet but an anticipation and a near prospect.

One is the more inclined to hear that familiar tone in the words of my text, if we remember how something of the same kind of desire to accelerate that from which he shrank is obvious during all the narrative of his last days. Do you remember how he set his face as a flint on his last journey to Jerusalem, with such a tension in his countenance and resolved determination in his swift steps up the rocky road from Jericho, that the disciples were conscious of something unusual and followed behind, as the Evangelist says, silently and in amazement? What was the meaning of our Lord's entire reversal of all his previous policy—if I may use that word—on the occasion of his public entrance into Jerusalem? What was the meaning of his daily going into the Temple, casting out the money-changers, and pouring out the vials of his hot indignation upon scribes and pharisees

and official hypocrites and malefactors? Did it not all point to this, that he had resolved that the time was come, and that if we cannot say he deliberately accelerated, at all events he did not seek in the smallest degree to avoid, the fall of the thunder-bolt? Nay, rather, he deliberately sought the publicity and took up the position of antagonism which were certain to lead to the Cross. I suppose that he, too, who had travelled all his life—if we believe the New Testament narratives—with that black thing closing the vista ahead, was conscious, as he drew nearer and nearer to it, that in a strange way it both repelled and attracted him. And so, if I might so say, he turned to Judas, as a lamb that was being slain might have lifted its innocent eyes to the sacrificer, and said, "Do it quickly!" Ah! brethren, that brings him very near to weak hearts.

Let me say one word, before I go further, about that of which the wish to get it over was a symptom, viz., the shrinking from the Cross. It was perfectly inactive and natural, the recoil of the sensitive corporeal nature from pain and suffering, which is neither right nor wrong in itself, being natural and involuntary. But there was something more, as we see from the story of the last hours. Most men, however much they are cowards in their lives, die calmly; Jesus did not. The agitation, the horror of great darkness, the recoil and desolation of his whole nature, are neither heroic nor admirable; nor explicable in my poor judgment, except on one hypothesis: "The Lord hath made to meet on him the iniquity of us all." That burden weighed him down, and made his death less calm than have been the deaths of thousands whose calmness came from himself. If we bring in that deeper element, we understand not only the cry of desolation that broke tragically through the silent, dark hours, but we understand the shrinking and the strange paradox of feeling which turns the shrinking into its apparent opposite when he said, "That thou doest, do quickly."

But if we would probe the whole depth of the revelation which is given in this saying of our Lord's own emotions and thoughts, we have to turn to another aspect of it. I have spoken of this being the expression of his shrinking from the Cross, but can you not hear in it an expression also of his resolved will to go the Cross? That shrinking of which I have been speaking, and which I have called purely human, instinctive, and involuntary, and perfectly neutral, in so far as any moral quality is concerned—that shrinking, if I may use such a figure, never climbed up from the lower depths of instinctive feeling into the place where the Will sat enthroned. The mist lay in the bottoms; the summit kept always clear. He shrank, but he never allowed his will to waver. The tempest beat on the windward side of the ship, but the helm was kept firm, and the bow pointed always in the same direction. Jesus Christ was steadfast in his purpose from the beginning to the end. "The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." And so, all his life long, through all those gracious and wonderful ministrations of his, when his heart was open to all distress, and his eye open to all the loveliness of nature, the flowers of the field, and the lilies of the plain, there lay in his heart the fixed purpose, to die for men.

Brethren, why was Jesus Christ thus determined? What was it that kept the fixed will thus ever pointing in the one direction? What was it that shut down the shrinking, that coerced the nature which innocently and necessarily recoiled from suffering and pain? I believe it was two things; one, that Jesus Christ's own conception of the significance and place of His death differed altogether in kind from the conception that a martyr who is willing to die for a cause, and to pay down his life as the price of his faithfulness, might entertain. To Jesus Christ, as I read his own sayings, death was not the inevitable consequence of his discharging the mission which he was ready to face. It was, shall I say, the climax of the mission, and that for which he was born. And then, still deeper, if you ask me why was he thus rigidly and constantly determined to die?—I answer, it was love that backed up his will, and kept it from ever wavering. Because he loved us, and gave himself for us, therefore, as I have said, he shut down the recoil, and kept himself steadily determined to endure the Cross, despising the shame like some strong spring, always active behind some object which it presses constantly forward against a cutting knife, so the love of Jesus Christ bore him onward, all through his career, and if I may not say that it drove him, I may say that it led him, through all his sufferings unto the last of all.

It was a universal love, and it was an individualising love. "He loved me," says the apostle, "and gave himself for me." Each of us has the right—and if we have the right, we are under the obligation—to say the same thing, and to take of that great river of the water of life and love that flows out of the heart of Jesus, and turn it into our own little plot. Because he loved me he went to "the Cross, despising the shame." He subdued the shrinking, and welcomed death. When he hung on the Cross, and when he sits on the Throne, his love embraced you and me. May we take it and be at rest.

And now turn to

II.—THE OTHER ASPECT OF THIS STRANGE COMMANDMENT,

and think of how it affected the betrayer. There we have the solemn leaving of a man to take his own way.

I have already said that this is almost a kind of appeal to any lingering pity or kindness that there might be left in Judas. But it is more than that. Christ still keeps his position of authority over the traitor, and when he says to him, "That thou doest, do quickly!" it is a word of command, which says: "I am ready. You do not need to plot and contrive. Here are my hands; put your fetters on them." He assumes what is the characteristic of his attitude during his sufferings, that no man has power over him, but that he is voluntarily surrendering himself. The soldiers that would take him fall to the ground, that he might have departed. He waited, and let them lay hold on him. It was not Roman nails that fastened him to the Cross; it was the "cords of love" that bound him there. Throughout the whole of his Passion the same characteristics are prominent, and they are plain here.

But, beyond that, there is another point of view from which the words must be regarded. To Judas this commandment was equivalent to saying, "Take your own way." Jesus Christ left him to do what he would. Now, brethren, the analogue to that, the thing which corresponds to it, in your experience and mine, is a condition to which, more or less completely, we are all exposed, and to which some of us have drawn very near, when we are conscious of no restraints of conscience, when nothing seems to pull us back from evil that we are inclined to do. I do not know that anybody ever comes to absolute and entire insensitiveness of conscience. I hope not. But many of us do come awfully near it, and all of us tend toward it in some directions. For I suppose we all know what it is to have faults, sins, to which we are so disposed and habituated as that there is very little, if any, conscious check or pull-back when we contemplate doing them again. It is an awful solitude into which a man comes then. With our own hands we pull up the buoys, and put out the light-houses, and pitch overboard the compass, and lash the helm, and go to sleep in our bunks—and what happens then? Why! we are bumping on the black rocks, with half the ship's side torn to shivers, before we know where we are. So let us take care lest, by doing what Judas did, we get into the place where Judas stood, where conscience, which is God's voice, and circumstances, which are God's hand, shall no longer keep us back, and we shall wipe our mouths and say, "I have done no harm."

Do not let us forget that the only man that Jesus Christ ever, if I may use the word, abandoned, was an apostle. And how did he come to that fatal position? As I tried to show you last Sunday—by a very familiar road. He had been with Christ and neglected him. He had listened to his teaching and ignored it. He had received the full flame of his love upon his heart, and it had not melted him. So he grew worse and worse until he came to this—"Do it quickly!"

But is not that which I have called, perhaps too strongly, abandoned—the letting of a man have his way—is not that a kind of appeal to him, too, and a seeking of him by the only way by which there is a chance of finding him? We all know that sometimes the best thing that can happen to a man is that he shall drink as he has brewed, that he shall be "filled with the fruit of his own devices," that he shall be obliged to reap as he has sown, that if he will play with fire he shall be allowed to play with it, and find out when he looks at his own scarring palms what a fool he has been. God seeks us sometimes by letting us go, that we may learn by consequences that it is an evil thing, and a bitter thing as well, to forsake the Lord our God. "Do it quickly," and find out how rich you are with thirty pieces of silver in your pocket, and a betrayed Master on your conscience. I say that was a kind of seeking, and that is the kind of seeking that some of us need, and that some of us get.

No man is so left as that return is impossible. No man is so left as that he cannot be forgiven. If Judas was lost, he was lost not because he betrayed his Master—for even that crime might have been washed away by the innocent blood which he betrayed—but because, having betrayed, he despaired. The dealer "went out and wept bitterly," the betrayer "went out and hanged himself." If he had let remorse become repentance, as Peter did, he, too, like Peter, might have had a healing message from the risen Lord on the Easter morning. He, too, might have been forgiven and cleansed.—Baptist Times and Freeman.

THE LATE

—A jury at Slough Pells, S. D., on Friday, awarded Mary Garrigan a verdict for \$1,800 damages against Samuel Kennedy, a Dell Rapids saloonkeeper, for selling her husband liquor. Evidence was introduced to show that Garrigan became intoxicated on liquor bought of Kennedy, and that he later committed suicide. Mrs. Garrigan has similar suits pending against two other liquor dealers. This is the first conviction under the new license law prohibiting the sale of liquor to inebriates.

This seems to be a decided improvement over the way in which such matters are managed in this country, where if a man gets crazy drunk and threatens the life of his wife and family, he is fined any twenty or thirty dollars, and his wife and family get justice by virtually paying the fine; and the saloon keeper goes scot free.