

REMARKS ON LUKE XXII. 14-34.

How good and precious it is that we have at all times the Lord to look to ; for if our eye had always to be fixed upon self, not only should we not advance, but we should be thoroughly discouraged by the thought of the evil within us.

We confine ourselves to the idea of this evil, and thus deprive ourselves of the strength which can overcome it.

The nature of the flesh and the blindness of man's heart are worthy of remark. What foolish things come between us and God, to hide from us that which we ought to see ! How strangely, too, do the thoughts of the natural heart follow their natural course (even when the Lord is near us), and deprive us of the consciousness of the most striking things, which have a sensible effect around us. We find this presented in the portion before us.

The Lord Jesus was about to accomplish that work which can be compared to no other ; He was on the point of bearing the wrath of God for us poor sinners ; He was in circumstances which ought to have troubled His disciples' hearts. He had just spoken, in the most touching terms, of the passover which He desired to eat once more with them before He suffered ; He had told them, too, that one of them should betray Him. All this ought to have rested on their minds and have filled

their hearts. But they? They were striving among themselves which of them was the greatest! To us the curtain is withdrawn; and when reading of this fact, we can hardly understand how they could be busied with such things, but we know what was then about to take place.

How many things have power to turn even us, who have more light than they, from the thought which then filled the heart of Jesus! Such is the heart of man in presence of the most serious and solemn things.

The death of Jesus should exercise the same influence on our hearts as on the disciples'; it should be precious to us. The Lord is with us when we are gathered, two or three together; and yet we well know the thoughts which pass through our hearts and minds. Here we see the same thing under the circumstances most calculated to touch the heart. Jesus tells His disciples that *His blood was to be shed for them*: "the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me at the table, but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed;" and they enquire among themselves which of them it was that should do this thing.

One might suppose that they would think of nothing save the death of their gracious Master; but no! "There was a strife among them which of them should be accounted the greatest." What a contrast! But, alas! if we examine our own hearts we shall find there two things generally brought together, namely, real feelings which bear

testimony to our love of Jesus, but also, and perhaps within the same half-hour, thoughts which are as unworthy as this strife among the disciples. This shows the folly and vanity of man's heart; he is but as the small dust of the balance.

The Lord, ever full of gentleness and meekness, forgets Himself in His care for His disciples, and says to them, "He that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger: and he that is chief, as he that doth serve." He knows how to teach them, by His own example what the love of God is; and at the same time, He shows them the grace which is in Him, and all the faithfulness for which they are indebted to Him. It is as though He had said, *Ye need not raise yourselves; My Father will raise you.* "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations, 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." Instead of being irritated at the abominable conduct of His disciples, He shows them, that if there is no grace in men, there is grace in *one Man*, that is in Himself.

This grace is perfect in Jesus; and He places His disciples in it, whatever they may have been toward Him. He has fixed them firmly in the principle of grace, instead of the folly of the flesh, which had just shown itself among them; as though He had said, I am all grace towards you, and I trust the kingdom to you.

We are put under grace, and its voice is always heard. It assures us, that, notwithstanding all our weakness, we have continued with Jesus, and that He gives the kingdom as the Father gave it to Him. If He says to His disciples, "I appoint unto you a kingdom, ye shall sit on thrones," &c., &c., He takes care to show them what the flesh is.

"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." He does not say, "Thou shalt not be tempted; I will hinder Satan from sifting thee;" no, nor does He do it. We see here that God often leaves His children in the presence of their enemy, whom He does not destroy; but even while thus in the presence of the enemy, He watches over His own; as we see, (Rev. ii. 10), "The devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Peter might have said to the Lord, "Thou canst hinder me from being thus sifted," as Martha and Mary thought Jesus could have hindered the death of Lazarus: and, truly, He who can give the crown of life can shelter us; but He does not do so, that we may be tried. Satan desired to have Job that he might sift him like wheat, and God permitted him to do so; and this happens to us also. We often say within ourselves, "Why has He dealt thus with me? Why has He put me into such and

such a crucible?" Ah, it is Satan that desired and God who permitted it.

Things often occur which we cannot understand ; such things are intended to show us what the flesh is.

When God is about to use a Christian in His work, He takes the one who has gone the furthest in the path of trial. Thus here it is said, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you." The danger is presented to all ; but He adds, speaking to Peter. "I have prayed for thee;" for thee in particular ; for Jesus distinguishes him from all the rest, because he had taken a more prominent position than the others, and was thus more exposed, though they were all sifted by the death of Jesus. The Lord then says to Peter, "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." Notwithstanding all this, Peter is full of self-confidence. "I am ready to go with thee, both unto prison and to death." But Jesus replies, "the cock shall not crow this day, before thou hast denied that thou knowest me."

The flesh acting in Peter had only power to carry him up to the time of trial, and there failed ; for Peter denied the Lord Jesus, even in His very presence. He might have seen his Saviour, if his heart had not been turned away from Him. Jesus was looking at him, and yet he denied Him to the maid, saying, "I know Him not." He had been warned ; but the Lord would not allow him to be kept by divine power at that moment, because he

needed to learn by experience what he was in himself.

If we notice all that Christ did, we shall see how He was watching at this time over Peter; His grace (so to speak) went out to meet him, and took care of Him all through the temptation.

The first thing that Jesus tells him is that He has prayed for him. It is not that Peter's repentance led to Jesus' intercession, but the intercession of Jesus brought about Peter's repentance. "I have prayed for thee," and "Jesus looked upon Peter." As to Judas, he betrayed the Lord, and when his conscience was awakened, he killed himself. But, here, the effect of the prayer of Jesus was to preserve faith at the bottom of Peter's heart, so that when Jesus looked on him, he was broken down.

The first thing to remark is, that the Lord had prayed for Peter; and the second, that He always remembered His disciple, and as soon as the cock crowed, Jesus looked on him and Peter wept bitterly. It is in this way the Lord deals with us, He prays for us and allows us to go into temptation. If He conducts us when in it, He also bids us pray that we enter not into temptation: but God permits all this because He sees the need of it.

If Peter had been conscious of his own weakness, he would not have dared to show himself before the High Priest. This trial was the natural consequence of what he was in the flesh: but it was God's purpose to use him, and even put him in a

prominent position in His work. The cause of his fall was self confidence: the flesh was actively present.

God did everything well for him, and Peter saw what was the power of Satan's sifting. The other disciples, not having the same fleshly strength, fled at once. They had not so much confidence as Peter; but God left him to struggle against Satan, and Jesus prayed for him, in spite of his fall, that his faith should not fail.

The moment Peter fell, the eye of Jesus was turned upon him. That look did not give peace, but confusion of face. Peter wept; he went out, and it was all over. He had learnt what he was. There was his failure—the sin was committed, and could not be undone; it could be pardoned. Peter could not forget that he had denied the Lord: but Jesus made use of this fall to cure him of his presumption.

It is the same with us. We often commit faults which are irreparable, from too much confidence in the flesh. Where there is no possibility of correcting one's faults, what is to be done? The only resource is to cast oneself on the grace of God. When the flesh is too strong, God often permits us to fall, because we are not in that precious state of dependence which would preserve us. Jacob had too deeply offended Esau not to dread his anger; yet God did not leave him in his brother's hand, but gave him enough faith to carry him through the difficulty.

THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

The sympathies of Christ are so precious to the soul, His entering into our sorrows in this world of moral woe, so comforting, so softening, and yet so elevating, that we cannot treasure too highly the realization of them in our hearts, nor guard too carefully against anything that is spurious. That is the more important, because the character of His sufferings more or less connects itself with His person and nature. In the first place we have to distinguish His sufferings from man and His sufferings from God. Their cause, and the result of them are equally contrasted. Christ did we know suffer from men. He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. The world hated Him before it hated His disciples, it hated Him because He bore witness of it that its works were evil. He was "Light," and he that doeth evil hateth the light nor comes to the light, because his works are evil. In a word, Christ suffered for righteousness sake; even as it was from the beginning, in that which was a type of Jesus' history in this respect. Cain slew Abel, because his works were evil, and his brother's righteous. We may add, that the love which caused the Lord to minister to men in the world, and testify of their evil, brought only more sorrow upon Him. For His love He had hatred. This hatred of man against Him never slackened till His death, when, in the folly of human exultation, they could shout, Aha!

aha! so would we have it. Righteousness and love, and what was indeed the manifestation of the divine nature and ways on the earth, brought out the relentless hatred of the human mind and will; Christ suffered from man for righteousness sake.

But he suffered also from the hand of God upon the cross. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief; when He shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed. He was made sin for us who knew no sin, and then He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. There He suffered the just for the unjust; that is, He suffered not because He was righteous, but because we were sinners, and He was bearing our sins in His own body on the tree. As regards God's forsaking Him, He could say, "why hast Thou forsaken Me?" For in Him there was no cause. We can give the solemn answer. In grace He suffered the just for the unjust; He hath been made sin for us. Thus He suffered for righteousness, as a living man from men, as a dying Saviour, He suffered from the hand of God for sin.

It is most interesting to notice the result of these two characters of suffering as expressed in the Psalms.

In Psalms xx. xxi. we see the Messiah prophetically viewed as suffering on the earth from men. It was the day of trouble. They imagined a device against Him which they were not able to perform. But He asks life and has length of days for ever.

Glory and great majesty are put upon Him. What is the effect of His being thus glorified by Jehovah, in answer to the scorn and violence of ungodly men. Judgment. His hand finds out all His enemies. He makes them as a fiery oven in the day of His anger; as He said, "Those mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them before Me." The same thing may be seen in Psalm lxix 1-24. The effect of His suffering from the hand of wicked men, is judgment on themselves.

In Psalm xxii. we have, besides all these sufferings from the hand of men, and when they had reached their height, (see the whole Psalm up to verse 21), His sufferings from the hand of God. When under the pressure of the others, God, His only resource, forsakes Him. This is the great theme of the Psalm. But what is the result of this? This was the bearing of sin—at least the consequence of His bearing it. It was the judgment, so to speak: it was the wrath due to us. But He came to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Hence the result is unmingled and full of grace—nothing else. Who was to be punished for His having drunk the cup at His Father's hand? He is heard. God takes the new character of one who has raised Him up and given Him glory, because He had perfectly glorified Him about sin. He is raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. The name of His God and Father He immediately declares to His brethren. "I will declare Thy

name unto My brethren." So in fact He did, when He said to Mary Magdalene, "Touch Me not, [He was not now coming to be corporally present in the Kingdom,] for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren and say unto them, I go to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." The testimony was now grace, and Jesus leads the praises of His redeemed. Next, all Israel, the great congregation, is found in the praise also; then all the ends of the world. The fat eat and worship; all that go down into the dust: and the generation that shall be born, when that time of peace is come, shall also hear the wondrous story of that which angels desire to look into—that He hath done this. It is an unmingled stream of grace and blessing widening to the ends of the earth, and flowing down the course of time to the generation that shall be born.

Such is the effect of the cross. No word of judgment follows the tale it has to tell. The suffering there was the judgment on sin, but it was the putting it away. The judgment was borne, but passed away with its execution on the victim who had in grace substituted Himself; and if indeed we shall be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, He before whom we shall appear has Himself put away our sins; yea, we arrive there, because He has Himself come to fetch us, that where He is, there we may be also. In a word, it was suffering from God: and suffering from God is suffering for sin, not for righteousness; and the effect unmingled

grace, now freely flowing forth. Christ had been baptized with the baptism He had to be baptized with. He was no longer straitened in the exercise and proclamation of love. When He suffered from man through the whole of His witness among them up to death itself, He was suffering for righteousness. Sin He had not, in His Person to suffer for. He was no substituted victim in the eyes of men. The result of these sufferings from the power of men is judgment, accomplished on His return—in a providential way already in the destruction of Jerusalem, but fully when He shall return.

But there is another point of contrast, consequently very important for us. Christ suffered for sin that we never might. We are healed by, not partakers of, His stripes. What Christ has suffered from the forsaking of God as wrath, He has suffered alone and exactly, as to us, with the object that we never should taste one drop of that dreadful, bitter, to us insupportable, cup. Did we drink it, it were as condemned sinners. But in the suffering of Christ for righteousness, and in those which were caused to Him through His work of love, we are, poor and feeble as our faith is, to have a part. To us it is given not only to believe on, but also to suffer for His name. If we suffer for righteousness' sake happy are we, and yet more blessed if we suffer for His name. The Spirit of Glory and of God rests upon us. We can rejoice that we are partakers of His sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, we may be glad with exceeding joy.

The suffering for righteousness and for Christ, I may remark in passing, are distinguished by the Lord Himself, (Matt. v. 10, 11), and by Peter, (1 Peter ii. 20; iii. 17; iv. 14.)

The principle of these two kinds of sufferings, however, as contrasted with suffering for sin or evil, is the same. The difference of suffering for good and for evil is touchingly contrasted in Peter's epistle, while both are attributed to Christ, and we are warned against the latter. Christ is presented as suffering as an example, chapter ii. 19-23, where we see in verse 23, he refers to the revilings and violence of men; in verse 24 he adds, His bearing our sins, shewing that it is in order that we may be dead to it, not suffer for that. But this is brought out touchingly, chapter iii. 17-18, the force of which I take to be this: the Apostle had been speaking of suffering for righteousness, and adds, "It is better, if it be God's will, that you suffer for well doing, than for evil doing," for he adds, "Christ has once suffered for sins." That is, this is not your part in suffering; He has done this once for all. Suffering for righteousness may be your happy portion; suffering for sin, as regards the Christian, Christ's part alone. I would notice two other characters of suffering in our blessed Lord. In the first place, His heart of love must have suffered greatly from the unbelief of unhappy man, and from His rejection by the people. We read of His sighing in opening the deaf ears and loosing the tied tongue, (Mark vii. 34); and on the Pharisees asking a sign,

(chap. viii. 12) of His sighing deeply in spirit. So indeed in John xi. at the tomb of Lazarus, He wept, and groaned within Himself at seeing the power of death over the spirits of men, and their incapacity to deliver themselves; and as He wept also over Jerusalem, when He saw the beloved city just going to reject Him in the day of its visitation. All this was the suffering of perfect love, moving through a scene of ruin, in which self-will and heartlessness shut every avenue against this love which was so earnestly working in its midst. It must have been—with bright and blessed moments, where its exercise proved sweetness to itself, and led His heart out by times to fields white for harvest—a constant source of sorrow. This sorrow, blessed be God, and the joy that brightens it, we are allowed, in our little measure, to partake of. It is the sorrow of love itself. A weight of another character pressed upon the Lord, I doubt not, often through His life; and must and ought to have done so, though only showing perfectness, that is in blessed submission to the divine will. I mean the anticipation, when the time was there for Him to look at it (how often are we distracted by our little anticipated sorrows), of His sufferings on the cross and their true and pressing character. On His path of life death lay. He could not, as we see, take His part with the excellent of the earth, and bring them into the proposed or indeed any real and permanent blessing, without going through death, and death as the wages of sin, for they were sinners. If the corn of

wheat did not fall into the ground and die, it abode alone. There none could follow—not indeed the disciples, as He tells them, more than the Jews. And for Him death was death. Man's utter weakness, Satan's extreme power, and God's just vengeance, and alone, without one sympathy, forsaken of those whom He had cherished, the rest His enemies, Messiah delivered to Gentiles and cast down, the judge washing his hands of condemning innocence, the priests interceding against the guiltless, instead of for the guilty, all dark, without one ray of light even from God. Here perfect obedience was needed, and blessed be God was found. But we can understand, and just in the measure of Christ's divine, while human, sensibilities, what such sorrow must have been in prospect for a soul who looked at it with the feelings of a man made perfect in thought and apprehension by the divine light which was in Him. We have examples of these sorrows of the Lord's heart in two remarkable cases, which of course, though none were like the last, do not at all exclude the thought that others may have been, nor give full light on what He may have felt when in perfect calmness He spoke of His future sufferings to His disciples. The cases I refer to are John xii. and Gethsemane. In the former we read, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father save me from this hour." The coming up of the Gentiles had opened out before Him the scene of the rejected Christ passing into the wider glory of the Son of Man, but

then the corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die. This brings before His soul the true and necessary path of His glory—death and all it meant to His soul, and He looks for deliverance. He could not wish for nor fail to fear, the forsaking of God and the cup of death He had to drink. He was heard in that he feared. That was truth, and true piety, in presence of such a passage for His soul.

So in Gethsemane, when it was yet nearer, and the prince of this world came and His soul was exceeding sorrowful unto death; when the cup was just as it were being brought to Him, though He had not yet taken it, (for He would take it from none but from His Father's hand, when His will was that He should drink it, because it was not possible it could be otherwise, if the purpose and word of God was to be accomplished,) there this character of sorrow and trial or temptation, reached its fullness. The tempter (who on His entrance on His public service, and to hinder, His doing so, had tempted Him with what was agreeable to the flesh in the wilderness, and on the pinnacle of the temple, and had been baffled and bound, and during the Lord's life had his goods spoiled), now returns to try Him with all that was dreadful for the soul of man, and above all for the Lord, if He persevered in His obedience and work unto the end. Power had been displayed capable of delivering living man from all the dominion of the enemy.

(To be continued, D. V.)

THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

Sweet to trace His toiling footsteps
Here amidst the desert sands;
Bear in memory all His sorrow,
Thorn-clad head and piercèd hands,
Learn His love beside the manger,
Learn it on the stormy wave,
By the well, and in the garden—
Learn it by the cross and grave.

Yet not only in remembrance
Do we watch that stream of love—
Still a mighty torrent flowing
From the throne of God above,
Still a treasure all uncounted—
Still a story half untold—
Unexhausted, and unfathomed—
Fresh as in the days of old.

Christ at God's right hand unwearied
By our tale of grief and sin,
Day by day and hour by hour,
Welcoming each wanderer in;
On his heart, amidst the glory,
Bearing all our grief and care;
Every burden ere we feel it
Weighed and measured in His prayer.

Fragrant thus with priestly incense,
Every want and sorrow tells
Thoughts that fill the heart of Jesus
In the glory where He dwells.
All His love, His joy, His glory,
By His spirit here made known,
Whilst that spirit bears the sorrow
Of His saints before the throne.

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