

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

26:47-56

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

We see in these verses the cup of our Lord Jesus Christ's sufferings beginning to be filled. We see him betrayed by one of his disciples, forsaken by the rest, and taken prisoner by his deadly enemies. Never surely was there sorrow like his sorrow. Never may we forget, as we read this part of the Bible, that our sins were the cause of these sorrows! Jesus was delivered for our offences. (i) (i) Romans 4:25). Let us notice for one thing in these verses what gracious condescension marked our Lord's intercourse with his disciples. We have this point proved by a deeply touching circumstance at the moment of our Lord's betrayal. When Judas Iscariot undertook to guide the multitude to the place where his Master was, he gave them a sign by which they might distinguish Jesus in the dim moonlight from his disciples: he said, "Whomsoever I shall kiss that same is he." And so, when he came to Jesus, he said, "Hail master, and kissed him!" That simple fact reveals the affectionate terms on which the disciples associated with our Lord. It is a universal custom in eastern countries, when friend meets friend, to salute one another with a kiss (i). It would seem therefore, that when Judas kissed our Lord, he only did what all the apostles were accustomed to do when they met their Master after an absence. Let us draw comfort from this little circumstance for our own souls. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a most gracious and condescending Saviour. He is not an austere man, repelling sinners and keeping them at a distance; he is not a being so different from us in nature that we must regard him with awe rather than affection: he would have us rather regard him as an elder brother, and a beloved friend. His heart in heaven is still the same that it was on earth: he is ever meek merciful and condescending to men of low estate. Let us trust him, and not be afraid. Let us notice for another thing how our Lord condemns those who think to use carnal weapons in defense of him and his cause. He reproves one of his disciples for striking a servant of the high priest. He bids him put up his sword into its place, and he adds a solemn declaration of perpetual significance, "all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." The sword has a lawful office of its own. It may be used righteously, in the defense of nations against oppression; it may become positively necessary to use it to prevent confusion plunder and rapine upon earth; but the sword is not to be used in the propagation and maintenance of the Gospel. Christianity is not to be enforced by bloodshed, and belief in it extorted by force. Happy would it have been for the church if this sentence had been more frequently remembered! There are few countries in Christendom where the mistake has not been made of attempting to change men's religious opinions by compulsion, penalties, imprisonment and death. And with what effect? The pages of history supply an answer. No wars have been so bloody as those which have arisen out of the collision of religious opinions: often, mournfully often, the very men who

have been most forward to promote those wars have themselves been slain. May we never forget this! The weapons of the Christian warfare are not carnal, but spiritual (2 Cor.10:4) Let us notice for another thing how our Lord submitted to be a prisoner of his own free will. He was not taken captive because he could not escape; it would have been easy for him to scatter his enemies to the winds if he had thought fit. "Thinkest thou," he says to a disciple that I cannot pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled that thus it must be?" We see in those words the secret of his voluntary submission to his foes. He came on purpose to fulfill the types and promises of Old Testament Scriptures and, by fulfilling them, to provide salvation for the world. He came intentionally to be the true Lamb of God, the Passover Lamb. He came voluntarily to be the scapegoat on whom the iniquities of the people were to be laid. His heart was set on accomplishing this great work. It could not be done without the "hiding of his power," for a time: to do it he became a willing sufferer. He was taken, tried, condemned and crucified entirely of his own free will. Let us observe this: there is much encouragement in it. The willing sufferer will surely be a willing Saviour. The almighty Son of God, who allowed men to bind him and lead him away captive when he might have prevented them with a word, must surely be full of readiness to save the souls that flee to him. Once more then let us learn to trust him and not be afraid. Let us notice in the last place how little Christians know the weakness of their own hearts until they are tried. We have a mournful illustration of this in the conduct of our Lord's apostles. The verses we have read conclude with the words, "Then all the disciples forsook him and fled." They forgot their confident assertions made a few hours before; they forgot that they had declared their willingness to die with their Master; they forgot everything but the danger that stared them in the face. The fear of death overcame them: they "forsook him and fled." How many professing Christians have done the same! How many, under the influence of excited feelings, have promised that they would never be ashamed of Christ! They have come away from the communion table, or the striking sermon, or the Christian meeting, full of zeal and love and ready to say to all who caution them against backsliding, "Is thy servant dog, that he should do this thing?" And yet in a few days these feelings have cooled down and passed away: a trial has come and they have fallen before it. They have forsaken Christ! Let us learn, from this passage, lessons of humiliation and self-abasement. Let us resolve, by God's grace, to cultivate a spirit of lowliness, and self-distrust. Let us settle it in our minds that there is nothing too bad for the very best of us to do unless he watches, prays and is held up by the grace of God; and let it be one of our daily prayers. "Hild thou me up, and I shall be safe." (i» Psalm 119:117).

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