

**Robert Emory Golladay**

**The Cross Athwart The Sky**  
*Lenten Addresses*



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# The Cross Athwart the Sky

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# The Cross Athwart the Sky

Lenten Addresses

By Robert Emory Golladay, A.M., D.D.

AUTHOR OF LENTEN OUTLINES AND SERMONS; THE CREED; THE LORD'S PRAYER; THE TEN COMMANDMENTS; EARTH'S SONG OF REDEMPTION; THE SON OF GOD RIDES ON; ETC.

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# Preface by Lutheran Librarian

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## A NOTE ABOUT TYPOS [Typographical Errors]:

Over time we are revising the books to make them better and better. If you would like to send the errors you come across to us, we'll make sure they are corrected.



# Foreword

WHY ANOTHER LENTEN BOOK? There has been a steadily growing volume of them the past decades. I have bought scores of them myself. Here is my answer: Many of these Lenten books are good; but they are just as good for any other season as they are for Lent. Lent stands for something specific. It tells the story of God's grace and how it was specifically shown. It tells the story of redemption and how it was accomplished.

Last year I bought one of these books. It had a real Lenten title. The addresses were well written. They were instructive. But there was not a paragraph, scarcely a line, of real Lenten instruction in the whole book; simply a series of exhortations to serious living. If we are going to keep Lent let us keep it, and not be guilty of simply falling in line with an old custom, often abused, long scorned by many, but now become popular.

For Lent there is only one subject that is wholly appropriate — to present Christ Jesus as a teacher of morals, a guide, an example and do it in a wholly orthodox fashion, for Lent is wholly heterodox. Jesus is all this. And there are plenty of times when He may be thus presented. But if this is all men know of Christ Jesus, they miss the most fundamental part of all. Before Christ Jesus can be a guide and example He must be a Redeemer, a Savior. And Lent is the appropriate time of all times for presenting this truth.

The biggest thing in the Christian religion is not what man does for God, but what God has done, and does, for man. It is a great thing for man to be in quest of God; it is vastly more important that God is continually in quest of man. And God's quest for man reached its climax in the Savior's passion. This is the story, and the only story, to be told during Lent. It is an old story, but it is ever new. And it is going to be in place as long as there are men and women to be saved, who want to be saved.

This story of the Passion is of cosmic interest. It is the epic of the ages. It has never been surpassed from the point of view of dramatic interest. This story should be told, not prosaically, but with interest; not to arouse a cheap

emotion, but to gain attention, move the will, stir the heart, and lead to action. This story should be told not only as a story, but what led to it, and what it means.

Without this no sermon is a real Lenten sermon. What the world needs, first, last, and all the while, is the story of the Cross and its meaning for the world. This is what I have sought to set forth in these sermons. I wish I could have done it a thousand times better.

What I have said is, a personal conviction, but it alone would not have moved me to decide to publish these sermons. In my congregation there are nearly a dozen preachers and professors. During the past Lenten season a number wanted to know whether these sermons would be published, desiring a copy if they were. This was a motivating factor leading to publication. Finally, for several years the Zondervan Publishing House have wanted me to furnish them a series of Lenten sermons for publication. At last here they are. May God bless them to the comfort of many souls.

THE AUTHOR

# 1. Jesus Faces Jerusalem

## Scripture Lesson

Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin:...

That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits: Get you out of the way, turn aside out of the path, cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. Wherefore thus saith the Holy One of Israel, Because ye despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness, and stay thereon: Therefore this iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly at an instant...

For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength: and ye would not...

And therefore will the Lord wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the Lord is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him. —Isa. 30:1, 9-13, 15, 18

Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him: even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the Lord your God? Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders,

gather the children and those that suck the breasts: let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet. Let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O Lord, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people Where is their God? Then will the Lord be jealous for his land and pity his people. Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen. — Joel 2:12-19

What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid...

What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin; As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good, no, not one. — Rom. 3:1-4; 9-12

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up:...

He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. — John 3:14, 18

For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works. Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin...

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; By whom also we have access by faith into this grace

whereunto we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. — Rom. 4:3-8; 5:1-2

### **Text**

And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, Saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again. — Mark 10:32-34

### **Prayer**

Gracious God and Father, on the evening of this first day of Lent we have come together in Thy house. We have come to worship Thee. We have come to learn more about Jesus, our need of Him, what He has done for us. Father, give us the Holy Spirit to be our teacher. May we be responsive to His leading. Make and keep us truly humble and penitent. Increase our faith. Warm our hearts with a flame of holy love for Him who loved us unto death. May the example of Jesus' steadfastness in service strengthen us in our efforts at self-discipline and service. And make this Lenten season one of blessing to Thy children everywhere. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **Jesus Faces Jerusalem**

THIS IS ASH WEDNESDAY, the beginning of Lent. And Lent, reaching its great climax on Good Friday, followed by Easter, is in a sense, the very peak of the church year. Had God not intended that there should be a Good Friday and an Easter there never would have been a Christmas, there could have been no Pentecost, and there would have been no Christian church.

The history of Lent, its origin and observance, would be interesting and profitable, but there are more important things to engage our attention. That about which we ought to be most concerned is: What does Lent mean to us? All of us? Each of us? It is not something new in our lives. Many of us have

observed Lent since we were children, but what does it really mean to us? In what spirit are we approaching it? Why are we observing it? What do we expect to get out of Lent? What are we willing to put into it? I am leaving these and other questions for your own pondering. I shall refer to a few of them later.

Lent confronts us with the greatest problems of the Christian life. Let us enter Lent carefully, prayerfully. Not only the remainder of this year, but all of life, yes, life for eternity, may be seriously affected by the spirit, the attitude, with which we face the call of this Lenten season and what we get out of Lent.

## **The Purpose Of Lent**

Candidly, right down in the depths of our hearts, what is our purpose in observing Lent? Is it just a habit? Are we a little afraid to break with the custom of the centuries? We are here in God's House tonight. How did we come here? Did we just drop in because of a special invitation, or do we have a purpose and a plan for the season? If so, what is it? What do we expect to accomplish?

Is it possible that we are going to observe Lent and attend its services in an attempt, though we would not like to confess it, to make up for neglect during ten and a half months of the year? I am not going to say that we may not find a blessing even under such circumstances, but I have no hesitancy in saying that, if we have a plan, not only for regular attendance at the public services, but embracing some reading and study relating to some phase of the Passion of our Lord, or make a special prayerful quest of some particular grace or power for our own lives, the chances of receiving a blessing will be greatly multiplied.

There are many things recommended for Lenten practice. It is spoken of as an especially appropriate time for cultivating humility; for deepening the sense of sin — not of other folks' but of our own; and, consequently, a deeper repentance. Lent is a very appropriate time for seeking to strengthen the will that is often weak and vacillating; for cultivating the prayer-life, that often breathes only intermittently, and with difficulty; for deepening, in general, the spiritual life, which is often shallow.

Whatever our line of study, whatever we undertake to accomplish, it should all be begun and ended in the full light of the cross of Christ. Any-

thing worth while can be accomplished only by its power.

## **Self-Denial**

It is altogether unworthy to think that Lent is adequately kept by giving up a few things for a few weeks — a few luxuries, eating a little less food, giving up a few picture shows, parties, dances, and the like, if this is the extent of our Lenten observance. However, I think it is altogether natural and appropriate that certain self-denials and certain special efforts should be part of our Lenten observance. The suggestion seems to come spontaneously to the best minds and hearts of the race, and it is wholly in keeping with the teaching of Scripture. Fasting is often spoken of as a self-denial specially appropriate to Lent and profitable. It is often spoken of in the Bible as religious discipline. Jesus Himself declared it had a place. Many of us would be better off in body and mind if we ate more temperately. One of the best physicians in the city told me he is convinced there are few people above forty in normal circumstances of life who do not eat more than is good for them.

Let us consider fasting along with the wider field of self-denial, of self-restraint, of being able to say no to oneself. Most of us are too ease-loving. We do not like discipline either of the body or the soul. The sleek, comfortable, ease-loving, modern man is likely to think it absurd to forego a dinner, or any portion thereof, for the good of the body, least of all for the welfare of his soul. But the simple fact that ten thousand times ten thousand, over and over again, of the world's best men and women feel the benefit at this and other times of some sort of self-restraint and self-mortification is eloquent testimony to the fact that man in the deepest depths of his nature is conscious that he does not live by bread alone.

If life were entirely normal, if it were as self-disciplined, as self-controlled, as beautiful, as it was intended to be, we would not need these special seasons of striving for the spirit of self-discipline. But life is not normal; it is not as well disciplined as it should be. Life does not have the beauty of self-mastery. The best of us are shot through with worldliness. The pull of the desire for plenty, ease, the soft life, is more or less with all of us. We need to use every legitimate means that will give us an additional shred of help on the road to the stronger, more self-controlled life.

Every person with the slightest touch of moral and spiritual aesthetic feeling has felt the utter repulsiveness of the conduct of those stony-hearted soldiers who, all unfeeling, sat at the foot of the cross and coolly gambled for Jesus' garment. And surely anyone to whom the Garden of Gethsemane is more sacred than the Garden of Epicurus, the hill of Calvary more revered than the halls of Bacchus or the chambers of wantonness, will be impressed by the thought that, to say the least, it is not becoming for those who call themselves Christians to be feasting and frivolous while they stand beneath the cross and see the Son of God and man suffer and die.

Do not take my word for this. Listen to St. Paul, that great Apostle of free grace and salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. Writing to the Corinthian congregation he had founded and telling them of his liberties and prerogatives, he cried out: "This I do for the gospel's sake... Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible... I keep under my body, and keep it in subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

And Jesus, who above all others knew the meaning of the cross, says to all His followers: "He that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me."

"What a shame," cried Saint Bernard, "to be a delicate member of the Head crowned with thorns."

Of course habitual temperance and self-mastery are more wholesome than recurrent austerities, but many of us have not attained to this high grace. A beginning now may lead toward this end. At our peril, we neglect the earnest culture of the soul.

But the Christian life, even during Lent, is not only one of self-denial. Especially is it not that kind of self-denial that easily folds up, gets a martyr complex, and mopes, complaining of its burden.

## **Adventurous Living**

Christianity at no time, assuredly not during Lent, is merely a matter of not doing things. This is always a part of life as it is, but this can never be all. Above all seasons, Lent is a call to adventurous, creative living. Every great child of God has been an adventurer for God. Look at Abraham leaving his country and his kindred to do God's will. Think of Moses, born in servi-



tude, reared in a king's palace, albeit with some hesitation, becoming the daring leader of his own enslaved people. This has been true of every other great child of God — John the Baptist, St. Paul, Augustine, St. Francis, Luther, Wesley, Moody, and others.

What these men did in their day and way — and they only lived up to their capacities and opportunities — we can do in our day and smaller way. There is, with most of us, most of the time, not enough real effort in our living, especially not in our moral and spiritual living. If we gave but fifteen or twenty minutes a day to planned living, to Scripture reading, study, prayer, to achieving something specific in our own lives in the way of disciplined habits, courageous doing, for self or others, doing something for the Lord in the church, especially for Him in the persons of His less favored followers, most of us would revolutionize our lives in ten years' time or less, just as most of us would more than double our efficiency in the work of the everyday life if we went about it in the same way.

There is one thing, however, against which we need carefully to guard ourselves during Lent and at other times as well. Our self-discipline, our efforts to abstain, or achieve whatever measure of success possible, must not be carried on in the spirit of Pharisaic self-righteousness. However great a degree of character we may succeed in achieving, it should be for the desire of being true to our God-given capacities. No one ever has or can merit heaven. Had this been possible, we, probably, would have been left to our own devices, and there would have been no cross, no dying Savior. Jesus came to save. The cross was the price He was willing to pay for our salvation. "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (I John 2:1-2). This is an indisputable and indispensable Scriptural truth, basic to all profitable Lenten meditation.

## **Jesus Facing Calvary**

Let us see how much of that of which we have been speaking is illustrated in the life of Jesus; yes, set forth even in our little text.

Jesus, to accomplish His Father's purpose and His own, of saving the children of men, left the perfection, peace, and glory of heaven, came down to earth, and became man, perfect Himself but associated with imperfect men and an imperfect world. He who could say in all truth, "The silver and the gold are mine; the cattle on ten thousand hills are mine," became a man who had not a place to lay His head that He could call His own, according to human title. He who was the King of kings and Lord of lords, came not to be ministered unto but to minister, to be the servant of all. He who was honored, adored, worshiped by the seraphim and cherubim and all the hosts of heaven, by the sapphire throne of glory, came to earth expecting to be despised, buffeted, crucified by the unregenerate sons of men. We call this the humiliation of Christ. In essence, it was just this very thing of which we have been speaking. It was Jesus denying Himself; only He was doing it wholly for others, not for Himself. This was this world's, the universe's supreme example of self-denial to accomplish a purpose. At its spectacle we may well wonder and adore.

At the same time, this was the supreme adventure of all history, sacred or secular. You have read of daring merchant princes sailing some gaily bedecked argosy to distant seas in search of valuable cargo. History is full of the stories of soldiers of fortune, who, singlehanded or at the head of armies, went forth to win fame or fortune on the field of battle. The world is full of the lesser breed of adventurers who, here, there, everywhere, in all spheres of adventure, are seeking advantage, some coveted possession, some measure of glory, in some kind of adventure.

Now, let your imagination work for a moment. Picture to yourself the gates of heaven swinging ajar and the eternal Son of God coming forth, accompanied by escorting hosts of heaven's ministering spirits — the beginning of His great journey to earth. Then ponder a moment the earthly scene. Passing the earlier scenes of the incarnate life of the Son of God come to earth, fasten your eyes on the eternal Son of God incarnate as He walks the hills and dales of old Palestine clad in the robes of a simple peasant. Think of the hands that hung the spheres in their place and keeps them in their orbits marked with the callouses of an honest carpenter and, after a little while, pierced with nails. See that fair open brow that, even in its human form, more than hinted at the majesty of heaven and of God, pierced with thorns' sinking under the assaults of fiendish hands. Was there ever an adventure like this — an adventure, not for the gain of gold, not for human

glory and acclaim, but an adventure prompted solely by love, the adventure of one who was willing to live dangerously in order to get close to the hearts of men and die fully satisfied when the will of God was done and the way back to the Father's house was opened for the lost, weary, wayfaring sons of men.

Now let us look, a bit more closely, at our little text. Jesus was on His last trip to Jerusalem. He was going up that rather steep incline that leads from the plain of Jericho to Jerusalem. Up and down this road David and Solomon had marched with their armies. The armies of the Medes, the Persians, and Babylonians had climbed this stretch. Along this road the Roman chariots rolled and the Roman legions strode. It was often called "The Ascent of Blood." But the least of the steepness of this ascent, for Jesus, was in the road itself. The weariness and the burden of it all lay in what Jesus carried in His heart and in what He saw at the end of the road — Gethsemane; fierce, vindictive faces; thongs and blows; Calvary; and the brief, undisturbed repose of Joseph's garden.

We know the physical road Jesus traveled on this ever memorable journey. From beyond Jordan He was on His way to Jerusalem by way of Jericho. Our text tells us that as this company marched on their way up the steep ascent the disciples "were amazed, and they that followed were afraid." There was an eagerness about Jesus that was unusual even for Him. It was clearly evident that there was something in Jesus' mind, something on His heart, that wholly absorbed Him. They were all awed by Jesus' eagerness and determination.

The Disciples thought they knew what was back of this faraway look, this eagerness, this haste. Jesus, they were hoping, was going to throw aside His temporary guise of lowliness and meekness and establish the long expected Messianic kingdom, a glorified, enlarged renewal of the old Davidic kingdom. But they were mistaken. It was not of this that Jesus was thinking; He was thinking of that new spiritual kingdom comprised of the elect of all races and nations. And He was looking straight ahead to Gethsemane and Calvary, by which it was to be established. And He was beginning to feel the conflict and the pain even now. He had already begun to drink of the cup that very soon He was to drain to the last bitter drop.

Jesus saw all this. He saw the jealousy, the hatred, the intrigue, the treachery, the inhumanity and injustice with which He was to be treated. And yet He chose to go on and in going He exhibited an eagerness that

might be compared with that of a bridegroom hastening to meet his bride on their wedding day. What is the explanation? Jesus did this because it was in the path of duty (John 4:34). But it was more; it was the call of love (John 13:1). When Jesus spoke of these things, His disciples tried to dissuade Him (Matt 16:22). But in spite of all that Jesus saw at the end of the road, in spite of the dissuasive powers of His disciples, He chose to go this way. Why? Because there was no other way. He came to redeem, to save the children of men. This was the price He had to pay to accomplish the purpose for which He had come into the world. And love made Jesus willing to pay the price, and to do it willingly, joyfully.

Do we not feel that a love such as this can be trusted all the way? There never could be a greater test than this that Jesus endured. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for another. And let us remember that the love that went out to Peter, James, and John, and the others, is just as direct and warm toward each of us today as it was in that distant day. Indeed that eager journey, that great sacrifice, was just as much for you and me as it was for those who journeyed with Jesus in the flesh on that eventful trip". Having done all this for us, out of love and not compulsion, can He, will He, ever fail us?

Ought not every Lenten season, when we study these facts of history anew, bring to us an increased faith, a renewed confidence, a new depth of devotion? It assuredly will if we observe it aright.

## **What Does Lent Mean To Me?**

Let us go back to our starting point. Let each of us, the last thing before we retire tonight, ask himself some personal questions like these: What, really, does Lent mean to me? What do I really want to get from it? What am I willing to put into it in order that I may get the most from it?

Let us take this matter from the sphere of the infinite and theoretical and make it wholly personal. There is no Lent without Christ Jesus. There is no real Lent for us till we know and accept what Jesus did for us. So some of the big questions of each soul during Lent are: What does Jesus mean to me? What does the work He did mean to me? Do I realize what I did to bring all this on Him? Do I realize what my condition would be without Jesus and His passion?

Let us not grow overly sentimental and, especially, not gloomy about it; but let us be conscientious and honest with ourselves. And let us resolve that, by God's help, we are going to profit to the utmost by these Lenten services.

I have emphasized at length the thought that is often uppermost in the minds of Christian people during the Lenten season: self-denial and creative effort. These things are helpful when rightly understood and used. But by no manner of means must these become the chief things for which Lent stands. At all times, and especially during Lent, we should emphasize, not what man does for God, but what God has done and does for man: not what man gives to God but what God gives to man — everything that belongs to man's salvation.

Most of us, I trust, still remember our little old Catechism, not only that there is such a book, but some of its precious lessons. At the conclusion of the explanation of the First Article, which recounts the material blessings God has bestowed upon us, stand these words: "For all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him." These words are very appropriate here; but nowhere are they more appropriate or quite as much in place as they are at the close of the explanation of the Second Article, which is truly a Lenten article, that ends thus: "Who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and the power of the devil, not with gold or silver; but with his holy precious blood, and with His innocent sufferings and death." If from this Lenten season we can come — and we can if we will — with a renewed and deeper sense of our need, incurable by any human means; of the immeasurable depths of God's love; of the universality of the redemption in Christ Jesus; of the fact that all we need to do or can do, is to accept what God has done for us; then this new Lenten season will prove to be richly profitable.

Having received this great blessing from God, the gift of forgiveness, of full acceptance as sons and daughters of the kingdom, heirs of all that is to come, of peace, and joy, and glory, appreciatively grateful for it all, we cannot stop with passive reception. Love must speak and act. Gratitude must do something.

This is the explanation of the completely changed lives of all the Apostles, after Easter and Pentecost, when they came to know. In the case of St. Paul it proved not only a stimulus to his religious nature but brought a

complete transformation. So it did with St. Augustine and millions of others.

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent — how shall I observe it? In the very first place, let us give God a chance to do something for us. He is waiting, eager to do it. Let us read His Word, specially the record of the Passion. Let us regularly attend the services of God's house, where these great themes are discussed. Let us pray God to give us His quickening, enlightening, sanctifying Spirit to lead us in the path of righteousness. And ere we know it, our hearts will be growing warm, our interests increasing, and soon we shall find that we shall be wanting to do something in the kingdom. Then Lent will have passed from the realm of objective historic fact into the realm of inner reality.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, on this Ash Wednesday evening, we have been trying to sit at Thy feet, to learn of Thee. Thou, Lord, knowest our limitations; we see with partial vision only, especially in the deeper things of life.

Tonight, Lord, we have tried to follow Thee in that last steep, stony ascent to Jerusalem that was to bring Thee into final fierce conflict with the powers of darkness in this, and the nether world. Thou didst not hesitate, ever urged on by the holy passion that burned within,. Thy love for, Thy desire to rescue, to save, the lost, wretched sons and daughters of men.

In this, O Christ, Thou wouldst reveal to us the Father-heart, the Brother-heart, of God. Greater love can no man have than this, that he lay down his life for another. O Savior-heart of Christ, how sacrificially rich Thou art toward the sons of men! Since the hour when the light of this love broke over the world, it has never failed. And it will never fail.

On this Ash Wednesday evening, O Lord, we are wondering what we ought to do during this holy season to please Thee and profit ourselves. The first thing Thou wouldst have us do is to believe; believe Thy Word when Thou dost tell us of our need; believe when Thou dost tell us that in Thee, Thy person and work, our needs have all been fully met.

Fulfill Thy promise, O Lord, to send us the Spirit to lead us into all needed truth. Give us the spirit of steadfast determination. Help us to take up our cross and follow Thee. In word and deed, make us messengers of this story of wondrous love.

O Thou changeless Christ, who knowest the permutations and perturbations of Thy earth-born, earth-bound sons and daughters during the changing years, bind us to the changeless by binding us to Thee. Amen

## 2. One For All

### Scripture Lesson

The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many signs. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. Now this he said not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation; and not for the nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that are scattered abroad. So from that day forth they took counsel that they might put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but departed thence into the country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there he tarried with the disciples. Now the passover of the Jews was at hand: and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the passover, to purify themselves. They sought therefore for Jesus, and spake one with another, as they stood in the temple, What think ye? That he will not come to the feast? Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given commandment, that, if any man knew where he was, he should show it, that they might take him. — John 11:47-57

Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. — Isa. 53:4-5

Who His own self bare our sins in His body upon the tree, that we having died unto sins, might live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were



healed. — 1 Pet. 2:24

Wherefore also He is able to save to the uttermost them that draw near unto God through Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them. — Heb. 7:25

### **Text**

The chief priests therefore and the Pharisees gathered a counsel, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many signs. If we let him alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation. But a certain one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. Now this he said not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation. — John 11:47-51

### **Prayer**

Eternal Father, on this second evening Lenten service we come into Thy holy presence. We come to worship Thee. Holy, holy, holy art Thou, Lord God of Sabaoth. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. We thank Thee for all the good Thou art continually pouring into our lives.

We come unto Thee, our Father, in the name of Jesus, Thy Son, our Savior. We come humbly, conscious of our many sins. Give us the assurance of forgiveness. We know our weaknesses, our many failures. When we wander away, O Father, bring us back. When we fall, raise us up. Teach us how to appropriate more and more of Thy precious spiritual benefits, conceived in love for us, Thy children. Open our spiritual eyes that we may see the riches of Thy grace. Clear away all sense-reared barriers between Thyself and us, and bring us into ever closer fellowship with Thyself through Christ Jesus. Amen.

## **One For All**

ONE WEEK AGO, Ash Wednesday evening, we began our Lenten services. We showed what Lent means, in itself, and what it ought to mean to us. We indicated that all that is best in the observance of Lent was illustrated by Jesus Himself in that last trip to Jerusalem. Up the steep ascent He went — eager, determined, self-forgetful, ready to be sacrificed in order to serve those He loved. The great difference between He and us lies in the fact that Jesus did this perfectly, out of love, in order to save us. We, at best, can serve only imperfectly, in gratitude for what was done for us.

At first glance, especially of the first part of our text, it seems as if it followed in natural historical order after that of last Wednesday evening, but such is not the case. Some little time before the last trip to Jerusalem, of which our lesson a week ago told us, Jesus went there at the request of the sisters, Martha and Mary, whose brother was very ill and who died soon after the sisters dispatched their messenger to Jesus. You know the story. Jesus knew all that was going on in Jerusalem but came there anyway and raised Lazar from the dead. And “many therefore of the Jews, who came to Mary and beheld that which He did, believe on Him.” Such a thing could not be endured by the high church authorities in Jerusalem. Theft, hatred, a necessary legalized murder now and then, meant little to these high clerics of the great Temple. But that people increasingly should believe in Jesus, find peace and joy in fellowship with Him, could not be endured. Something must be done about it. The chief priests called a council. And at the time of our text, the final decree of this ecclesiastical court was that Jesus must be put to death.

Jesus knew this, and because the fullness of time had not yet come for His great passion, He temporarily withdrew from Jerusalem. But when the time came for His passion, Jesus set His face steadfastly to go back to the so-called holy city, knowing full well what awaited Him there. This helps decisively to emphasize the love, the courage, the steadfastness of Jesus in fulfilling His mission for the sons of men.

Last Wednesday night our leading, undergirding thought was — Jesus facing Calvary as Redeemer, Savior. Let us not forget it. Tonight, and every night during Lent, may this thought be at least in the background of our thinking, the open secret of every mystery. Every scene that comes up for consideration, every action that calls for attention, every person who enters the scene, every principle that needs elucidation, to be understood aright,

must be viewed in the light, of this picture — Jesus facing Calvary in order to be Redeemer, Savior, to the world.

Last week our text pictured Jesus and His disciples on the way up to Jerusalem. The lesson for tonight tells us of the situation as it was in Jerusalem itself, represented by its outstanding citizens. The thought we should like to have standing out in the forefront of our thinking is this — Jesus was going up to Jerusalem facing its perils, in our place. It was — Jesus for all, One for the many.

## **The Arch-Conspirators**

Before we proceed, let us take a look at the chief human actors in this tragedy, the chief conspirators in the scene that is to pass in review before our eyes tonight, as we consider the words of our text.

Only one man is mentioned by name in our text; but we know who a good many of this group of opposers of Jesus were: they were members of the Sanhedrin, Israel's great ruling church body, some of the leading Pharisees of Jerusalem, and, unquestionably, Annas and Caiaphas. Annas, the ex-high priest, and Caiaphas, the son-in-law of Annas, official high priest, were leaders in the conspiracy against Jesus. It will help us to appreciate the situation if we get a glimpse of the characters of, at least, these two men. There were others, in fact a crowd of lesser officials and a mob of hangers-on; but they were mostly satellites, the servile doers of the bidding of the men in power.

There was Annas, the ex-high priest, the power behind the throne. In early life he had been a member of the cultured Jewish colony down at Alexandria in Egypt. He had come to Jerusalem to be the high priest at the request of Herod the Great, a commentary in itself. Annas was a man of ability, but so greedy, unscrupulous, and dictatorial that Valerius Gratus deposed him after he had held the office eight years. Annas had five sons, each of whom managed to obtain the office of the high priesthood for a brief period. Like their father before them, these men lived only for self-aggrandizement. They would stoop to anything and stop for nothing when there was any hope for personal gain.

When all these men had been deposed, Annas still found a way of keeping a grip on the perquisites of the high-priestly office. He had a daughter. Anyone who married her, nothing seriously interfering, would be eligible to

the high-priestly office. Caiaphas, willing for such a bargain, married the daughter. Then, recommended by those not known to be in league with the Annas family, he was appointed high priest.

Annas and Caiaphas were antagonistic in personal and family matters. Caiaphas resented the way Annas was continually interfering with the affairs of his office. But Annas was such a forceful personality, that most of the time it was expedient to submit to his wishes. Some of the Talmudic writings of a later period refer to Annas as the black-hearted high priest and call him a spiritual degenerate. There were several things, however, on which Annas and Caiaphas were of one mind. They were Sadducees; they did not believe in a resurrection of a future life. They were of the ecclesiastical aristocrats of Israel. They considered themselves the favored ones of the chosen people. This made them all the more antagonistic to Jesus when He raised Lazarus from the dead and did other kindred works. Both were rich, and, like most of their class, were bent on getting richer. The Temple service itself afforded them an opportunity of further enriching themselves. At the time of the great festivals, especially at the Passover, thousands upon thousands of animal sacrifices were offered. This offered a legitimate source of business to someone. The high priests, instead of attending to the spiritual affairs of the church and allowing someone in the business world to attend to supplying the necessary sacrificial offerings, themselves cornered the market and sold things at their own prices through their hirelings.

There was a certain Temple tax that every Jew had to pay when he came to worship in Jerusalem. It was legitimate. There were expenses that had to be met. This fee had to be paid in Jewish money. The majority of the worshipers at many of the great festivals were Jews from the various countries around the Mediterranean. These people, naturally, brought with them the money of the countries from which they came. To change this foreign money into Jewish money and charge a reasonable fee for the trouble was a legitimate business. Annas and Caiaphas saw that this was too good a chance to be lost. They would not let anyone else in on such a fat chance. They set up their little banks right in the courts of the Temple. And around them there was a continual wrangle going on. The people were continually complaining that they were being overcharged and short-changed; that they were being given counterfeit money in the exchange; in short, that every trick of the racketeer was being played on them.

It was this state of affairs that made Jesus so indignant when He went into the court of the Temple on the occasion of His last visit. So righteously provoked was He that He made a whip of a handful of cords and drove these traffickers from the Temple court.

I am not telling you these things just to give you a bit of ancient history. I am telling about Annas and Caiaphas because they were at the head of the church in Jesus' day. These were the men who held the high and holy office of the high priesthood. It was a God-ordained office. The one who held it was in the Aaronic succession. But the high-priestly robe was not intended to cover the breast of one whose heart had departed from God, who had become a scheming politician, a corrupt money-monger.

These are the men at whose connivance Jesus was brought to trial. These are the men before whom Jesus was tried — the ones who secured His condemnation, the ones responsible for His death. To know them helps us to understand something of the procedure and to account for some of the results of this trial.

## **The Verdict**

Remember, this is not the final trial of Jesus. And Jesus was not at the trial. This was a kind of star-chamber session of the Jewish high court at which they would determine, beforehand, the fate of the One under consideration when the opportune time came to get Jesus in their hands. And their decision was — He must die. In reality, this was not a trial. It was simply a process of condemnation. Neither was the next one a real trial; it was simply the somewhat legalized form of carrying out this predetermined sentence of death.

When this star-chamber session was held, there was a general admission that Jesus had been doing many remarkable works. There was no question of the fact that He had brought Lazarus back to life. The people, increasingly, were looking with favor on Jesus. Said the chief priests, "If we let Him alone, all men will believe on Him." In the light of history, what a terrible thing this would have been! Whoever got a bad deal from Jesus? From his professed followers, yes; but never from Him. The only people who stood to lose anything in this case were Annas and Caiaphas. They would have lost their unrighteous control of the people who followed Jesus. They would have lost their profits. And with them, and others like them, the prin-

ciple prevails-Let anything happen; let us do anything rather than lose our profits.

So far as Annas and Caiaphas were concerned, they had a ready solution for this disturbing situation. They said to themselves, "We dare not lose prestige. We will not lose profits. To avoid this, we will get rid of Jesus. It matters not how many commandments we break; it matters not how many innocent lives we crush, or how much undeserved suffering we cause, Jesus must be put out of the way." This was the character of the men who determined, before the actual passion began, what they were going to do with Jesus when the opportune time came.

I have been speaking tonight of those who determined, beforehand, to put Jesus to death. Now, let us not get this picture wrong. These men were responsible for taking the life of Jesus. They were the devil's agents for carrying out his design. They were just as guilty as if there had been no other force in the universe working. But on the other hand, and at the same time, God was working to save men. Jesus knew what these men were planning in the dark. He could have defied them and escaped. But then the cause for which He came into the world would not have been accomplished. The way of the cross, erected by wicked men, was the only way of salvation for man. Let us not forget the picture of Ash Wednesday evening: Jesus, with His face set steadfastly toward Jerusalem, on His way to die, on His mission to save, to save at the cost of His own life.

## **A Prophecy**

In this star-chamber session, Caiaphas and Annas let the others talk. These men were diplomats. They sat back, cold, cynical, observant. The one absorbing topic was, "What must be done with Jesus, if we, the ecclesiastical organization, are to be preserved?" Something had to be done, they all agreed; but what? One suggested this course, another that. Finally, Annas and Caiaphas could not contain themselves longer. So one of them, with ill-concealed disdain, broke out with, "Ye know nothing at all." And he meant not only that they were ignorant, lacking all understanding, but that they were cowards and weaklings. "Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people."

"Expedient for you." For whom? Not for the people at large, not even in the sense meant by the high priest. The "for you" was a blind. The only

ones who would continue to be profited by the old regime were the members of the ecclesiastical corporation, its heads, and their satellites. It has been so times not a few in the history of the church. God is forgotten. The spiritual needs of humanity — of this there is no consciousness. The church as an institution for mediating the blessings of gracious God to needy men, of this, sight is lost. The church, to these men, became an institution for the practice of nepotism and private gain.

The simple meaning of the words of the high priest was — We have to get rid of Jesus. He is in our way. He is causing trouble with the people. He threatens our profits. He is a crazy fanatic. He wants an honest, spiritual religion. If we want to go on — and we do, for it is a profitable business — we shall have to put Jesus out of the way. And to kill Him seems the only way out. It has to be done. There is no shadow of a question as to whether it be just or right.

These men had no conscience whatsoever. With them, the end always justified the means. Had someone quoted the old quatrain —

Perish policy and cunning!  
Perish all that fears the light!  
Whether losing, whether winning,  
Trust in God and do the right;

Caiaphas and Annas would have laughed in his face.

How often Jesus has been crucified in the house of those who call themselves his friends! How often the church has been put on the block by those who are, professedly, her servants!

Caiaphas tried to hide his lack of moral sense under the guise of patriotism. “If we let Jesus alone,” he said, “the Romans will come and take away our place and nation.” The old hypocrite! Israel was already a subject nation. And there is absolutely no reason for believing that, if the whole nation, to the last man, had turned to Jesus and had behaved themselves as He would have required them to do, the Romans would have cared one whit.

What Caiaphas, and the others, did not know was that by the course upon which they were entering they were preparing the way for the full outpouring of the vial of God’s wrath through the Romans that would end in the complete destruction of their city, their nation, and their national life forever.

Bear in mind, Jesus knew all that was going on in Jerusalem. He knew what was in the minds and hearts of Annas and Caiaphas. He knew their plan. He knew what the outcome was going to be. And yet in the face of all this in a few weeks He set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. His love for the children of men, His desire to save them, was stronger than His fear of death.

Now we come to what is, in reality, the very heart of our text. What we have said before is only introduction. This fundamental thing is the unconscious prophecy of Caiaphas: “Ye do not take account that it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.”

What Caiaphas meant by these words, I have already told you. All that he meant was that, in order to save themselves trouble, they would have to get rid of Jesus, even if they had to murder Him. But all unknown to Caiaphas he was delivering a real prophecy of the kingdom of God. It was another instance of the wrath of man being Made to praise God.

“One man should die for the people” — yes, that was God’s plan; but Caiaphas did not know it. The process of giving His life, not only for Israel, but the world, had begun in Jesus’ incarnation. He had given His best to and for the people in His ministry. And now Jesus was going to crown His ministry by actually dying on the cross for the salvation of the world. In his ignorance and malice Caiaphas had determined on doing the thing without which the world would not have been redeemed.

Annas had been high priest. Caiaphas was high priest. The one had been, the other was, at the head of God’s own church. Of all the men in Israel, of all the men in the world, they should have best known Jesus Christ, who He was, and the purpose for which He had come into the world. All the prophecies of their great book, the Old Testament Scriptures, pointed to Him. All their great services were based on Him as their reality. Jesus Christ was the One typified in all their sacrifices. But they knew nothing of Him. In their attitude of mind and heart, they could not know anything of a spiritual nature. The prophecy of Isaiah fifty-three was an insoluble riddle to them. That Israel was to have, and was supposed to expect a spiritual, or religious, Messiah at all was, probably, beyond their ken. These men never knew that all the sacrifices, about the prices of which they were haggling, were all signs and symbols of the Christ now in their midst and of the salvation to be prepared by Him. But now the Spirit of God took these words of Caiaphas



and had them written into the sacred record as a prophecy of the death of Jesus, not only for Israel but for all the world. Yes, Jesus was going to die even for Annas and Caiaphas.

## One For All

I want to close tonight with the thought Caiaphas so unwittingly expressed — One dying for all. The Scripture elsewhere is full of it — Jesus giving Himself, His very life, His all, for all; for you, for me, for everyone.

Jesus made it possible for every soul to be saved. If anyone is not saved, it will not be Jesus' fault. Annas could have been saved; Caiaphas could have been saved; Judas could have been saved. Indeed, Jesus did all that was necessary for them to be saved. The only trouble was that they would not accept it, profit by it.

There is one indispensable condition of salvation. To be saved, everyone must repent of his sins and believe in Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient Savior. "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me" (John 14:6). "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Jesus was condemned by godless men, godless men at the head of the church. But though Jesus was condemned to death by godless men doing the will of the devil — all unknowingly, they were carrying out the sovereign and eternal will of God for man's salvation.

Let us go home tonight pondering the following passages. There are many others like them. Remember that while they are the words of Isaiah, Peter, and Paul, they are much more: they are the Words indicted by the Spirit of God Himself: "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was wounded for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:4-5).

"Who *His own self* bare *our sins* in *His own body* on the tree, that we, having died unto sins, should live unto righteousness; by *whose stripes ye were healed*" (1 Peter 2:24).

Surely nothing could more plainly tell us the story of the way of salvation; the story of the One for the many, the One for all, the One for each; for you, for me.

I have given these words no interpretation. They do not need it. They are God's words. To build on them is the one way to assurance of salvation. I add just one more passage: "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). The thought added in this passage is that Jesus still lives, still has the same interest in our salvation, still puts forth His divine power to make effective in us what He once did for us. >"Under an Eastern sky,

>Amid a rabble cry,  
>A Man went forth to die,  
> For me!

Thorn-crowned His blessed head,  
Blood-stained His every tread,  
Cross-laden on He sped,  
For me!

Pierced glow His hands and feet,  
Three hours o'er Him did beat,  
Fierce rays of noon-tide heat,  
For me!

Thus wert Thou made all mine;  
Lord, make me wholly Thine;  
Give grace and strength divine,  
To me!

In thought and word and deed,  
Thy will to do; oh! lead my feet,  
E'en though they bleed,  
To Thee!"

## Prayer

God of all grace, look down upon us in mercy. As a result of what we have seen and heard in Thy holy Word tonight we are humbled in the dust, and we have been made fearful of ourselves.

We have seen how those who stood at the very head of the church of old so far forgot Thee, and themselves, and all truth and justice and righteous-

ness, and were so filled with jealousy and malice and hatred that they decreed the death of Thy Son.

In the face of such men and such deeds, O Lord, who can trust himself? Of ourselves, we are no better than they were. If we have been saved from such, it has been by Thy grace. Thou hast shown us that the natural human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. In our hearts we know that Thou speakest the truth when Thou dost declare that “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

Father of mercies, God of all grace, give us Thy Holy Spirit that we may see ourselves as we really are, that we may come to know what sin really is, our own sins of omission and commission. Help us to face them, name them, number them, measure them; and to do this in the light of the cross that sin raised on the earth. And teach us to hate them as they ought to be hated. Give us O God, a perfect repentance that Thou mayest give us a perfect pardon. O Father, help us to believe, in the light of the upraised cross to believe, “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

O Thou Christ of the cross, Thou who art the life of all who live; the helper of all the helpless who flee to Thee; the hope of all who cry to Thee, cleanse us from our sins that we may be clean. Purge our minds of every thought displeasing to Thee. Cast out of our hearts every impure desire. Burn out of our flesh every unholy passion. Support us in every temptation. Teach us, O Spirit of God, to love all that is good, and true, and pure, and beautiful. And bring us at last, with all Thy children, into possession of the everlasting good. We ask it alone in the name of Jesus, Thy Son, our Savior. Amen.

# 3. Two Rebukes

## Scripture Lesson

When Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah; and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God...

From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. — Matt. 16:13-16; 21-23

And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose or forfeit his own self? For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in his own glory, and the glory of the Father, and of the holy angels. — Luke 9:23-26

## Text

From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples, that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall never

be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumbling-block unto me: for thou mindest not the things of God, but the things of men. — Matt. 16:21-23

### **Prayer**

Lord Christ, take the scales from our eyes that we may see clearly; the cobwebs from our minds that we may understand. We see Thee in the way, Thy face set steadfastly toward Jerusalem. We see thee betrayed, condemned, crucified; but, like Peter of old, by nature we are inclined to be too proud and stubborn to believe that all this really needed to be done for us. We believe, Lord; help Thou our unbelief. Help us, O Christ, to see sin as Thou dost see it, in the light of the cross. Melt our cold hearts. Take away our pride. And then help us to see, O loving Son of the loving Father, the love, Heaven high, world wide, deep as the depths of the sea, that led Thee to endure all this for us. And help us, in this hour, O Christ, humbly, penitently, believingly, to draw near to Thee; and then, before we can speak our faltering word of confession, Thou wilt apply the pardoning blood that cleanses from all sin. Praise be to Thee, forever, O Christ. Amen.

## **Two Rebukes**

OUR series of Lenten texts presents a wide range of subjects, but there is a central and vital bond of unity. In the center of every picture stands Jesus, His face illumined but serious; set with steadfast determination toward Jerusalem and the cross. Jesus knew full well all that awaited Him there — Gethsemane, betrayal, the cross, Joseph's garden. In spite of all this, there was not only a holy light in Jesus' face as He went forward, the light of a holy purpose but a holy joy as well. This was the Father's will that He was fulfilling. It was His own will as well. Only this way could that be wrought that was needful for human good. And Jesus would go, in fact did go, through hell, as a conqueror, to save His people, because He loved them.

The other side of the Lenten picture is a rather conglomerate, kaleidoscopic one. It presents a considerable group of people, representative of many classes. Some were outspoken enemies of Jesus — bitter, sardonic demonic, determined on one thing — His death. Some were friends of Jesus,

well meaning, most of them, but lacking in understanding of Him, lacking that resoluteness of will, that settled faith, that can lead a weak and faltering body to heights of sacrificial devotion, and service.

Last Wednesday evening we made a study of several of Jesus' enemies, among them especially Annas and Caiaphas. By virtue of their office and the heritage they represented Annas and Caiaphas should have been Jesus' best friends, His strongest, ablest advocates. They had the native ability for such a career. And the grace of God would have been theirs had they sought it. Instead, from the outset, they assumed an attitude of malignant hatred. Possessed of a great religiosity, these men knew nothing of grace; they had never been born again.

Tonight we are going to deal with a group of Jesus' best friends, loving and desirous of being loyal, but still lacking very much in understanding and in faith and that strength of character and unquestioning devotion that were to be their heritage in the days after the resurrection and Pentecost.

In the brief story of our text we have two rebukes. One is a rebuke of Jesus by Peter; the other is a rebuke of Peter by Jesus. This gives me my brief subject — *Two Rebukes*.

## **Man's Rebuke Of God**

Jesus and the twelve had just had a wonderful experience up in the north country. Jesus had led them up into Phoenicia, into the region of Tyre and Sidon, where He had made a profound impression. And He had now led them back to the upper regions of Galilee.

It was well on in the third year of Jesus' ministry. Up to this time there was one vitally important subject on which He had not directly or plainly said much to his disciples, namely, His death. Jesus knew all about it, and He had spoken to them about it in veiled, mystic, figurative language. He had spoken of the temple of His body being destroyed and raised the third day (John 2:19). He had said the time would come when He would be lifted up as the serpent had been raised up in the wilderness (John 3:14). He told them He would give His flesh, His life, for the life of the world (John 5). Many other things of similar import Jesus said to them. But the plain recital of the actual fact Jesus had not given His disciples, because they were not yet able to stand it and He did not want to alienate them. They were, even yet, only apostles in the making.

Now the time had come when the disciples had to be told what was coming. The time was near at hand for the last journey to Jerusalem. These men needed to know something of the nature of the issue at hand before they faced the real facts.

Just before the conversation of our text, probably as a preparation for it, Jesus had asked the disciples two memorable questions: First, "Who do men say that I the Son of man am?" In reply, they gave the answer bruited by Herod Antipas and repeated by others — "John the Baptist." "Others," they said, "think you are Elijah, returned," according to widespread Jewish expectancy, to prepare the way of the Messiah. "And still others," said these men, "think you are Jeremiah, one of the most gentle of the prophets." "So that is what the people think," said Jesus; "but what do you men, my disciples, think?" This was the point about which, at the time, Jesus was most concerned.

These men had been with Jesus nearly three years. They had pondered again and again His works of mercy. They had seen Him restore to life the ruler's daughter at Capernaum; they had seen Him call Lazarus from the grave at Bethany; they had seen Him drive the legion of devils out of the man of Gadara; they had seen Him feed the famishing multitude; they had heard His prayers to His heavenly Father, His words of compassionate mercy to His fellow-men; they had associated with Jesus intimately, in the home, on the road, in hours of retirement, amid the approving shouts of the multitude and when the mob hurled its curses. They knew Jesus as a real brother man, with human appetites like themselves, only in perfect control; but apart from His miracles and His teaching there was something they could not explain in terms of the purely human. So when Jesus asked, "But who say ye that I am?" Peter, without hesitation, rejoined, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And all the disciples joined in Peter's confession.

Keep these words of the disciples in mind. "Thou art the Son of God." This was their reasoned conclusion, based on three years' experience with Jesus. Jesus' words, His deeds, His life, determined this conclusion — "The Son of God!" "The Son of God!"

Is this your settled conviction? And mine? A conviction nothing can shake? If so, it should be determinative of many things.

This was the time for which Jesus had long been looking. Now He could do some plain speaking If they really believed that He was the Son of God,

He could tell them the full, plain truth about what was soon to happen. So at the first opportune moment “Jesus began to show unto the disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up.”

Bear in mind, these men had just said, “Thou art the Son of God.” And they really believed it. They were building everything on it. But, alas, man at best is a bundle of contradictions. His vision of things is limited. His understanding is partial. His selfish plans warp his judgment. These disciples wanted Jesus to be the Son of God. Their plans required that He be God. But if Jesus died on the cross, that would knock the foundation right out from under their plans. Jesus was to be a king. He was to rule in glory over Israel. Hence Jesus’ death would not fit into this, their program. You see, these men were still thinking about a national, temporal kingdom. So Peter, the usual spokesman, turned to Jesus. He was so agitated, so horrified, at what Jesus had said that he actually laid hold of Him, and, almost shaking Him, impetuously cried out, “Lord, this shall never be unto Thee!”

Let us stop right here for a moment. Let us ponder the really monstrous thing that here confronted us, on the part of the Apostles. What it amounts to is really this: in effect they were saying, “You are the Son of God.” So they said to Jesus in one breath, “But you do not know what you are saying,” or, “You are not telling the truth;” is what they, in effect, said in the next breath.

It is a strange, strange picture — man, little man, “picayune” man, rebuking the eternal Son of God.

Man rebuking God! At first thought we are horrified. And it is horrible. But people are doing it continually. Jesus says, “I am the Son of God,” “I and my Father are One.” And men say — some professing Christians — “It is not true; you are only a man.” Jesus says, “I must die to save the world from its sin; no man cometh to the Father but by Me, the Christ of the cross.” And men say, “No; you died because you were a little stubborn in your idealism; you died only because your enemies hated you. We do not need even a God to die for us. We can take care of ourselves.”

And there are many other folk, some of whom think they are pretty good Christians, who are doing, in their way, just what Peter did — rebuking God. God says, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, for the study of God’s Word, for worship.” Remember, it is God who says this. But when we please, we simply



say, not in word, but in deed, “I do as I please; I will stay in bed all Sunday morning instead of going to church if I want to; I will read the Sunday paper instead of the Bible if I want to.” Please tell me what is this but rebuking God, telling Him to mind me, own business, that you are going to do as you please?

God says, “Love your neighbor; be at peace with him; do not hate him; do not quarrel with him.” And how often, again of course not in word, but effect, men say to God, “Stand aside, please; this is our private little war. We are abundantly able to take care of it ourselves.” And so it is with many, many other things.

Rebuking God! Yes, many of us are doing it every day. We find fault with the way God does things. We question His love for us. We doubt His promises. We defy His demands. In contradiction of God’s Word, we formulate our own plan of salvation. In a good many things we act as if we think we know much better how things ought to be run and what is good for us than does God.

Let us now return to Peter’s rebuke of Jesus. But before we proceed, I want to say, let us not be too hard on poor Peter. Peter was not nearly as guilty as we would be if we did the same thing. Peter, up to this time, never had the opportunity of knowing what we know. There are a good many things we know in the light of Good Friday and Easter that Peter at this time did not know. Peter should have believed when Jesus spoke; he should have believed it just because Jesus said it, especially after he had made his confession that Jesus is the Son of God. But what Jesus had said was so diametrically opposed to all that Peter had been thinking and planning about the future kingdom that he just could not make sense of it.

Beside all this, though it is no real excuse, I think there is no doubt that part of Peter’s objection to what Jesus had told them was based on his love for Jesus. Peter really loved Jesus. It was not yet the most intelligent kind of love, speaking from a Christian point of view. But Peter did not want to see Jesus subjected to shame, suffering, and death. Jesus was Peter’s friend, and Peter felt that he could not stand for such treatment of a friend.

Besides, as Peter had just declared, was not Jesus the Son of God? And Peter could not conceive how the Son of God, who had so recently proved Himself to be the Lord of life and death, could be subjected to ignominy, suffering, and death. A cross, and death upon it, was altogether out of harmony with all they had come to believe of the nature of Jesus and His king-

dom. The Son of God! Did this not mean life, power, rule, victory, glory? No; Jesus could not die. That, thought Peter, would be a direct disproof of His claims; the death of hope for them.

These were the surface thoughts and feelings that motivated the rebuke Peter voiced against Jesus. But they do not sound the depths of that which led to it. Fundamentally Peter's rebuke showed a colossal ignorance of man's real condition, or the utter destroying power of sin, of the lengths to which God would, indeed, have to go, if man was to be redeemed and saved. God, in Jesus, the God-man, would have to endure what man should have endured; He would have to pay what man could not pay if man were to go free. It is just as hard for many people to believe this today as it was for Peter.

Playing a part in Peter's rebuke was no doubt the natural recoil of human nature against anything in the nature of suffering and sacrifice. It is difficult to understand that, in the present condition of things, something of this kind may be a necessary part of the discipline that fits man for his destiny. It is often very difficult for us to trust the knowledge, love, and wisdom of God when He allows the discipline of disappointment and suffering to come into our lives.

## **God's Rebuke Of Man**

Ignorance is no excuse in the eyes of the law, either of man or God. It may, it often does, lessen the penalty, but it never abrogates it. Peter's ignorance, his refusal to believe what seemed to him the impossible, did not save him from the most scathing kind of a rebuke. When Jesus heard Peter's rebuke, He turned, and, if it had not been Jesus, I would say, said sharply, "Get thee behind me, Satan." I think this is the severest rebuke Jesus ever gave any man. And He gave it to a friend, one He loved, one who was a member of the inner circle of disciples. Surely it must have been a grievous offense; surely Jesus must have been deeply hurt. It must have been wholly justified.

To get the full weight and significance of this rebuke, we need to go back to that important incident, part of which I mentioned before. After Peter, in answer to Jesus' question as to who they thought He was, replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus had said, "Blessed art thou, Peter, flesh and blood have not revealed this to you; but my Father who is in heaven. I also say unto thee that thou art Peter, and upon this rock

I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” After such a commendation and promise, to turn upon this same man and call him “Satan,” and a stumbling-block to Him, indicates that Jesus considered this one of the most grievous of offenses. It behooves us to try to understand it, that we may escape the same offense.

What was the matter with Peter’s well-meant suggestion to Jesus that He should avoid the cross? Unknown to Peter, he was repeating, in a different form, and prompted by a different motive, the temptation the devil presented to Jesus in the wilderness. Here Satan showed Jesus a panoramic sketch of the nations. “See these,” he said; “why do you not strive for something worth while? With your power, why are you going around like a poor man? Why do you submit to all this shame and suffering? Own my sway, fall in with my way of doing things, and you shall rule all things; you shall, indeed, be a king.”

Had Jesus accepted Satan’s offer of a world-kingdom, of worldly glory and rewards, He might have escaped the cross, its shame and suffering, but God’s plan of a world redemption and a possible world salvation would have been effectually thwarted. This is not what Peter wanted when he insisted that Jesus should sidestep the cross, but this would have been the inevitable result.

If Jesus had fallen in with Peter’s suggestion that He shun the cross, He would have lost all that was highest and best in His own life. In vs. 25, just following our text, Jesus said: “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” There is no question that this punitive judgment would have applied to Him had He turned aside from the cross. He came down from heaven to provide salvation for the world; between Him and a possible saved world, and the throne, stood the cross. There was no way of reaching the goal for which He came but by the cross. Refusing that cross, the world would have been unredeemed; His own life would have been a failure, His throne unattainable.

In rebuking Jesus, Peter was rebuking Him for the very thing for which, in his heart, he, Peter, was hoping and praying. Peter wanted to be a child of God. He wanted God’s kingdom established. He wanted to come to that blessed immortality that was the hope of all the true Israel before Christ and since. But in his ignorance Peter would have prevented the only thing that could make this possible — a Savior crucified. And men today, in taking up with all kinds of fads and fancies and accepting all kinds of theories at vari-

ance with the simple gospel of Christ crucified, are, in substance, doing the very thing Peter did.

This particular text does not tell us why the cross of Christ was necessary. It does not tell us how the cross met the needs of the situation in human life that Jesus was facing as the world's Redeemer. It does not tell specifically just what was accomplished by Christ's death on the cross. In fact, nowhere is this specifically revealed. But it does most clearly and emphatically set forth that in the mind of Jesus there was a divine necessity for the cross in the plan of God for man's salvation. With this we should be satisfied.

May we not firmly believe, on the basis of this text alone, that in fully meeting this divine necessity as the last great act of His earthly service for man, that, somehow, Jesus met the last full measure of our need, that hereby Jesus met the curse and penalty of our sin to the last iota of its utmost demand, that it was met for me, for you, for all, that the way was opened into the life of man, for the surging, cleansing, rebuilding, perfecting stream of the life of God?

So far as I am concerned, if there was not another word in the gospel record about the need and purpose of the cross of Christ, and the Christ of the cross, this one unquestioned historic record would fully satisfy me that the cross of Christ was, somehow, necessary for man's salvation.

Peter, a man, well meaning, but only a frail, vacillating man, rebuking the Christ, the Son of God! What a sight for men and angels! "What an outrage!" we are all ready to say. And nearly everyone is ready to feel some sense of righteous indignation at Peter because of his ignorance and presumption. We easily feel that Christ's stern rebuke was wholly justified. You know, throwing brickbats at other folk is a kind of self-justification. Besides, for the time being, it keeps others from investigating us too closely. But how about those who, in various ways, are continually doing the same thing in the face of a hundredfold clearer light than Peter, up to this time, ever possessed?

In the days after the crucifixion and resurrection, Paul, writing to the Corinthians, spoke of those to whom the word of the cross is foolishness. To the Galatians he spoke of those to whom the cross is an offense. Who are those to whom the cross is foolishness and hence an offense? Not wholly irreligious men. Not those wholly unconcerned about salvation. They are those who do not want to hear anything of a salvation that had come from a

crucified Nazarene. They are those who want to gain release from guilt by a self-imposed regime of discipline; those who expect to work out a righteousness satisfying to God and sufficient to gain admittance to heaven by climbing the steep and stony ascent of human endeavor, unshriven.

The world is full of such people today. And there are many, many of them in the church, men and women who somehow expect to get to heaven by their own efforts; those who have never been willing to sing, “In my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.” These people, with all their pretended earnestness and piety, in deed, if not in word, are doing the very thing Peter did — rebuking Jesus for presuming to declare that His death was necessary to man’s salvation. And I am wondering whether Jesus is not saying to them, as He did to Peter, “Thou art an offense unto me.”

Let us get rid of this complex of everlastingly saying with respect to God and His Christ, “How can this be so?” To have the benefits of Christ’s redemptive death, to stand in justified relationship with God, we do not have to understand how the cross made this possible. All that is required of us is that we believe.

“Jesus began to shew unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed... Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.”

These are serious words. Let us take them home to ourselves as a serious warning that Men cannot deal lightly with God’s holy Word. Let us learn from these words how serious a thing is human sin and salvation, else Jesus would not have gone to such lengths to cure the one and bestow the other. Give us faith, O Lord, to believe that Thou didst know the need of what Thou wast doing in going to the cross. Help us to accept this service of Thine as the highest expression of the wisdom and love of God, the one way to a completed redemption. Make us willing, O Lord, in our feeble measure, to share the cross of Christ, willingly, patiently, victoriously; for of such it is written, “To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev. 3:21).

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, in this evening hour we have been sitting at Thy feet listening to Thy Word; by the abiding, enlightening presence of the Holy Spirit, may we profit by what we have heard.

As we listen to Thy Word, as we behold Thee on the way to Gethsemane, and Calvary, we marvel at the measure of Thy love for us, O Christ, and at the measure of Thy endurance for our sakes.

Lord, we are weak, and withal presumptuous. Thou dost tell us what Thou art going to do for us, that having lived for us Thou art going to die for us; and, like Peter of old, in our short-sighted ignorance, we presume to correct Thee. Lord, we have nothing but ignorance, and weakness, and arrogance; but what matters it, gracious Lord, so long as we have Thee, so long as we can seek Thee with the assurance of finding Thee, and in Thee all that is lacking in ourselves?

When we come with our confessions Thou dost meet us with eternal forgiveness and renewal, because we come to Thee at the foot of the cross and speak the all-prevailing name.

All unworthy as we are, O Christ, we come to Thee. Come Thou to us according to the need of each life. Rule over us according to the sweet sovereignty of Thy love. Draw near to us in our blindness and weakness. Draw us ever nearer to Thee with the tender compulsion of Thy grace.

We are ever surrounded by temptations. They come from within. They come from the evil one who seeks our destruction. Some have not been spared the whirlwind or the raging storm. Not one has been spared some form of trial. They come to test our faith and the security of the foundation on which we stand. It is not of our merit that we stand. It is of Thy mercies, O Lord, that we are not consumed. Thou didst not allow our feet wholly to slip or our faith to be eclipsed.

O Lord Christ, go with us as we travel the steep ascents of life. Comfort when our distress is keenest. Support us when else we would stumble and fall. In Thy companionship may we forget our weariness and lose our fears. Take the life of each of us into Thy hands. We have covered them with shame; Thou hast filled them with grace. Keep us in Thy grace. Help us to realize that around us are the everlasting arms. Help us to face the years yet unborn with courage, because we know that we can meet them in Thy strength and love. And to Thee, O Christ, be the praise and the glory forever. Amen.

# 4. Peter, Cowardice And Courage

## Scripture Lesson

And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and there come together with him all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes. And Peter followed him afar off, even within, into the court of the high priest; and he was sitting with the officers, and warming himself in the light of the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council sought witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found it not. For many bare false witness against him, and their witness agreed not together. — Mark 14:53-56

Now Peter was sitting without in the court: and a maid came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus the Galilean. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and saith unto them that were there, This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I know not the man. And after a little while they that stood by came and said to Peter, Of a truth thou also art one of them; for thy speech maketh thee known. Then began he to curse and to swear, I know not the man. And straightway the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly. — Matt. 26:69-75

So when they had broken their fast, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again a second time, Simon, son of John, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Tend my sheep. — John 21:15-16 56

And they seized him, and led him away, and brought him into the high priest's house. But Peter followed afar off. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the court, and sat down together, Peter sat in the midst of them. And a certain maid seeing him as he sat in the light of the fire, and looking steadfastly upon him, said, This man also was with him. But he denied, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou also art one of them. But Peter said, Man, I am not. And after the space of about one hour another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean. But Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how that he said unto him, Before the cock crow this day thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly. — Luke 22:54-62

### **Prayer**

Our Father, who art in heaven, only because of this name, gracious God, do we poor sinners, whose sins are of scarlet hue in grievousness, and like the sands of the sea in number; only because of this name do we dare to come into Thy presence. Have mercy upon us, O God. Thou desirest not the death of a sinner, but that the sinner, by Thy gracious help, turn from his sins and live; so forgive, Thou God of all grace.

O God, the Father in heaven; O God, the Son, Redeemer of the world; O God, the Holy Ghost; have mercy upon us. From all sin, from all error, from all evil — Good Lord, deliver us. Lord Jesus, by Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy cross and passion, help us, good Lord. O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us and grant us Thy peace. Amen.

## **Peter, Cowardice And Courage**

SO FAR in our Lenten studies, we have been considering some of the elementary fundamental principles, divine and human, determining the Passion. On



God's side there were love, grace, resignation, holy determination, the will to save. On man's side they were mostly ignorance, frailty, weakness, sin.

In our first lesson we had, in action, a picture of the mind of Jesus, a portrayal of the set of His soul. With resolute face, with firm step, Jesus set Himself to go to Jerusalem to meet the predetermined ordeal necessary to man's salvation. Every move indicated that He was resolutely bent on carrying out the Father's will in this matter, which was also His will.

Then we took a look at the attitude of the Jewish religious leaders at Jerusalem. They were eminent men, men with qualities of leadership, but men who had prostituted the holiest in religion and the highest in human life to the furtherance of their own baser passions. These men were just about as determined as Jesus was; but they were determined to get rid of Him, to get rid of Him at the cost of every principle of humanity, of truth, and righteousness.

Last week we had a close-up view of some of Jesus' best friends, His closest followers, the Apostles. These were, we should say, good men, well-meaning men, but as yet, poorly informed, lacking in judgment, and poorly developed in a moral and spiritual sense. These were men of high hopes, but their hopes were built on a faulty foundation. They had religious plans — pretentious religious plans — but their plans could not pass muster with God because they could in no case meet the issue. These men loved Jesus but it was as yet largely a mere human love and hence not wise. They were desirous of seeing the kingdom of God established on earth but their ideas were altogether at variance with Jesus' ideas of the kingdom of God. As a result these men found themselves at variance with Jesus on all the biggest problems of life, and religion and poor and weak in every crisis. It is always so with men when they think they know things better than does God.

In the two classes of people mentioned, the high priests and their associates represented the devil and the world in the church, operating under the guise of religion. This often happens. Against them the true church needs to be eternally, on guard. These secret enemies, at times even, perhaps, self-deceived, are ten times more dangerous and harmful to the church of God than open enemies on the outside. Many a Caiaphas, wearing the ephod of the high priest; many a Peter, not yet come to Pentecost; does the church of God more harm than a Pilate or a Nero. Let us keep our eyes open, not only for the other fellow, but for ourselves. Let us earnestly seek to keep ourselves under the enlightening and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

Without Him, like Peter, in earnest ignorance, and unconscious unbelief, we may do untold harm to the kingdom of God. There is only one source of truth and light, God's Word, just as God gave it.

With the lessons we have now had the stage is well set for some of the Passion scenes themselves. And our text for tonight thrusts us into the very midst of the Passion story.

At the time of which our text speaks, the two great historic feasts in the upper room in the Holy City had been celebrated. The soul-trying experiences of Gethsemane were at an end. Jesus had been taken prisoner and led away in bonds. His trial was on in the high priest's palace.

There are two chief figures presented in our text for tonight. The central, outstanding, commanding figure is Jesus. A prisoner, possibly in bonds apparently loath to speak, Jesus dominates the scene. Men always, everywhere, appear in their true stature and are judged as they appear in the presence of Jesus Christ.

The active, voluble figure of our text tonight is Peter, the one whom, as we heard last Wednesday evening, dared to rebuke Jesus to His face. Tonight Peter was not so daring. The scene shifted. Jesus, his trusted Master, was a prisoner. His enemies, and Peter's enemies, seemed to have the upper hand. And Peter, though the second of the Twelve who dared to follow Jesus into the high priest's palace after He had been taken prisoner, for which we give him due credit, was very much dejected, and, for Peter, singularly quiet. But, later, when cornered and charged with being a follower and accomplice of Jesus, Peter blustered and swore that he did not even know Jesus.

At this point it would be comparatively easy to step in and tear Peter to pieces, to denounce him as a scoundrel and knave. That is the way people often do when they want to raise a dust and divert attention from their own shortcomings. Beyond question, Peter does appear in a very unfavorable light. And he was much at fault. But it is much easier to find fault, rebuke, and condemn, than it is to understand and seek out the lessons whereby we may ourselves profit.

In this evening hour of truth seeking and self-searching let us not too easily excuse either Peter or ourselves. On the other hand, especially so far as others are concerned, let us not condemn beyond the limits of truth and justice. Let us look at this incident so that we may all learn the lesson of common human frailty and learn where it alone may be cured. Let us go to

the fountainhead where alone life may become strong, courageous sacrificial.

I am going to take for my subject, and I am asking you seriously to consider it with me, these two far-reaching words — *Cowardice and Courage*.

## **Peter**

I am not going to begin or end by bringing railing accusations against Peter; let us rather seek to know him, understand him. Peter is one of the best known names in the New Testament. It is found there one hundred and sixty times. In the Apostolic band, he was the leader, the spokesman. Mark wrote the Second Gospel; it bears his name; but it is quite generally conceded that it is the Gospel according to Peter, that he furnished the material for it and not improbably supervised even the writing of it. There are two Epistles that rightly bear Peter's name. Peter stands out in the thought-life of the Christian world, perhaps, more prominently than any other Apostle, save Paul.

In spite of all this, we really know comparatively little about the details of his early life, and not a little of the activity of his later life is hidden in the enveloping shadows of uncertainty. We know that Peter's father's name was Jonas, and that Andrew was his brother; that, like his father before him, he was a commercial fisherman on the Sea of Galilee; that he was, probably, a man of some little means; that he was, so far as we know, the only one of the Apostolic band who ever married; a rather strange coincidence, in the light of later history. From tradition, not the Bible, we learn that Peter's wife's name was Perpetua, and that she became one of the first Christian martyrs. With the exception of a few outstanding incidents recorded in the Gospels, quite a few of them not favorable, and a few of them decidedly unfavorable, this is all we know about Peter up to the Day of Pentecost.

Peter's fault was grievous, wholly unjustifiable. I am not going to make any excuses for it. But after all it was human, understandable. And without excusing Peter, and without the least desire to give him a white-wash, I want to be fair to him.

Another thing quite common — let us not fix our eyes so exclusively on Peter and his weakness; and let us not become so indignant in our discussion and denunciation of Peter's fault, that we fail honestly to try to put ourselves in his place and ask ourselves, just as honestly, whether had we been

in his place we might not have behaved just as badly or even worse than did Peter.

It would be an easy thing for all of us to join in saying, “Peter, what a coward you were that night! What little faith you showed! How ungrateful you were! What a mess you made of things!” and let it go at that. That would be the easy, unprofitable way. It will be harder on our pride, but much more profitable in every way, to see in Peter — which he is — an example of universal human frailty, and to ask ourselves whether it is not possible that, with a hundred times less provocation, we may not have denied the Master as shamefully as did Peter, but in some other fashion.

## **Peter’s Cowardice**

At this point in our consideration, let us pause to consider, for a moment, this serious problem of cowardice as applied to Peter. Peter was cowardly that first Good Friday morning but not beyond that of many of the sons of men. Physically, I do not believe that Peter was a coward. Norwood, in his “The Man Who Dared to be God,” pictures Peter as a towering, muscular, vital giant of a man. There is no way I know of proving this contention, but if not overdrawn, it meets my conception of the man. He was a strongly built, sun-tanned fisherman. And I do not believe Peter was lacking in natural vigor or courage. He had little fear of men. In the midst of the roar and danger of the still tumultuous sea, he started out to walk to Jesus on the waves. In Gethsemane, in the midst of the shouting mob, with their clubs and spears, Peter snatched a sword and struck valiantly at the foremost of the onrushing mob. That he did not cleave the head of Malchus, instead of cutting off an ear, was probably not Peter’s fault. Not long before Peter had said to Jesus, “Lord, with Thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death.” And I think he meant it.

There were a number of elements in the circumstances of the hour and Peter’s own makeup that contributed to Peter’s downfall, his cowardice, his denial. First of all, the unexpected, the impossible, had happened. Jesus was a prisoner in the hands of his bitter enemies. How could this happen to Him whom He had just recently confessed the Son of God!

You remember the lesson of last Wednesday evening. Jesus had told His disciples that He was on His way to Jerusalem, and that when He got there His enemies were going to take Him, condemn Him kill Him. When Peter

heard this he took Jesus by the arm, and, in heated remonstrance, cried out, "Master, this cannot be true. You are the Son of God. What can those people in Jerusalem do to you, the Son of God? Besides, do you not know that we have plans, plans of which you are the center? Have you forgotten about the kingdom, that real kingdom that is to be set up here in Israel, the kingdom, the throne that you are to occupy, in which kingdom we, your friends, your disciples are to have places of distinction?"

Now Jesus was a prisoner, and all this fine dream had fallen in utter ruin. Peter and his brethren were in a daze. Peter was not himself. What was the trouble? Too much self-confidence; lack of understanding of Jesus' plan; lack of faith in Jesus' word; too much human interpretation of Jesus' words. It is all right to have visions of great things in the world of religion; but they must be founded on the rock of God's revealed, unaltered Word.

The biggest trouble with Peter was that he could not believe in the cross of Christ. It seemed to nullify everything for him. It was, at this time, utterly impossible for him to see how anything good, how any victory, could come from it. Along with this, and partner in it, was Peter's own self-confidence. Quite humanly, he thought he knew everything. Even God could not tell him anything. Satisfied with his own judgment, Peter felt himself capable of any kind of an enterprise. He was yet to learn, by bitter experience, that "pride cometh before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Another big trouble with Peter' and a cause of his defection, was his self-sufficiency. He thought too much of Peter. He did not know human nature, especially his own. "I will go both to prison and to death with you," he said to Jesus. "Though all men forsake you, I never will." Peter was not consciously prevaricating. He simply did not know himself. He did not realize how seriously human life can be stampeded. Self-reliance is a virtue when it is intelligent, when it is grace begotten, and grace controlled, which it was not yet in Peter's case.

## **The Occasion Of Peter's Cowardice**

Let us now turn directly to the incident in which Peter showed himself such a miserable coward. It was in the high-priest's palace, where Jesus was being tried when the mob had taken Jesus prisoner and started off with Him toward Jerusalem. All the Apostles forsook Him and fled. Like frightened

rabbits, they darted off into the darkness. Where most of them went, and what they did, we do not know. Two of the Eleven soon somewhat collected themselves. They began to think of Jesus' plight, of their own pitiable conduct. These two were John and Peter. Especially did Peter have much to think about that would make his face burn with shame. He was the one who had so loudly boasted of loyalty and powers of endurance, and then, after a moment's spirited resistance, he had run away just as fast and just as far as any of the others.

Beware of boasting. It is dangerous business. It is either the result of ignorance or the bluster of concealed cowardice. In any case the boaster usually soon makes a fool of himself.

Somewhere in his impetuous flight, Peter stopped, and found courage to say to himself, "What a fool I have made of myself, what a coward I have proved to be!" Any man who is honest enough, and courageous enough, to admit this even to himself is not all bad, there is still hope for him. There was for Peter. He not only stopped his flight, but better, he started to retrace his steps, to find Jesus' and make amends. On the way, somewhere, he met John, who was also retracing his steps; and together they proceeded to the high-priest's house, where John was known, to find out what they could of the fate of Jesus, and, if possible, render some assistance.

Some chide Peter for daring to thrust himself into this place of danger, thus exposing himself to the assaults that followed. It was, most likely, not a worldly wise action. It was, evidently, a violation of the law of self-preservation. But I am not going to be one to blame Peter for it. It was an element of repentance, or self-reproach; it was love, concern, for Jesus that led Peter to this step. And the man is not hopeless who has these qualities in him.

It was springtime. The wheat in the fields was turning yellow, and hastening to harvest. But, in the late hours of the night, it still grew chilly. And in the courtyard of the palace where Jesus' trial was going on, someone started a small coal fire in a brazier. Around this fire, from time to time, would gather the caretakers of the palace and the loungers of the courtyard. For some reason, Peter drew out of the shadow where he had been standing unobserved, and joined the circle around the fire. Presently a maid, most likely the one who had admitted John and Peter, drew near to the circle around the fire. She looked with surprise into the face of Peter, and said, "You also were with Jesus of Nazareth." Taken by surprise, Peter asserted, "I do not know what you are talking about." Peter's confusion, and evident

resentment at being asked this simple, and probably innocently asked question, served only to arouse suspicion: and presently another girl, probably goaded on by some of her companions, came to the fire, pointed a finger at Peter, and said in a challenging tone, "This is one of them." Again denial leaped to Peter's lips, as it did every time, on this occasion, when the attempt was made to associate him with Jesus.

After an hour of shame, remorse, and bitter inner conflict on Peter's part, a man drew near the fire where Peter was. He was a kinsman of Malchus, whose ear Peter had struck off with his sword out in the garden. This man drew near with a vindictive look on his face, and he snarled at Peter, "Did I not see thee with Him in the Garden?" It was a trying moment. Peter saw the net gathering about his feet. And the old fisherman's habit reasserted itself. With repeated oaths, Peter reaffirmed his ignorance of Jesus, His person, and His mission.

Yes, this was a grievous sin — a sin directly against Jesus' person. And I am not going to seek to excuse Peter. There is no excuse. This was a great fall. It did not have the same results; but in its nature this sin was not far behind that of Judas, the Benedict Arnold of the Apostles, save that it was not premeditated.

## **The Compassionate Christ**

This story of Peter is indeed a sad one. And if this were all there was to tell, what would be the profit of telling it? It could only depress us, remind us of the common human failure, impress us with man's inherent hopelessness, and help drive us all to despair. But there is another side to this story; a side that points to hope and better things. It shows the love of Christ for poor sinners. It is only because of this that the story is worth anything, only because of this that it is told. This other side of this story is the one that tells us of the compassionate Christ, His pity for Peter, His readiness to forgive, His desire and ability to help.

Jesus had foretold Peter of this hour, that Satan was after him, determined to sift him as wheat; that to withstand at all he would need to watch and pray.

We are inclined to think of this experience of Peter as an altogether unusual occurrence. The fact of the matter is that, in one form or another, it is a rather common occurrence in all our lives.

I am sure this story of Peter's unusual failure was recorded for our profit, to correct a common judgment of mankind concerning the wisdom and power of man. If the story of Peter was told us without the part of it that recites his failures, we would be inclined to put him on a pedestal, as many are inclined to do with all the great religious leaders. Indeed, in spite of his serious lapses, Peter, by part of the church, has been almost deified. The next step is to apply to ourselves what we have already applied to the great and near great in the church. And then, soon, we do not need Christ Jesus and His redemption.

The truth is that Peter, John, and all the rest of them, were just human beings such as are we. They had the same inherent weaknesses we have. They were just as subject to temptations as we are. Peter started his Apostolic career on the common human level. Grace alone could save him. And he rose only by the help of Christ Jesus. It is the only way anyone can be saved and rise. So there is hope for us as there was for Peter.

All the while the devil was after Peter in this special assault, Jesus was keeping His eye on Peter, praying for him and throwing His protective influence around him. And at last, when Peter had exhausted his vocabulary of denial, Jesus, who, in the midst of His own troubles, kept mindful of Peter and his peril, turned and looked Peter full in the face. It was as much as to say, "Peter, did I not tell you? Did you hear the cock crow? Well, you have denied me thrice." Jesus' look was not vindictive. It was the look of wounded love, a wound that bled more for the one who inflicted it than for the wound itself.

That one longing look was enough. Peter felt the full force of it. And he read it aright — full of love, of pity, of willingness to help. That look of love accomplished more than all the reprimands and reproaches that could have been heaped on him. It went, like a dagger thrust, straight to his heart. A blood-red wave of shame spread over Peter's face. His conscience upbraided him like the sting of a serpent's tooth. He felt the humiliation of the situation. Still more did he feel the affront he had given Jesus. Peter would have given his life to be able to have recalled the words he had spoken. He was utterly crushed, broken-hearted, and he rushed out into the night, his eyes drowned in tears. Peter was a defeated soul, but he had to become a defeated soul before he could become a victorious soul.

Have you ever had a bad conscience? — a conscience that burned like a coal of fire? — that made you toss restless and sleepless on your bed at



night? — that made you feverish and restless? — that lashed you, and stung you, and would not let you rest? Well, you probably know just a little of what Peter felt this day, and how miserable and worthless life can seem to one thus caught.

## **The Reborn Peter**

This great failure of Peter was, as I see it, the beginning of the real change for the better in Peter's life. From this point on the Peter who had been was ready to begin to grow into the Peter who was to be, Peter as we know him. So it often is with human lives. Men and women have to learn to know their inherent, ever lurking, frailties; their utter incapacity in the face of their utmost resolve; before they become willing to cast themselves on the grace of God in Christ, and accept salvation as His gift.

Before this, I think, Peter had never wept many tears, either for himself or others. He was too self-reliant; he felt himself too strong, too capable of extricating himself from any kind of distressing situation, to weep for himself. What he felt capable of doing for himself, Peter felt others ought to be capable to do themselves; so there was little call for tears for them. In this state of mind and heart, Peter never could have risen very high in the kingdom of God, for at this time Peter lacked understanding of the kingdom as he lacked understanding of himself. And for this fundamental lack, no superficial love for Jesus or devotion to the kingdom could atone. It was because of this that Jesus permitted Satan to wrestle Peter down, down into the pit of utter failure and heartbreak. It was only in this way that Peter could learn to distrust himself and trust Jesus.

“And Peter went out and wept bitterly.” Has there ever been a soul that has really felt the preciousness of being near the Savior? Has there ever been a soul who has risen high in the service of the Lord in His church, who has not done the same thing? David did it, Hosea did it, John the Baptist did it, Peter did it, Saint Augustine did it, Luther did it, Bunyan did it. And he who has not done it, it would seem, just does not truly know either himself or the Christ. Tears do not work the change, but the grace wrought knowledge of sin and the forgiving love of Christ does it.

With the same tender considerateness with which Jesus turned His pleading eyes on Peter on that first Good Friday morning, and broke his heart in order truly to heal it; He had Peter singled out on Easter morn to be the re-

ipient of the resurrection news. “Tell Peter,” said Jesus, “that I have risen, and shall soon see him.” And ere long, up by the old sea, Jesus met Peter, and by due process, that at once humbled and strengthened the stricken Peter, restored him to his Apostolic office. From that time on, but especially after Pentecost, Peter began to grow into the stalwart man of God who deserved to be called “the Rock.” He was henceforth a man not only of an unusual degree of physical courage, but of moral courage as well.

Have we courage? What kind? A courage that blusters and brags, and then, in the crucial moment, fails? Have we the disposition, falsely called courage, that flies up, says cutting things, maybe strikes cruel blows, and then is ashamed, morally ashamed, to confess it and make it good. In the struggle of Edward I of England with his barons over their charter, Edward was not ashamed to stand before his people in Westminster and say, with tears in his eyes, “I have been in the wrong.” Have we been willing to do it? We cannot be Christians and refuse to do it. Let us learn from this incident in Peter’s life not to be ashamed to confess our faults. Let us learn from Jesus’ treatment of Peter to trust His forgiveness.

Was this story not recorded just to give us repentance, faith, hope? It is natural for most folk, could we not honestly say all people, to be, spiritually speaking, proud, self-reliant, haughty. They are either indifferent or they are going to climb up some Jacob’s ladder straight into a self-made heaven. But a careful study of some lessons like those of Peter or a personal experience of it when we sat around the fire in some judgment hall, talked too much, and had been caught and humbled; when we learned to discern Jesus’ hurt, but still encouraging, look and recall the Master’s words, “I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not,” and then, “Son, daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee,” will help us much. This was the great lesson Peter was to learn from his passion experience. And what Jesus did for Peter He waits to do for all of us, for each of us.

Luther, speaking on this incident in Peter’s life, says, “I should like to make clear from every hair of Peter’s head the story of God’s forgiving grace.”

Let us go home tonight pondering two vitally important lessons — one from Peter, one from Jesus. From Peter let us learn how weak, how unstable, how full of sin, human nature is, how utterly unable to redeem itself. From Jesus let us learn the constancy of His love, the sufficiency of His redemption, the certainty of His forgiveness and restoration; and then again

from Peter, the strength of character, the unfaltering courage, the power of achievement that may be ours if we live close to the Christ of the cross.

## Prayer

Our Father God, we have been sitting this evening at the Master's feet. Thy Holy Spirit has been working on our hearts, and we are humbled into the Dust. We have been watching Peter, the man who was with Jesus on Tabor and saw Him transfigured before his eyes; he had seen Him raise the dead; and not many days before this he had himself been impelled to confess, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And now because of the question of a serving maid, he denies that he ever knew Jesus, denies not only once, but thrice; not only denies, but with an oath.

Father, we are not chiding Peter. We are not trying to hide behind him or excuse ourselves because of him. We are humbled; we are made ashamed; we are terrified because of him. In Peter we see ourselves. We, too, are Thy children, but, like Peter, we have fallen again and again. When we should have stood up for Jesus in bold confession, we have been discreetly silent; we have evaded issues. We have denied Jesus, over and over again, by doing what we should not have done; and by our failure to do what we should have done. We have denied Jesus by the unguarded thoughts that surged through our minds and the desires that burned in our hearts. We have denied Him by deeds done under cover of darkness.

O God, what is man that Thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that Thou visitest him? When the tall cedars of Lebanon fall twisted and broken under the blast, how shall it be with us, the feeble ivy clinging to the decaying wall?

Lord Jesus, we are smitten into the Dust. We are ashamed to look up. Tears should fill our eyes to overflowing. But, thanks be to Thee, O Thou thorn-crowned Christ, Thou dost not desert us as we deserve to be left in our shame and misery. It was because of this very thing that Thou didst endure Gethsemane, the Judgment hall, and the cross. O Christ, as upon Peter, turn those eyes of love and mercy ever upon us. May they ever melt our stubborn hearts and bring the tears of regret and penitence to our hearts.

Lord Jesus, we have nothing to bring Thee but our weakness, our shame, our tears. But amid it all, shamefacedly, and with trembling lips, we say,

“Lord, Thou knowest we love Thee; we trust Thee.” Say to us again and again, “Son, daughter, thy sins be forgiven thee.” Amen.

# 5. Choices That Determine Destiny

## Scripture Lesson

Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor. — Matt. 27:1-2

Now Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest. And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders he answered nothing. Then saith Pilate unto him, Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he gave no answer, not even one word: insomuch that the governor marveled greatly. Now at the feast the governor was wont to release unto the multitude one prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him up. And while he was sitting on the judgment-seat his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that righteous man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him. Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. But the governor answered and said unto them, Which of the two will ye that I release unto you? And they said, Barabbas. Pilate saith unto them, What then shall I do unto Jesus who is called Christ? They all say, Let him be crucified. And he said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out exceedingly, saying, Let him be crucified. So when Pilate saw that he prevailed nothing, but rather that a tumult was arising, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, say-

ing, I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye to it. And all the people answered and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. — Matt. 27:11-25

### **Text**

And Pilate called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, and said unto them, Ye brought unto me this man, as one that perverteth the people: and behold, I, having examined him before you, found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: no, nor yet Herod: for he sent him back unto us; and behold, nothing worthy of death hath been done by him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him. But they cried out all together, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: one who for a certain insurrection made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison. And Pilate spake unto them again, desiring to release Jesus; but they shouted, saying, Crucify, crucify him. And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath this man done? I have found no cause for death in him: I will therefore chastise him and release him. But they were urgent with loud voices, asking that he might be crucified. And their voices prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that what they asked should be done. And he released him that for insurrection and murder had been cast into prison, whom they asked for; but Jesus he delivered up to their will. — Luke 23:13-25

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we come into Thy presence in this evening hour. We see Thee thorn-crowned, bound, spit upon; yes, stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But with the eye of faith we see Thee the everlasting Son of God, all beautiful within. Thou didst submit to all this because it was the price Thou didst have to pay, wast willing to pay, for our redemption. This was the measure, is still the measure, of Thy love for us. Lord, increase our faith in Thee. Fan the flame of our feeble, flickering love for Thee that it may burn more steadily and brightly. Keep around us, O Savior divine, Thy strong, everlasting arms. And at last, when life's fitful race is run and life's broken tasks are done open to us the gates of Thy eternal home and receive us, Thy frail, wearied, wandering children, to Thyself. For Thy love's sake we ask it. Amen.

# Choices That Determine Destiny

AT EVERY LENTEN SERVICE we have been sitting in the lengthening shadow of the cross. And at the center of every group we have considered stood Jesus Christ. He may not be the one in every lesson who stands out in the forefront of the picture the lesson presents; He may not be the one most prominent in the action recorded or the number of words spoken. He may not be the one concerning whom we say the most in discussing a particular lesson. Nevertheless, at the center of every lesson, the arbiter of every issue stands Jesus, the Jesus of Holy Week. How could it be otherwise? Jesus is the center of every gospel lesson; yes, of every Scriptural lesson.

We may see how Jesus is the center of every lesson by briefly reviewing the four lessons we have had. On Ash Wednesday our lesson was the story of Jesus going up to Jerusalem for His passion, striding on before the company with such a passion in His heart that it transformed His face and gave significance to all His movements. Jesus here was noticeably the center of the whole group. The next lesson told us of the conference between the high priests and their adherents. Here Caiaphas and Annas seemed to be in the limelight. But it was anxiety about Jesus and His growing popularity and that threat He gave to their prestige that called these men together; so Jesus was again the center of the lesson. Two weeks ago our lesson told us how Peter dared to rebuke Jesus, which seemed to make Peter the more prominent; but it was not so — it was Jesus who gave the final rebuke that brought Peter to his place, if not yet entirely to his senses. Last week, again, it was Peter concerning whom the story was told, the story of his denial; but it was Jesus who brought Peter to his senses and started him on the road to restoration.

In our lesson tonight, five chief figures stand before us — Caiaphas; Pilate; Procula, Pilate's wife; Barabbas, and Jesus. Caiaphas was the accuser, Jesus the accused. Barabbas was a base, insignificant person, but he was preferred to Jesus. Procula was a worthy woman, but she came into prominence because of her interest in Jesus. Pilate, the Roman governor, represented the greatest empire of his day. Jesus was brought a prisoner before Pilate to be tried and sentenced, but in reality, as all the evidence shows, it was Pilate who was on trial before Jesus; not Jesus before Pilate. From every angle, Jesus is the center of this lesson.

All the way around, this lesson presents a series of choices. With the people it was a case of Jesus or Barabbas. With Procula it was a case of taking her ease or espousing the cause of justice. With Pilate it was a case of dealing righteously, or saving his office.

## **Pilate's Choice**

Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, or procurator, of Judea, the southern district of the Holy Land, was appointed to this office about 25 A.D., shortly before Jesus began His public ministry. He was inclined to be tyrannical and was hated by the Jews. Pilate, at the time of our text, was in a trying situation. The Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish ecclesiastical and political power in the Jewish world, had decreed that Jesus must be put to death. But they were powerless to carry out their own sentence. Their Roman masters had taken this prerogative from them. The Jewish rulers still had their courts and could still pronounce sentence, but in cases of capital punishment, the Roman governor had to give his consent before the sentence could be executed.

This is the situation our text presents. The Jewish authorities, under the capable and determined leadership of the chief priests, soon reached their decision — Jesus must die. Under the personal leadership of the chief priests, Jesus was led into the presence of Pilate and pressure was brought to bear on him to get his consent to the execution of the sentence.

Pilate did not want to give consent to Jesus' death. For one thing he did not like the Jewish leaders. They were continually causing him trouble in one way or another, and he did not care to please them by granting them any kind of a request. Pilate was not held in check by any, squeamish dislike for shedding human blood, but the evidence indicates that he was intellectually convinced of Jesus' innocence and that the farther the case proceeded the more fully convinced he became. There is no evidence that Pilate was at all interested in Jesus' religion. He paid scant attention to the claims of his own Roman deities. Pilate knew very little about mercy or pity; but he did seem to have had a certain sense of Roman justice. Knowing something of the unfounded but bitter hatred of the Jewish leaders for Jesus and their relentless persecution of Him, which was responsible for their sentence of condemnation, Pilate did not want to give these men authority to put an innocent man to death.



In the face of this situation, why, then, did not Pilate peremptorily demand that Jesus be set free? There were a number of difficulties in the way. If Pilate released Jesus, the Jews, instigated by the chief priests, would stir up a riot, which would reflect on Pilate's ability as a ruler. Besides, the Jews purposely misconstrued Jesus' claim to kingship so as to make it appear that he was a rival to the Roman emperor. And when Pilate seemed to incline toward just treatment of Jesus the Jews threatened to report this to Rome, to the embarrassment of Pilate.

The result was that Pilate tried a number of expedients, each of which he thought, at the time, would result in setting Jesus free, or at least take from his shoulders the responsibility of Jesus' condemnation. It came to Pilate's mind that Herod, Jewish ruler of Galilee, where Jesus had His home, was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Pilate said to himself, "I will rid myself of this repellent situation; I will send Jesus to Herod, and let him make this decision." But the ruse failed. Herod, though he had no conscientious scruples about anything, speedily sent Jesus back to Pilate without any recommendation.

In the meanwhile, Procula disturbed her husband still more by relating to him her dreams about Jesus and adding a strong personal plea that he have nothing to do with the death of this just man.

Finally, after weighing in his mind all kinds of expedients, Pilate hit upon what he felt was a brilliant idea. He remembered that the Jews had a long standing custom of liberating at the Passover festival some prisoner. He knew that, at the time, they had in prison under sentence of death a vicious, hardened criminal, the notorious Barabbas.

Barabbas, as the name indicates, was the son of a Rabbi, one of the teachers of Israel. In opposition to all the teachings of his father, in defiance of the prayers of his mother, running counter to all the good influences of the society in which he had been reared, Barabbas had broken through the restraints of orderly society and had become a robber and murderer. For a long time he had led a life of violence. He had become thoroughly hardened. The marks of his moral degeneracy were written all over his face in lines of brutal coarseness and cruelty. There was a fierce light in his eyes. Every attitude, every movement of his, was anti-social. The brand of hate and dishonesty was on his brow. This is always the case when lust and hatred rule in the soul. Though Barabbas was a Jew, the Jews had no sympa-

thy for him. They were in hearty agreement with the sentence of death passed on him, the date of the execution of which was near at hand.

Thinking of this, "Here," said the resourceful Pilate to himself, "is my chance. I know how the Jews hate Barabbas. I know how relieved they are that he is in prison and will soon go to his death. I know how repulsive he has grown during these months in prison. Much as the Jews hate Jesus, I am sure they hate Barabbas more. If they have to make a choice between the two, I think they will choose Jesus." No sooner did the thought come to birth in Pilate's mind than he acted on it. "Captain of the Guard," he cried, "go to yonder prison and bring me Barabbas." His command was at once obeyed. Barabbas was a sight to behold. He was filthy. His few mildewed garments were in tatters. Vermin were in his hair. His eyes looked daggers. And even through his matted and filthy beard, coarseness and viciousness could be read in every line of his face.

To the side of this filthy social and moral outcast, this leech on society, this parody of a man, Pilate had Jesus brought. He was clad only in the common peasant garments of the day, but they were scrupulously clean. His face bore the marks of His experiences in recent hours, but on His brow there sat a crown of quiet, noble dignity. One look and the beholder knew that here was the stuff of which gentlemanliness is made. Jesus, too, was in chains. He bore the marks of recent rough treatment, but no king on his throne was ever more dignified, calm, or self-possessed. That which was in Him, an integral part of His life, was shining forth.

To the astonished assembly, Pilate presented this unusual pair. He thought it a master stroke of strategy. And he cried out, "Ye men of Israel, behold these men: make your choice, and the man you choose, according to your custom, shall be set free." In Pilate's mind there was not a shadow of a doubt as to which of these two would be chosen. But Pilate had reckoned without his host. He did not know the mind of the Jewish leaders.

Probably Pilate never received a greater surprise in his life. He was startled. It was as if someone had struck him in the face. He could not believe his ears, though the people's demand was screamed in his face. Pilate began to hedge and argue with the people. He said, "I find no fault in Jesus. If you insist that He be punished, I will scourge Him, and then let Him go." But the more Pilate argued, the more insistent the people became. "If you let Jesus go," they said to Pilate, "you are not Caesar's friend. Give us Barabbas. Away with Jesus! Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate was utterly nonplussed. His fine scheme had failed, and he was not man enough to do the right regardless of consequences. When he said, "I find no fault in Jesus," there was but one thing that, in justice, should have followed, and it was this — Jesus set free. "My soldiers will protect Him, and I will bear any consequences that may follow from doing what is right." But Pilate was not man enough for this. Intellectually convinced of Jesus' innocence, he did not have the moral courage to back up his conviction. He had no definite standard of conduct or sense of moral responsibility. He acquitted and condemned; declared guiltless and then treated as guilty. How he must have despised himself! The trouble was that Pilate was interested only in himself. He knew that if he let Jesus go, the Jews would send a garbled report to Rome and his position would be jeopardized. Pilate's Roman reason said, "After all, what is one life more or less, even the life of Jesus, if, by its sacrifice, I can keep my office, my salary, and honor in the eyes of others?"

So Pilate took a basin of water, washed his hands in the presence of the multitude, and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man; see ye to it." And he turned Jesus over to be crucified. "This righteous man!" Indeed, then why must He die? Why was he not man enough to save Him? "I am innocent!" Innocent! Oh, no, men do not get rid of guilt, men do not acquire character so easily as all that.

Pilate made his choice that Good Friday morning. Unconsciously he had been preparing for it a long time. He made his choice by default, by refusing to do what every dictate of justice demanded he should have done. But it was really a choice. To save his face with the Jews and the Roman emperor, he consigned Jesus to the cross. And, as men always do, he paid for it. Dogged by irresoluteness, Pilate became more and more ruled by expediency. Increasingly he became a moody man filled with remorse. In a few years he was compelled to go to Rome to explain his conduct, and, as a result of the interview, was deposed and banished.

At Luzerne, Switzerland, you look up at a sharply pointed mountain peak. It is called Pilatus. Here, tradition says, Pilate committed suicide by leaping down its precipitous side. This was nearly two thousand years ago; but, still, every Sunday millions of Christians throughout the world repeat this phrase of the Apostle's creed, "Suffered under Pontius Pilate"; thus perpetuating this man's name and deed as the arch-coward and traitor of the

race; a traitor to his own better self, to his fellow-men, to God. Pilate made a choice, and he reaped a destiny — forever.

## **The Choice Of The Jews**

We have seen, directly or indirectly, in every lesson we have had this Lenten season, that Caiaphas and Annas had made their choice; the choice of a plan of life, a choice with respect to Jesus. Weeks before this trial, as we have heard, they had decided that He must die. To achieve this fully determined end, they were ready for perjury and bloodshed. And they won a temporary victory. They succeeded in having Jesus put to death. And now what is the verdict of history? If these men had only known. Masefield, in the “Trial of Jesus,” says that, on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, Caiaphas preached on the theme, “The Desire that Some Brave Man Would Dare to Die for Israel,” and that on Good Friday night, Annas preached on the theme, “Deliverance.” Yes, if these men had only known! That for which they were hoping had come to pass; but their eyes were blinded; they did not know. In later days these men may have been convinced of their mistake, but they never confessed it. And these men’s names were written down by their own countrymen with anathemas. The Christian world loathes them. By the great majority of mankind, they are entirely forgotten.

Barabbas, in early life, had made his choice, and it had brought him ostracism and a sentence of death. True, this was now rescinded and Barabbas was again a free man. Free! Think of it, a man who had lived by crime, whose hands were red with the blood of his fellows; this man, by the connivance of his superiors, and the weakness of Pilate, was set free, his chains stripped from him; while Jesus, who had never spoken a word but to instruct and comfort, who had never laid a hand on a human being but to heal and cheer, was put in chains, sent to death. All this by the choices of men!

Barabbas free! I often wonder what became of him. Did he appreciate his liberty? Did his conscience bother him when he thought of the innocent One who had been forced to take his place on the road to death? Did he, after awhile, follow the crowd that streamed to Calvary, to see Jesus crucified? Did Barabbas note Jesus’ conduct, hear His words, note His prayers? Did he see his two companions in crime crucified? Did he hear the one continue to curse the other begin to pray? Did he hear Jesus assure the latter

that because he had repented, and believed, and prayed, he should be with Him that very day in Paradise?

Barabbas free! Did the returning memory of his venerable father's teaching and example, the thought of his once loved mother's prayers, lead him from Calvary to the old home, to cheer his aged parents' hearts by confessing his sins and starting life anew? If so, this was a new choice.

We do not know what happened to Barabbas. But whatever happened, even if he made a new choice and achieved a better destiny, there was always the memory, and the heartache, of the wrong choice, and the misspent days. It is said an old sage once went about crying, "For five talents of gold, I will teach you the secret of remembering." One day he met a man who answered his cry thus, "Ten talents of gold shalt thou have if thou canst teach me to forget." To forget, to forget — this is the cry of ten thousand times ten thousand souls.

The Jewish people made their choice. If the people had been left to their own thoughts, there is no doubt they would have chosen to set Jesus free, and allowed the law to take its course with Barabbas. But they were fickle. They had no settled convictions. And when the chief priests and their emissaries, hurriedly circulated among the people, whispering, "Choose Barabbas, choose Barabbas," and here and there placed a few small coins, the people were ready to do their bidding. As a result, when Pilate, inwardly rejoicing over what he was sure would be the success of his masterly scheme, confidently put his question, "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?" the multitude, as with one voice, cried out, "Give us Barabbas!"

Well, they had their way; and by their suffrage Jesus died; died to save them and all the world. But by their rejection of Jesus, they forfeited hope; for they had prepared the way for the destruction of their city and temple and the overthrow of their nation. For nineteen hundred years the Jewish people have presented to the world the anomalous spectacle of a people without a homeland or a government, despised by all the world. There is only one explanation of this spectacle — the Jews made the wrong choice when they chose Barabbas and rejected Jesus. This is the outstanding example of all history of what it costs to reject Christ Jesus.

Procula was probably not a Jewess, though some seem to think so. At any rate she made a far-reaching decision on that first Good Friday morning. She had a deep interest in Jesus. How she came to know Him, or how

she knew about Him, I do not know. Masefield makes her say that she had met Him the year before. Whether there is any historic basis for this statement I do not know. At any rate, she knew something about Jesus. Her womanly intuition sensed His deep sincerity, the honesty of His claims, the spirituality of His mission. She believed in Him. And she was neither ashamed nor afraid to affirm it. Procula made a decision and she stood by it. The tradition of the ancient church is unanimous that, after the resurrection, she became an outspoken and prominent Christian. Taking this to be true, here was another decision that determined destiny.

Jesus was a Jew. The greatest, farthest reaching decision ever made on earth or in heaven was the one He made. His choice is summed up in these words, "I come...to do Thy will, O God." It cost Jesus much to stand by His choice, but He never wavered. There were times when Jesus' flesh felt that the burden was almost too heavy, the pain too severe, the price too great; but He caught His breath, took hold of Himself, and cried out, "Father' Thy will be done." And though He could have fled from it all, He stood by, unflinchingly, unfalteringly, to the end. And in so doing Jesus decided destiny — His own, ours, humanity's. True, Jesus had to die to make His choice good. But what of it? Death is not the worst thing in life. It is only a passing incident in the eternal progress of life. Now Jesus is on the throne. He is the hope, the only hope, of the world.

## **Choices Determining Destiny**

There is no question that choices determine destiny. There is no fate, no all-determining power, that decides things for us or against us, whether we choose or not. In spiritual things, in our present state, God must give the power of right choice; but when empowered, we must then choose. God forces no one. God prevents no one. Jesus said to the people of Jerusalem, "How often I would have gathered your children together, but ye would not."

One of the earliest things young people should be taught is the vital importance of making choices, right choices. Anyone with open eyes cannot fail to note how large a part of the lives of successful people is the result of making and sticking to right choices and how large a part of life's failures is the result of making wrong choices, or just the failure to make right choices.

In our inmost lives we are all, very largely, the result of our lifetime of choosing.

All that goes into the making of the life of man has its genesis in small beginnings, and unless interrupted, proceeds along natural lines to its goal. With rational creatures, along this line there are many points of special decision. Here and there it is up to men and women of intelligence and will to say, "I go this way, or that; I go on, or turn back; choose the right, the true, at temporary cost, or the opposite for a temporary gain." God did not put us here as perpetually self-winding clocks. In some things we must be wound up. In others, we must wind ourselves, by God's gracious help.

Now and then there are great choices that must be made by men and nations. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve," said the Lord to Israel. "I have set before you life and death; therefore choose life." This is the issue facing every human being.

The time came when Moses had to make one of these momentous decisions. Before this he had had two loyalties — to Israel and to Egypt. The time came when these two loyalties were in conflict; then Moses had to make a choice. And to choose either horn of the dilemma would cost something. To choose Egypt would mean giving up his kindred, his religion, his hopes of a Promised Land. To choose Israel meant to leave those by whom he had been reared, advanced, honored. But, counting the cost, he did not hesitate. "He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

Heard are the voices,  
Heard are the sages,  
The world's, and the ages.  
Choose well: your choice is  
Brief and yet ageless.

Every day our choices are helping either to make us Or mar us; because life, its pattern and its texture is determined by our choices, often our common, everyday choices. We are all today what we are as a result of our choices. Every choice, or failure to choose, has a twofold result. It reacts on the conscience and the will. To choose the right, do it decisively, and stick to it regardless of cost, gives renewed insight and tone to the conscience and added power to the will. To refuse to choose the recognized right enfeebles both the conscience and the will. To choose the recognized evil makes ev-

ery future choice of the right that much more difficult. Some people seem to spend most of their lives in trying to avoid making decisions. This in itself is a choice, a choice that means increasing feebleness of will, a choice that means letting life go by default. Even an apparently, inconsequential choice may eventually so grip one as to have life-long, yes, eternal consequences.

Once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide,  
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side;  
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight;  
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,  
And the choice goes by forever twixt that darkness and that light.

Often men's choices are written in their faces. It is said that the young man whom da Vinci chose to paint as the face of Christ, some years later served for the face of Judas Iscariot. In the British Museum there are two busts of Nero; one represents him as a young man. Generous impulses, kindly feelings, are portrayed in this reproduction. The other bust represents Nero in later life, when the passions of life had made a beast of him. You can see the change even in the lines of cold marble. This is true to life. The inner life usually writes its history more or less legibly on the face in one's attitude. We have all had the experience of knowing people who were not especially beautiful of face, with the beauty of line, of contour, or color; but when one came to know them they became beautiful, sometimes radiantly so; it was the beauty within shining through; the beauty of goodness of heart, of purity of life; the beauty of loving service unselfishly rendered.

The one great, all-inclusive, all-determining choice of every life is that of which our text tells us — the choice between some Barabbas and Jesus Christ. When the chief priest and the people led by them chose Barabbas and rejected Jesus, by their choice they decided that falsehood, prejudice, and hate should rule in their lives. And it meant failure and destruction forever. Millions of people are following in the footsteps of those ancient Jews. Friends companions in pleasures and in vice, are chosen in preference to Jesus; in defiance to His wishes. Instead of a person, it may be a thing that takes the place of Barabbas. It may be money, or position, or honor, or pleasure. It may be a question of truth or falsehood, of honesty or dishonesty, of candor and deceit, of purity or impurity.

Barabbas or Christ! Most of the nations these days have chosen Barabbas and rejected Jesus. Jealousy, selfish aggrandizement, violence, blood-



shed, are the gods before whom they bow, all unmindful of the fact that a haughty spirit comes before a fall and that “they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.”

Some would like to make a choice for Jesus. There is really an inner urge for the better, the lasting things. But they just cannot bring themselves to the point where they are willing to let some Barabbas go. You remember the story of the rich young ruler. He was a clean-living young man. He loved the better things of life. He had high ideals. One day, breaking through the barriers of class and position, he ran up to Jesus, fell down before Him, and wanted to know what to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus knew this young man’s trouble. It was greed, covetousness. So Jesus told him what he would have to give up, then come and follow Him. The young man could not give up his Barabbas, so he went away from Jesus with a sad heart, but away; and that is the last we ever hear of him. There are thousands like him. Am I, though a professing Christian, in some thing, or things, like him?

Pilate, when in one of his dilemmas, cried out, “What, then, shall I do with Jesus?” There is only one thing to do, the right thing; accept Him as our Savior and Lord. And follow Him as best we can. None of us is perfect. All of us falter at times. None of us measures up to the ideals we have set for ourselves. But, having made our choice, there is only one thing to do — determine that our choice is going to stand and, by the grace of God, follow through as best we can. And Jesus, whose mercy embraced the penitent thief on the cross and brought him safely through to Paradise, will not fail us. This is the reason Jesus gave us a Lent and a Good Friday. Someone tonight may be affected for life, it may be forever, by a choice that is made or refused in this hour.

### **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we find no words adequate to express the feelings that surge through our hearts in this hour.

We know Thee as the Son of the everlasting God, very God of very God; the Prince of life; the Light of the world; ten thousand of the shining celestial choirs fall before Thee and worship Thee as the prince of the court of heaven.

From the shining courts of heaven Thou, O Christ, didst not hesitate to step down to earth and become clothed in the livery of flesh and blood and live in toil and poverty, that Thou mightest be a real brother to the needy sons of men.

We have seen Thee as Thou didst walk the earth, all tenderness and forbearance. Thou didst come from the heights down into the valley of human defeat, where men lie crushed, hopeless, sick at heart, ill at ease, and Thou didst pour into their wounded hearts the balm of Gilead. Thou didst raise the fallen. Thou didst say to all who would hear, "Thy sins be forgiven thee." Thou didst point men to heaven as a universally attainable hope, through Thee and Thy help.

And now, O Christ, we see Thee a captive, led in chains. We see that brow, fairer than that of any of the sons of men, thorn-crowned. We see Thee, the all-tender and loving, hated with all the malignity of hell and traded for a common thief.

How shall we harmonize these conflicting thoughts, O Christ? Didst Thou lose the "all power" that was given Thee? Art Thou now a stranger to the wisdom and power that thwarted Satan and drove him away vanquished? No, a thousand times no. This was the measure of Thy willing condescension; this the measure of the love wherewith Thou didst love us; thus far didst Thou stoop to save us.

O Thou Christ of the loving heart, be with us yet, be with us yet. We have often forgotten Thee. Do not forget us. We have often grieved Thee by our faults, our littleness of faith, our slackness in service. Deal with us, not according to our deserts, but according to Thy love. Be with the sick at heart and the ill-at-ease. Comfort thy tried saints. Increase our faith. Cause our love to burn with a brighter flame. Let thy grace be greater than all our failures and our needs. And at last save and crown us one and all. Amen.

# 6. Jesus In Bonds

## Scripture Lesson

When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where was a garden, into which he entered, himself and his disciples. Now, Judas also, who betrayed him, knew the place: for Jesus oft-times resorted thither with his disciples. Judas then, having received the band of soldiers, and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus therefore, knowing all the things that were coming upon him, went forth, and saith unto them, Whom seek ye? They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am he. And Judas also, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When therefore he saith unto them I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Again therefore he asked them, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I told you that I am he; if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: that the word might be fulfilled which he spake, Of those whom thou hast given me I lost not one...

So the band and the chief captain, and the officers of the Jews, seized Jesus and bound him, and led him to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, who was high priest that year...

The high priest therefore asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his teaching. Jesus answered him, I have spoken openly to the world; I ever taught in synagogues, and in the temple, where all the Jews come together; and in secret spake I nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them that have heard me, what I spake unto them: behold, these know the things which I said. And when he had said this, one of the officers standing by, struck Jesus with his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me? Annas therefore sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest. — John 18:1-9, 12-13, 19-24

Now when morning was come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death: and they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor. — Matt. 27:1-2

### **Text**

So the band and the chief captain, and the officers of the Jews, seized Jesus and bound him, and led him to Annas.

Annas therefore sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest.

And they bound him, and led him away, and delivered him up to Pilate the governor. — John 18:12-13, 24 — Matt. 27:2

### **Prayer**

Father in heaven, in the name of Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, we, Thy earth-bound, but redeemed and justified children, come into Thy presence. We adore Thee, we worship Thee, triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Humbled, contrite, we confess our sins unto Thee. Forgive us for the sake of the obedience, and the wounds, of Him who died for us. O Thou Christ of God, who in Almighty power wast meek, and in perfection of life wast lowly, give us true humility and heartfelt sorrow for our evil will and ways. We are frail and fainting; be Thou the staff upon which we may lean. Our minds are blind; be Thou our light. In spirit we are froward; keep Thy restraining hand upon us. All that we have as our own is naught; fill our minds and our hearts with Thy good gifts. By whatever process, Lord, make us over, more and more, into Thy image. And at last, when Thy Word is finished in us, open the door of Thy everlasting habitation and bid us welcome. And we shall praise Thee forever. Amen.

## **Jesus In Bonds**

OUR LESSON for this evening is not in exact historic sequence to the one of last Wednesday evening. In fact, that was one of the last steps in the series of which this was the first. But I am using this for the last service before Holy Week because, in a sense, it presents the climax of the indignities heaped on Jesus before His actual crucifixion. There were many shameful

things done to Jesus all His life and especially in those last days of His passion, but I consider this, in some respects, the most shameful of all. At the same time, it was one of the most significant things of Jesus' passion life.

Before we proceed, I want to call attention to a few well known Scriptural facts that will help, I think, to make the event of which our text speaks stand out in the light in which it deserves to be studied and without which it can never be rightly understood.

Let us go back a little more than thirty years from the time of our text. Heaven was stirred to its depths. One of the three greatest events in man's world was about to take place: the incarnation. Angels bearing God's message were going back and forth between heaven and earth. Finally, when the clock of time struck the hour of the fullness of the ages Jesus was born; God, eternal God, became man. Then again the angels came and sang their hallelujah chorus. The age-long, heaven-born, heaven-moving plan of redemption was in actual process of fulfillment.

We shall pass by the silent years of Jesus' earthly life; the years of growth, of development in body, mind, and soul; the twenty-five years during which there is only one recorded utterance, the declaration of the twelve-year-old youth, dedicating Himself to His Father's business. At last the years of active ministry began. Jesus was baptized, publicly and officially dedicated to His work. At this time the heavens opened and God, in the eternal Father's voice, spoke to the waiting world, putting His seal on Jesus' person and work, declaring Him to be His beloved Son. Then, after an initial decisive victory over the prince of darkness, followed a blessed teaching and healing ministry, opening the minds, touching the hearts, curing the souls of men; and with this, when it would aid the cause curing the bodies of men, giving sight to the blind, healing the leper, and even raising them from the dead.

Jesus hated sin with a depth and intensity of feeling beyond the comprehension of men, but was ever compassionate to sinners, pitying them, desirous of helping them. The only people to whom Jesus ever spoke sharply or called down judgment were those who knowingly and pertinaciously pursued the evil; the unbelievers, the haters, and destroyers of men. Whether it was in commendation or condemnation, Jesus' voice was never raised but to bless; never was His hand outstretched but to heal.

This is the One, Jesus of Nazareth, the perfect Son of man, the holy, almighty Son of God, who, in the second greatest event of human history,

the passion, stands before us in bonds. Behold the spectacle and marvel — the Son of God, Himself God, the One without whom nothing was made that was made. He stands before us His hands bound with thongs; thongs imposed by the church and sanctioned by the state.

In Munkacsy's great picture — "Christ Before Pilate" — the artist portrays Jesus in bonds. How many of us, in looking at this great picture, ponder the thoughts that lie at the heart of it? Rightly to understand the passion we need to learn some of these lessons. Without them we can in no right sense appreciate what Jesus has done for us. Let us, then, prayerfully consider the one great lesson presented by our text.

## **The Scene Presented**

In our little text of four verses, the word bound, as applied to Jesus, occurs three times. He was bound by the chief captain and led away to Annas; Annas sent Jesus bound to Caiaphas; from the palace of Caiaphas He was led away, still bound, to Pilate. The probabilities are that Jesus was kept bound most of the time, if not all the time, from the time He was taken prisoner at Gethsemane till He was led away to be crucified. Let us not pass by this scene in review too rapidly. This was not just a case of another prisoner in chains.

I wish we had a picture of this scene, like that of Munkacsy's, and could throw it on a screen, that we might sit silently pondering it and let the truth sink slowly into our consciousness that this was no ordinary man, no ordinary prisoner, but the Christ, the Son of God, and that He bore these bonds, not because He had to do so, but because He willed to do so, for a great purpose. Usually we hurry by these things too fast. It takes time for facts like these, and what they represent, to sink in, to take root in our minds and souls.

After the Passover celebration, after the institution and celebration of the Lord's Supper, Jesus went out to Gethsemane., I shall not dwell on the ordeal He endured there. We know it in its external manifestations. No mere human being knows it in its depths of meaning. This was the very climax of the battle of God, of perfect humanity, with the mystery and curse of sin. Here it was, beyond question, that Jesus endured His greatest suffering, more than on the cross. Here it was that Jesus made the great and final surrender. Here it was that He won His greatest victory. Here it was that the

great calm, the great joy, the great peace, of victory came into Jesus' life. Then it was that the emissaries of the high priest came, took Jesus prisoner, bound Him, and led Him away to the house of Annas, the high priest emeritus. From here Jesus was led, still bound, to the palace of Caiaphas, the high priest, and from here, still bound, to the palace of Pilate, where He was tried and condemned to death.

Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, in bonds! Put into bonds, and kept in bonds, by the church of His day. When we think of Him in terms of His humanity, this is understandable. When we think of Him in terms of His divinity, our minds become dazed. Truly, Jesus "came unto his own and his own received him not." And that church failed. It is still gasping for breath, but spiritually it is dead.

Down through the centuries, Jesus has often been in bonds before His own church. Many a time His church has lacked, almost wholly, His Spirit. It has been proud instead of humble. It has sought power and prestige instead of lowly service. When the church, in the person of those who speak for it, denies Jesus' plainly taught doctrines — His deity, His redemption, His Word and sacraments, Jesus stands in bonds in His own church. When the church refuses to stand for the application of the principles of Jesus to human conditions, when she advocates and practices violence and cruelty; when she aids or winks at the exploitation and oppression of the weak and defenseless; when she does not show the way for and advocates not the cause of the weak and the down-trodden; then, too, Jesus stands in bonds in the midst of His own church, for He Himself says that all that is done to the lowliest of His people is done to Him.

When the Jewish high church officials led Jesus from the high priest's palace to Pilate, He was delivered, in bonds, by the church to the state. And here, before the representatives of the greatest civil government in the world, representative of the world as such, Jesus stood in bonds. All the world, church, and state, held Jesus in bonds; condemned Him on trumped-up charges and put Him to death as a criminal.

This is still the attitude in which the world looks at Jesus. It regards Him as an idealist, a dreamer of impossible dreams, to whom no serious attention need be paid. And how much different is it with the governments of the world now? How much liberty has Jesus — how much has He to say, how much influence does He exert, in Russia? in Germany? in the Congress of the United States? in the legislature of the State of Ohio? of other States?

Men often speak of Christian lands, and Christian governments. There is no such thing. If it were not for Jesus' own word we would be inclined sometimes to doubt whether there is such a thing as a real Christian church anywhere in these days.

The Son of God, the prince of the sons of men, in bonds, standing as a criminal who might be vicious, and needed to be restrained; as a rogue who might run away! Behold the spectacle, ye angels in glory, wonder and weep; behold it, ye sons of men, and bow your heads in the dust in penitence and shame.

Was it just an accident that the Son of God and man stood thus in bonds? Was it no more than the result of personal pique on the part of a few men in Israel to whose ambitions and practices Jesus ran counter, that they hounded Him to bonds and to death? Was it only because there was a selfish, weak-willed, Roman governor in office in the province of Palestine? No; no one of these things, nor all of them together, is sufficient to explain this phenomenon of the ages — the eternal Son of God in bonds. What, then, is the meaning of this spectacle that is calculated to awe the angels in heaven and the saints on earth? Let us pause and ponder. It is difficult, almost impossible, for a thought like this to make itself at home in our mental processes. It has to be gradually absorbed, and then only step by step.

## **A Lesson In Humility**

This spectacle of the Son of God, the Lord of glory, in bonds, is the world's greatest lesson in humility. Humility, rightly understood, is one of the world's greatest virtues. The basis of the Beatitudes is humility. What is "poorness of spirit," "mourning," "meekness," being "merciful," acting as "peacemakers," but the exercise of humility?

You no doubt recall the words of Paul in Philippians where, speaking of the humiliation of the Christ, he says, "Who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on equality with God a thing to be grasped; but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient even unto death." This is plain speaking and to the point. And the spectacle we are considering tonight, the Son of God in bonds before Annas, and Caiaphas, and Pilate, and the world, was the next to the last step to-



ward the deepest depths of Christ's humiliation, and that last step was the cross itself.

This spectacle of the Lord of glory in bonds is, however, not only the world's supreme example from which, under certain circumstances, we may learn a salutary lesson in humility. The very essence of this spectacle in its purpose is of a nature to humble us into the dust. Why did Jesus stand here, unprotesting, in bonds? He was here as our substitute. We, every single one of us, all men, were in bonds, the, for us, unbreakable bonds of sin. These bonds made men prisoners, doomed, like Barabbas, to death, death in the body here, darkness in the spirit forever. Jesus came down from heaven to wrestle with the world problem of sin. And that which we see in this picture of Jesus in bonds is what sin does to men, whether they yield to it or oppose it. When men yield to sin, the devil wraps them around with bonds that seem, at first, only to titillate the senses and seem like velvet for smoothness, and like tissue paper for weakness, but which are, in reality, like cables of steel for strength, which prick like dragons' teeth when men seek to slip their bonds, and when men, prompted by the Spirit of God, seek to break these bonds the devil seeks to break those who seek freedom, and he often does, in body at least.

Jesus in bonds shows to what low estate man falls when under the power of sin. It shows what sinful man will do, what those will do who call themselves the children of God but are not.

It is nearly two thousand years since the original of this picture of Jesus in bonds was drawn. We are sitting here quietly in our comfortable church talking, thinking about it. How near does it come to us? Is it merely an academic problem with us — one we consider only as we consider other problems of history? If so, we are wholly mistaken, and in no condition to be benefited at all. The truth is that you and I and every man are by nature, in bondage to sin, and there is no human power in any man or any combination of men to break these bonds. Men often boast of their freedom in this respect, but the only freedom they have is the freedom of the maniac and the devil possessed. No man has any more power, of himself, to break these bonds than the month-old babe has to pluck asunder the cable that tows the leviathan of the deep. Only the God-man could break these bonds; and to do it He had to wear them; and pay, to the last farthing, the price of such freedom. Remember, Jesus did this for us of today as well as for Elizabeth, and Mary, and Lazarus, and John, and Peter. This brings this picture of Jesus'

bonds right down to date. It affects us as much as it did those of nineteen hundred years ago. In brief, Jesus in bonds before Caiaphas and Pilate stood in our place. All the galling fetters that man has ever worn, now wears, and ever shall wear, however many or grievous, Jesus bore them for us. And when we believe that He did this for us, we are free.

This is the reason this picture ought to humble us, humble us into the dust. This picture of Jesus in bonds is my picture, your picture, without the composure, the dignity, the beauty seen in Jesus as He stood in the center of the original picture. And when, to the indignity of His bonds, they blindfolded Jesus, spat in His face, struck Him on the head, wove a crown of thorns and pressed it on His brow; and when, on the cross, the agony of Jesus forced Him to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me"; this, all this, was our due, yours and mine. And Jesus bore it all for us, that we might go free. And He did all of it out of love for us. "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." If this picture does not humble us, then we shall never be humbled. Afterwards, if this picture does not exalt us to the heavens, we shall never be exalted.

## **A Picture Of Faithfulness**

The picture of Jesus in bonds is not only the world's supreme example of humility; it is also the world's supreme example of faithfulness in the line of duty, of service for others. Jesus did not have to bear this indignity of standing in bonds before the courts of church and state; nor did He have to bear any other indignities. In the Mount of Temptation He successfully defied the devil and all his hosts. When the mob came out to get Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus did not have to submit and be taken prisoner. He tells us that He could have commanded twelve legions of the mighty warriors of heaven to come to His defense. When Judas came out to the Garden to betray Jesus, we are told he received a "band" of soldiers to accompany him for his protection and to execute any orders he might give. The word "band" could be translated "cohort." A "cohort" was a Roman company of soldiers numbering from three to six hundred. The probabilities are that this band accompanying Judas was of considerable size. And they were armed. And yet the record tells us that when Jesus told them that He

was Jesus of Nazareth whom they sought, they were impelled to retreat and fell to the earth like dead men. All the soldiers of the Roman Empire could not have taken Jesus had He wanted to resist. Why, then, did He submit to arrest and allow Himself to be bound? It was in the line of duty.

Jesus had come down from heaven specifically to identify Himself with man, to take man's place, to bear man's burdens, to atone for man's sins and prepare for him a righteousness that would avail before God. As man was in moral and spiritual bondage, as his weaknesses and misdeeds condemned him, to liberate him, Jesus had to wear man's bonds, suffer for his sins, and work out a righteousness for him. This was the final exhibition of that love concerning which it is said, "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." Yes, to this end, and the morrow's end on Calvary. Surely, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Jesus walked this way, bound as a malefactor, though He was the holiest of men, holy with the holiness of God because He was in our place. And He endured all this because by bearing man's sin He destroyed sin. By bearing the bonds sin imposes, He made it possible for the power of sin to be broken. By walking thus the steep and stony way in bonds, bowed beneath the cross, He made it possible for man to walk upright, a free man.

This is, in brief outline, the lesson of Jesus in bonds. It shows us what He did, was glad to do, to make us free, to save us. You have probably seen prisoners, manacles on their hands, chains on their feet, kept in dungeons dark and drear. It is a pitiable sight. When these things are deserved, they are but the outward evidence of an inner servitude to base passions. When they are not deserved, they are the evidence of other men's base passions, of man's inhumanity to man.

In bonds! In the Rome of the long ago, in the better homes of the land, in the corners and out-of-the-way places of the homes, there cringed beings of human form. They were often even nameless, always homeless. They had no rights. They were dead to all hope. They were the helpless victims of every mood, and every passion, of their heathen masters and mistresses. These were slaves, those who had been dragged away as booty from country and home, from kindred and friends, by cruel conquerors. They were strangers in a strange land, among strange, unfriendly people. Who that never experienced such a condition of life can more than vaguely imagine the memories that live to haunt such a life and the love and longing that refuses to die, but

lives on to eat at the vitals of such unfortunates, like the vultures that ate at the liver of Prometheus?

All of us have read about, maybe some of us have seen, the remains of some of those celebrated prisons of older lands. They were without light, without ventilation, without heat in winter. They were vermin infested, places where those consigned to them faced a living death.

All this is shocking. To read about it, or think of it, in the quiet and security of our homes, causes an involuntary shudder. But all of this, and all else like it, is but the result of another, a primary, form of slavery, the slavery of sin.

To cure all kinds of slavery, Jesus Christ came down from heaven and consented to stand in bonds in order to set us free, free forever, if we will accept it, and live like free men and women.

Conquering kings their titles take  
From the foes they captive make.  
Jesus by a nobler deed  
From the thousands He hath freed.

## Prayer

Eternal God and Father, neither the earth nor yet the heavens can contain Thee, yet Thou art present with us here in this hour, in this house made with hands, and here to bless Thy children. Yea, more than this, Thou dost come into our poor little hearts to abide there.

Lord Jesus, holy, Almighty Son of God, we see Thee today in bonds; Thy brow pierced with thorns, in the hands of heathen executioners. Surely Thou wast oppressed, and afflicted, and Thou didst go as a sheep to the slaughter. And it was for us. We helped to press those thorns into Thy fair brow. We helped to drive those nails into Thy hands and feet. But all this, O Lord, which proclaims our guilt, our worthiness of eternal death; all this has become the fount of our comfort. Here was laid the indestructible foundation of our redemption and the certification of our salvation.

O Thou Christ of Gethsemane, of the cross, and the grave, we throw ourselves at Thy feet. Have mercy upon us. May we touch the hem of Thy garment as Thou passest by. A thousand times we have denied Thee, and betrayed Thee, by our sins. But Thou wilt never leave us nor forsake us. Be patient with us. Till seventy times seven, speak Thy word of pardon.

Lord Jesus, send us the Holy Spirit to work in us that submissiveness to Thy will, that acquiescence in Thy providence, that obedience to Thy commandments, that subordination of our lives to Thine, that, more and more, Thou mayest give us the desires of our hearts because the desire of our hearts is to have more of Thee.

And at last, when this fitful fever we call life is over, call us home to find the gates ajar and Thy eternal benediction awaiting us. Amen.

# 7. The Feast In The Shadow Of The Cross

## Scripture Lesson

And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying, This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house: And if the household be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door posts of the houses, wherein they shall eat it. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.

And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat in haste: it is the Lord's passover.

And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. — Exod. 12:1-8, 11, 13-14

I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we

break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?

I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said: This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body. — I Cor. 10:15-16; 11:23-29

### **Text**

Now on the first day of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, Where wilt thou that we make ready for thee to eat the Passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Teacher saith, My time is at hand; I keep the Passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus appointed them; and they made ready the Passover.

And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the apostles with him. And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and he gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. This do in remembrance of me. But I say unto you, I shall not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. — Matt. 26:17-19; 26-29 — Luke 22:14-15, 19

### **Prayer**

Eternal God and Father, in whose presence we ever stand, give us this night the enlightening presence of Thy Holy Spirit. May He who inspired the

writing of Thy Holy Word interpret it to us in this hour. Glorify Thy Word in our hearts this night; make it take root and grow up into the certainty of faith and unto the power of godly living. Purge our souls and deepen the spiritual life within.

Keep us, O Lord, from pride and perversity of spirit. Strengthen our faith in Thee and in the Word Thou hast given us. Help us to understand in all things where understanding is possible. And where, in Thy Word, Thou dost rise too high for us into the realm of the divine and eternal, help us, in the simplicity of faith, to believe. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

## **The Feasts In The Shadow Of The Cross**

THIS is a great, historic day. It was such for the people of God of the Old Testament Covenant. It is such for the people of the New Testament Covenant. For fifteen hundred years before Christ it was sacred to the Jewish people. For nineteen hundred years it has been sacred to the Christian world.

This day is often called Maundy Thursday; Maundy from the first word of the new commandment Jesus gave His disciples in the upper room where the feasts, of which we are going to speak tonight, were celebrated. "Mandatum novum do vobis." In view of the fact that Jesus was, at this time, on the way to the final illustration of this commandment, "That ye love one another; even as I have loved you," as it had never been illustrated before or since, it is a very appropriate name.

The usual name for this day, with us, is simply Holy Thursday. The knowing, devout Christian at once feels the appropriateness of this name. In itself no holier than any other day, this day is forever hallowed in heaven and on earth by association with that which took place on this day — the celebration of the last Passover, the institution of the Lord's Supper, the ordeal in Gethsemane, the beginning of the great Passion.

Holy Thursday evening! As we think of that upper room and Jesus' services there with the Twelve, it seems like a quiet oasis of seclusion and rest in the midst of a week of turbulent passions. It was the beginning (for the Jewish day began at six o'clock in the evening) of one of the most momentous days of all history. It was the day when the old Jewish Covenant Dispensation came to its fulfillment; when types were to become realities;



when promises were to become history; the time when the New Covenant Dispensation was to be established. It was a time, we may say, of pause, of rest, of the gathering of strength for the most titanic struggle of all the ages. This was the beginning of the day when the powers of darkness and of light were coming to grips as never before in this world.

We began this series of Lenten addresses with the resolve that at every evening service this thought was to be in the fore-front of our thinking — Jesus facing the cross. Alongside of this thought there was to be another — at these services we are to consider ourselves as sitting in the shadow of the cross. All this should be doubly true of tonight and tomorrow night.

The feast of which most of us expect to partake tonight was instituted in the early hours of this night after the celebration of the Passover. Later in the night, Jesus went to Gethsemane. Here, later, He was betrayed, taken captive, hurried away to trial, to sentence, and at nine next morning to execution. Truly, what took place this night took place in the shadow of the cross.

## **The Passover Feast**

The Passover was instituted in Egypt fifteen hundred years before this first Holy Thursday night. You probably recall the story of Israel's adventures in search of food, of their enslavement, in which they were held for some hundreds of years, during which time they grew from a few score of folk to a people numbering almost, if not fully, a million and a half.

God could not allow His people to remain in bondage. He had a work for them to do; He had a world program to carry out, for which these people were to be the instruments. So He decreed their freedom. I shall not attempt to give details. You should know the story. But, in brief, Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, refused to let the Jews go free. Finally, the Lord was compelled to use stern measures with Pharaoh and his people. To accomplish His righteous purpose, He had to strike low the firstborn of all the land, man and beast. Only thus could Pharaoh be humbled, his stiff neck bowed. To Israel, however, must be saved from the general destruction. If they were to be saved, however, they must believe and obey. So they were informed through Moses and the elders that they must keep, on a designated night, a certain prescribed feast. A year-old lamb, without spot or blemish, was to be

slain without the breaking of a bone. It was to be prepared in a simple way and served along with a dish of bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

The lamb originally was to be slain on the step of the house where it was to be eaten. When it was slain some of the blood, gathered in a small depression made in the sill of the doorway, was then put on the lintel above the door and on the two side frames of the door. This made, as you will note, the form of a cross.

That night the angel of the Lord came to execute judgment on Pharaoh and his people as enemies of God and His people. When he came to a house with the sign of blood on the door, indicating that here the fear of God was in men's hearts, that they looked to Him in faith and were minded to be obedient, the angel of death passed over and did not strike.

This is the simple meaning of the word Passover, a "passing over." It comes from the Hebrew word, Pesach, which means to leap, or pass over a certain object.

To partake of this Passover Feast, the children of Israel were required to gather in family groups of not less than twelve. Where families did not have so many members, several smaller families were required to go together. This was to be a feast of fellowship. As an evidence of this people's faith in God and of their willingness, implicitly, and at once, to obey, these people were required to eat at least this first Passover Feast with their loins gird about, their shoes on their feet, and a staff in their hand.

In a very real sense, that original Passover was a feast of deliverance, a bodily, a national deliverance. And it was a deliverance by blood, blood in the form of a cross, though, of course, the Israelites did not, at the time, recognize the significance of this sign. Through that which was indissolubly connected with this feast, God gave His people their freedom, constituted them a nation of His people, renewed His covenant with them, and through the continued observance of the Passover, God kept alive among these people a knowledge of His goodness and pledged to them ever anew His favor. The Passover remained the center of the Jewish religion. Take away the Passover and you cut out the heart of the Old Testament.

The Passover, naturally, but also by specific command, became with Israel a great commemorative, or memorial, feast. For fifteen hundred years, through good days and evil days, this feast was more or less faithfully kept. And down through the centuries, every father who presided over his family and national memorial feast told his family the meaning of this institution.

At every celebration at a specified place in the service, a son was taught to ask this question: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" In answer to it the father told the old story of their Egyptian bondage, their deliverance, and God's covenant relation with them.

The Passover, however, was not only a memorial of a past deliverance; it was a memorial, a pledge of a still more wonderful future deliverance. The Passover was a symbol, a prophecy. This was clearly recognized by Israel, at least in later times. This is indicated by the fact that an empty chair was placed at every Passover table, a chair for an expected guest. At the Passover Feast a youth of the family went to the front door and opened it to see whether, perchance, the Messiah awaited to be admitted. And every Passover Feast ends with a prayer, the closing sentence of which is, "Next year Jerusalem and the Messiah."

That the Passover was prophetic, a type, a symbol of the Messiah and His spiritual deliverance, is the plain teaching of the New Testament. What else can be the meaning of the many references to Jesus as the lamb? "The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "Ye were redeemed...with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, even the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:18-19). And Paul says unmistakably, "Even Christ, our passover, sacrificed for us" (I Cor. 5:7).

Jesus was a true Jew, faithful to all that was divine in Judaism. He did not discard or overthrow anything that was helpful in the religion of His fathers according to the flesh. He knew as no one else ever knew the true nature, import, and blessing of the Passover. He did not come to destroy but to fulfill. The Passover was God-ordained. Jesus longed for it. "With desire have I desired to eat this feast with you." To this end He had His disciples prepare to celebrate this feast in the upper room of an unnamed house, on an unnamed street in Jerusalem. And here they assembled in the early hours of what, according to Jewish reckoning, was to be the day of His passion.

What a feast this was on that first Holy Thursday evening! The Passover was one of the most important of the three great Jewish festivals, and in some respects the most significant of all: It came in the month "Abib," a spring month, the month of "sprouting," or "the green ear." It was the time of the year when life in Nature was reasserting itself, when Nature was putting on her mantle of beauty and blessing. It was Israel's great historic festival. It marked the beginning of her national life by a God-wrought deliverance, and it pointed to a future greater deliverance and greater bless-

ings. Nature and history and grace combined to give special meaning and blessing to the Passover Feast of course, only Jesus fully understood all this. From that upper room He could look out and see the sweep of Israel's two thousand years of dispensational history and fifteen hundred years of national history break, wave upon wave, at His feet. And here this night, and on the morrow, in Him, all of Israel's religious types and symbols were to receive their fulfillment. He was the spiritual reality of them all. In Him only did they ever have any real spiritual reality. So in that upper room in Jerusalem, nineteen hundred years ago, the fullness of time had come.

This means that for Jesus the shadow of the cross fell across the Passover table. In the plan of God, the Passover led directly and inevitably to the cross. Jesus knew that only on the cross of the morrow would that be accomplished that gave spiritual validity to Israel's religion of the ages. On the hill gleaming in the moonlight, Jesus could see, with the eye of His foreknowledge, the cross on which would be laid, broad and deep, the foundation of the new spiritual order. In this day, the end of the old dispensation, the beginning of the new, God, eternal God, was vindicating Himself as a faith-keeping, a covenant-keeping God. Here He was now giving final fulfillment to His ancient promises. Here new departures, based on the present deeds of God, were at hand. Here was to be laid the foundation on which the Church of God was to rest forever secure.

Now let us pass on and consider the second of the feasts eaten in the shadow of the cross.

## **The Institution And Celebration Of The Lord's Supper**

That first Holy Thursday evening was one of the greatest hours of history; not only of Israel's history, but of the history of the race. It marked the end of an age. It witnessed the decisive hour in the birth throes of a new age. One covenant, that was intended to bind a minor fraction of the race to God and heaven, was being fulfilled. A new covenant that was intended, in the providence of God, to bind the race to God and heaven, was being drawn and signed in the blood of the Son of God and man.

On the table before Jesus were some of the elements used in celebrating the Passover — some unleavened bread and some wine. Jesus took some of this bread, blessed it, broke it, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then He took some of the wine, gave thanks, and gave it to His disciples saying,

“Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins. This do in remembrance of me.”

These are strange, strange words. If any other than the Christ, the Son of God, had spoken them we would turn from them in rebellion and disgust. They Would be blasphemous words. But we have no desire to get away from the words of Jesus. He is the truth. He speaks nothing but the truth. And these are, indisputably, the words of Christ.

That was a great Supper celebrated in that quiet sequestered chamber of that house in Jerusalem. The Lord’s Supper, rightly understood, is ever great, sublime, God-like. But there is something unusual about this first feast. It was coming fresh minted from the mind, the heart, the hand of the God-man. The, words spoken were the words of institution; they are the words that unite Jesus Christ Himself with this institution, give it its perpetual validity, and they determine, for all time, its content and its blessing.

Simple as are the words of institution, we must needs go with Jesus on that first Holy Thursday night to Gethsemane, and on the next day to Calvary, to get our best understanding of the matchless eternal beauty, the deep heavenly content, and the inestimable blessing of the Lord’s Supper. One thing is plain — in the institution of the Lord’s Supper there was no priestly incantation, no magic, no legerdemain, no illusion. Jesus always spoke carefully. He weighed His words well. Assuredly Jesus always knew what He wanted to say. And assuredly on this night, of all nights, He would be careful of what He said and how He said it. These words were spoken in the shadow of the cross. In His mind the cross was in full view. And it was fully understood.

Jesus was setting up a new covenant. He was making a will. He was bequeathing new blessings. The Passover was a memorial of a physical deliverance. This was to be a memorial of a spiritual deliverance. The Passover was a type, a symbol. This new feast was the reality symbolized by the Passover, and without which the Passover never had any worth-while spiritual significance. This new feast was a memorial of that by which the world was spiritually delivered. But it was more. It was that by which the Deliverer and His deliverance and all that is connected therewith was given to believing souls and is still given to believing souls.

These words of Jesus are very plain. And, remember, they are the words of the Son of God, the all-wise, the all-holy, and the all-mighty. They are the words of the sovereign Son of God. And they were spoken with the di-

rectness and the simplicity of the great mind, and the great heart, of the One who fully recognized the situation. There is an utter lack of ambiguity. The ordinary intelligent school child of twelve cannot only understand the language but will have difficulty in misunderstanding it. Only those misunderstand the language who want to make it say something the plain, simple, easily understood words do not say.

Assuredly tonight, above all nights, Holy Thursday night, while sitting in the shadow of the impending cross and later to be gathered around the altar, we are not disposed to quibble about words. And we are not going to do so. But words have a meaning, and words of some kind are our only known medium of conveying thought, and thoughts that deal with vital truth are important, very important. When Jesus, on this night of nights, took of the bread on the table before them, blessed it; and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take, eat; this is my body," and when He took a cup of wine from the table, gave thanks over it, and said, "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," He was instituting a covenant; He was making a will; He was bequeathing something. How are we to understand these words? How are we to interpret them? Personally, I do not interpret them. They do not need any interpretation. They are as plain, as unmistakable, as the simple mathematical statement that twice two equal four. And when I approach these words, in spite of all the questions the human intellect — persists in asking, I simply say, "Amen, Lord, Thou hast spoken; I accept, I believe."

What, then, do we, as evangelical Christians, believe that we receive when we come to the Lord's table? Bread and wine; unchanged bread and wine. If there was no other word concerning the Lord's Supper save that of the institution, I would be compelled to believe that, though I receive the form, or semblance, of bread and wine, it is no longer real bread and wine but the bread and wine transmuted into the body and blood of Christ Jesus. But St. Paul, who was an inspired man, and who expressly declares that he received his message directly from the Lord Christ, says that the bread and wine remain bread and wine but become the vehicle or agency, for communicating to the recipient the Lord Christ Himself, the whole Christ, with all His benefits.

How can this be? I do not know. No man knows. This is not strange. There are a hundred things in our holy religion that no man fully knows. There is no science, no metaphysics, no philosophy, that fully explains

them. The Lord's Supper is a great mystery. I do not have to understand it. I am asked only to believe it. And, so far as I am personally concerned, I do not particularly care to understand it. I do not want all the mystery taken out of my religion. I want something to believe. Otherwise my religion would lose much of its appeal. If I knew all about God, His wisdom, His power, and methods of operation, as I see things, He would not be much bigger, wiser, or more powerful than I am; and I do not want that kind of a God. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts," saith the Lord.

How can this be? I do not know. I believe. Yet though I do not know all the details of how this takes place, I do know, in a general way, how it can take place. That Christ Jesus gives me Himself in the Lord's Supper takes place because God the Almighty, the All-Wise, the Ever Truthful, makes it to take place through His Son Jesus Christ. The words, "Take, eat; this is my body: take, drink; this is my blood," are not mere words written on a piece of paper nineteen hundred years ago. They are creative words, creative while the world stands, and poor sinners have need of the life that is God. Back of the written Word, operating through the written Word, the power of the written Word, stands the Living Word, without Whom, and the Holy Spirit, the written Word is but a scrap of paper.

How did the world of worlds come to be? Not just by a vocally spoken word of so many letters and syllables, but by the Living Word, the eternally operative Word that is the substance of the laws of the universe to this moment. So it was with man's creation. When God breathed into the dead clay mask of a man the breath of life, man became a living soul. That creative act is still a creative act; and by virtue of this creative act, and by it alone, man still lives, and moves, and has his being in God.

This doctrine that God in Christ Jesus comes to us, must come to us, and impart Himself to us, if we are to be spiritually alive and enabled to respond in loving obedience and active service, is not confined to the Lord's Supper or peculiar to it. Take the Parable of the Vine and the Branches. Few fail to see in this parable the truth that the very life principle of the Son of God incarnate must become the life-giving, and life-sustaining principle of all who are the children of God. More than sixty times St. Paul speaks of Christ dwelling in us and we in Him. This evidently means more than that Jesus does something for us, that He removes certain things from us, that He bestows certain blessings on us. To the candid mind, it can mean only that in

some way, mysterious but certain, the Lord Christ joins His life to ours and Himself becomes the Life of our life. If Christ does this in response to faith, at any time, anywhere, as every Christian admits, can He not do the same through His own ordained means? “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”

To believe that Christ Jesus honors His word; that He comes to us Himself, and gives us, not just certain virtues, or achievements, or a certain influence, but Himself, certainly gives the poor, penitent, trembling sinner a spiritual assurance not to be obtained in any other way.

## **What Does The Cross Have To Do With These Feasts?**

What did the cross have to do with the Passover? What does it have to do with the Lord’s Supper? Much in every way. And it is not only a time relation. It did not just happen that the last Passover and the first Lord’s Supper came within fifteen hours of the crucifixion. There is a vital, an indissoluble, union of both of these feasts and the cross.

The Passover, as a spiritual festival, a life-giving festival, and such I deem it, was never really complete till the Jewish Messiah hung on the cross. All Passover blessings that had to do with the soul were given in view of the cross. No one can be saved except he be forgiven. No one can be forgiven save through Jesus and His redemption. And redemption was finished only on the cross. There it was that, as St. Paul says, Jesus Christ became the real Passover. And this, I think, is the meaning of Jesus’ words, when He said that last evening, “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” The old order was ended, by fulfillment.

As to the Lord’s Supper, it certainly has no meaning apart from the cross. Through the blood of the lamb from the fold, Israel was saved from destruction as a people. Through the blood of the Lamb of God on Calvary slain and suspended, the world was spiritually redeemed. By that first Passover Feast Israel was, in reality, constituted a nation and set on the road to fulfill its special world mission, that of giving to humanity a Savior. In that upper room, when the Lord’s Supper was instituted, Jesus established and gave a covenant to a new Israel, a spiritual Israel constituted by the acceptance, in faith, of the crucified Redeemer.

The Lord’s Supper, as was the Passover, is a memorial feast. “This do in remembrance of Me.” Remember whom? What? Remember Me; the whole



Christ, the God-man, in His person, nature, and work, but I think, so far as this feast is concerned, most of all the Lord Christ of Gethsemane and Calvary. Here is where the redemptive work of Christ Jesus reached the climax of its fulfillment. Here is where He put the indispensable keystone in the arch of His saving work — though it was all of one piece. We should always remember Jesus as the loving Savior. It is unthinkable that at the time of the celebration of the Lord's Supper we should fail to keep in mind the Lord Himself in those last days and fail to keep in mind these, His words of institution, "Take, eat; my body given for you; take, drink, my blood of the New Testament, shed for you."

According to Thy gracious Word,  
In meek humility,  
This will I do, my dying Lord,  
I will remember Thee.  
Thy body, broken for my sake,  
My bread from heaven shall be;  
The cup, Thy precious blood, I take,  
And thus remember Thee.

Practically speaking, the one thing that must never be forgotten, at any time, much less when we approach the Lord's table, is the word of Christ concerning the purpose of this feast instituted, and received, in the shadow of the cross. "Unto the remission of sins." This is the final explanation of the purpose of the incarnation; of all that Jesus did, of all He said. Here at the Lord's table, as at few other times or places, we have occasion to take to ourselves the full meaning of the words, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world." Here we are tonight, Holy Thursday night, a church full of people, nearly every one of whom expects to come to the altar to partake of this holy feast. For six weeks we have been sitting in the shadow of the cross. Tonight, in a specially realistic sense, the shadow of tomorrow's cross falls athwart the table of the Lord. It lends a note of special solemnity to our service. But all is not gloom. Everything tonight bears the unmistakable marks of the tender love of God for us in Christ Jesus. Across our whole service falls a holy light from heaven. As we sit here tonight in the holy Presence, and later, as we shall come to the altar, let us put away all curious, prying questions. Let us leave all difficulties with the Lord for His solution. Let us come humbly, penitently, believingly, lovingly. Let us come to hold fellowship, intimate, personal fellowship, with the Lord

Christ, and with our brethren, His other children. And let us leave this house rejoicing, assured that the Lord Christ has made good to us all His promises, forgiven us all sins, bestowed on us all His blessings, joined Himself anew to us. I come to Thee, O blessed Lord, Invited by Thy gracious Word To this Thy Feast, to sup with Thee: Grant that a worthy guest I be.

### **Prayer**

Father in heaven, in the name of the Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, and Savior, we come together in this evening hour to worship Thee, to be blessed by Thee. In spirit, we have been sitting with the disciples of old in that upper room, around the table across which fell the shadow of the cross. Again we have heard wondrous things out of Thy holy Word, for which we heartily thank Thee. May the Holy Spirit, through whose inspirational guidance this Word was written, bless this message to our minds and hearts. Through this Word, our Father, it has been impressed on us again that Thou art a faith-keeping God. Thou never didst forget Thy people of old. Century after century Thou didst honor the Passover Feast and bless Thy people through it, until in these last days Thou didst fulfill it, the shadow becoming the substance in Thy Son, the Christ, the great Paschal Lamb of the New Testament: “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.” Father, Thou wilt never forget Thy promises to us, nor fail to bestow the blessings provided for us. Make us ever ready to believe and to receive. Father, as we sat around that table in the upper room and looked into the face of Christ, and listened to His voice, we heard strange words. We saw Him take from the Paschal table some fragments of unleavened bread, bless it, and say, “Take, eat, this is my body.” We saw Him take of the wine that remained, bless it, and say, “This is my blood of the New Testament.” Father, these words are too deep for us. They seem to contradict all our knowledge of things. We ask Thee, through Thy Holy Spirit, to keep us humble and believing. Keep us mindful of the fact that it does not become finite human mind to scoff at the words of the eternal Son of infinite God or rebel against them. We bow the knee before Thee, O God, in childlike faith and humble adoration. Break the spell that would hold us in bondage to mere things. Give us a growing sense of the infinite, the invisible, the eternal, of Thyself, O God. And now presently, Father God, we all contemplate coming to this feast prepared for us by Thy Son. We know that of ourselves, we are not

worthy. Our worthiness comes from Thee, Our Father, who forgivest our sins and clothest us with the perfect righteousness of our Savior. Make us humble, O God; make us penitent; make us believing; and bless us as only Thou canst bless believing hearts. Amen.

# 8. The Cross Athwart The Sky

## Scripture Lesson

And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull. And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not. And they crucify him, and part his garments among them, casting lots upon them, what each should take. And it was the third hour, and they crucified him. And the superscription was written over, THE KING OF THE JEWS. And with him they crucify two robbers; one on his right hand, and one on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ha! thou that destroyest the temple, and buildeth it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. In like manner also the chief priests mocking him among themselves with the scribes said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, now come down from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reproached him. — Mark 15:22-32

And one of the malefactors that were hanged railed on him, saying, Art not thou the Christ? save thyself and us. But the other answered, and rebuking him said, Dost thou not even fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said, Jesus, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom. And he said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise. — Luke 23:39-43

And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by,

when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elijah. And one ran, and filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let be; let us see whether Elijah cometh to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, who stood by over against him, saw that he so gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God. — Mark 15:33-39 And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a counselor, a good and righteous man (he had not consented to their counsel. and deed), a man of Arimathaea, a city of the Jews, who was looking for the kingdom of God: This man went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down, and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain. — Luke 23:50-53

### **Text**

They took Jesus therefore: and he went out, bearing the cross for himself, unto the place called The place of a skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha: where they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. And there was written, JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. — John 19:16-19

### **Prayer**

Merciful God and Father, in this evening hour of this day of days, give us Thy Holy Spirit to guide us into a deeper understanding and appreciation of the truth we should relearn this night. Help us truly to sit beneath the cross. May it humble us as we should be humbled. May it encourage us as we should be encouraged.

Father, we know the story. Its lesson has not been wholly lost to us, but it has not gripped us as it should have gripped us. Drive home, O Spirit of God, drive home till it touches the quick and makes it bleed, the truth that the Christ of the cross went there in our stead because of our dire need. Yes, that He was our substitute; that, in very truth, He bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; that the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and that with His stripes we are healed.

Help us, O Father of grace and mercy, truly to believe in the depths and permanency of this, Thy love, that conceived and prepared this remedy for our sins. Help us to believe, whole-heartedly, in the full sufficiency and the abiding efficacy of this remedy for our sins. And in our trust may we find peace; peace amid all the failures of our own flesh, and all the raging of hell. Amen.

## **The Cross Athwart The Sky**

WE HAVE COME to Good Friday evening, the climax and practically the end of Lent. And it led to a cross. Tomorrow, the only other day in Lent, the world stands by a closed and sealed grave, stands dazed, uncomprehending; for Jesus, the friend of man, the Son of God, lies in that grave.

As we sit here this evening around the newly closed grave, in sight of the empty cross on the hill near by, I want to share with you an experience, an experience I shall never forget while life and reason linger. It was an experience of a Good Friday spent in Joseph's Garden at the foot of the hill of the cross. It was the experience of living over, on the spot, the scenes of Good Friday as they are recorded in the Gospel record.

In order to be able to share this experience with me, it will be necessary for you to bear in mind something of the lay of the land as to Jerusalem and its environs. Jerusalem is built on the east slope of a long ridge that runs, as to its general course, north and south, and is known as Mount Zion. The city, at its northeast corner, runs down almost to the foot of the ridge. To the east of Mount Zion and running parallel with it is the Mount of Olives. Between these ridges is the very narrow valley of the Kedron, through which flows a little stream that becomes rather turbulent and noisy in the rainy season but practically disappears during the dry season.

You have, no doubt, seen pictures of Jerusalem. With the use of a little imagination, try to make this a living picture, one you are actually beholding tonight.

You will remember that Jerusalem is a walled city. The north wall, naturally, runs east and west. Outside of the wall, at some distance from it, there is a depression that runs up from the Kedron pretty well toward the top of the ridge. Down near the Kedron this depression is farther away from the city wall. Here there is a decided knoll that rises on the ridge of Zion right

outside the wall and slopes northward toward the depression of which I have spoken.

Now let us try to get this picture. Down here is the valley of the Kedron, running north and south, getting deeper as it runs southward. Rising from this valley, and spreading westward, but, of course, facing eastward, is the ridge known as Mount Zion, on which Jerusalem is built, surrounded by a great wall. And here, on the north side of the city, outside the wall, down near the valley, on the side of the big hill is a smaller hill. This smaller hill, outside the wall, near the valley, I am convinced was the place Jesus was crucified. With this many modern students of the subject agree.

The side of this smaller hill nearest the valley was dug away, no doubt long before the time of Christ. The purpose, probably, was to get stone for building, or other purposes. There is nothing but hills around Jerusalem, and all of them are, practically, solid stone. The face of this little hill that was dug away is practically perpendicular, thirty to forty, or more, feet high.

The space where the hill was dug away has been fairly well leveled off. It covers, I judge, three quarters of an acre, maybe an acre. Earth has been deposited here, and some small cedar and olive trees are growing here; some poppies, and other flowers, the Holy Week I was there. It is a rather rustic but inviting spot. This is the place known as Joseph's Garden. And over here, at a spot nearest the city wall, in the face of that solid stone wall, cut back into the solid rock, there is a tomb. Those who know about these things say that the marks of the implements used in cutting this stone indicate that this work was done in Roman days. I am convinced, and so are many others, that this is the place where Jesus' body was laid away. And up on the hill, above, and a little beyond the edge of this stone wall, I am convinced, and so are many others, is the place where our Savior was crucified.

Some years ago, I spent most of a Good Friday in this garden, Joseph's Garden. I spent some time on the hill above; but it is now a Mohammedan cemetery, and infidels, as they call Christians are not overly welcome. But Joseph's Garden, and Gordon's tomb, as it is called, is in the hands of the English, and here Christians are welcome. To me, this place was one of the most inviting spots around Jerusalem.

As I sat here in this garden the greater part of Good Friday, and read, two, three, four times, the old story, and tried to live myself through the ages, so as to be a living witness of the story told, you may imagine my thoughts. As the afternoon wore away and the sun sank toward the west, ob-

scured occasionally by the cirrus clouds that hung over the Mediterranean, I felt that I could hear the rabble and see the cross that loomed against the western sky on the hill above me. O Let me tell you of some of my thoughts.

## **The Tragedy Enacted**

The world has witnessed many tragedies, but the darkest, starkest tragedy the world ever faced, it faced that first Good Friday. At the sight of it, the sun refused to give his light and the earth went into convulsions.

The victim of this tragedy was the harmless Carpenter of Nazareth; a good man with calloused hands, but with an uncalloused heart; a man against Whom never a breath was raised in accusation, save for this — He claimed too much for Himself, His person, and His mission, and, though His enemies would never admit it, they felt in their hearts that He was too successfully proving His claim.

That is the way it is with the world. It nearly always crucifies its really great men, its real benefactors.

Yes, the center, the victim, of this tragedy of the ages was none other than He who could look up to heaven and say, unblushingly, unafraid, “I and my Father are one.” “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” And “all power is given unto me, in heaven and on earth.”

Yes, the One led in chains to the little hill beyond the wall, the One we see suspended on the cross, is none other than the eternal Son of eternal God, the Cocreator and Judge of all the universe. To avoid meeting Him, the godless will call on the hills to fall upon them and hide them from His sight, but all in vain. This is the One on whom the devil, and the world, wreaks vengeance, but all in vain, for eternal God makes the wrath of men and devils to work His will.

We are sitting in Joseph’s Garden. In spirit, we have taken flight back through the ages. It is the first Good Friday. And it is nine o’clock in the morning. For days rumors of insurrection have been ripe in the Holy City. In the great Passover throng there are forebodings of impending evil. On the way to the Garden we heard, from groups on the street corners, disquieting reports of the capture of Jesus in Gethsemane, of midnight and early morning trials, and the expressed fear that, considering the temper of Jesus’ enemies, He would be condemned to death.



As I sat there in the Garden, in the shade of a small olive tree, I fell into a reverie. There came to mind the tumultuous scene of just five days before when, just a little to the south, within earshot, Jesus was given noble reception and entered the city in royal fashion, the rejoicing multitude shouting responsively, "Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." And now they were crying, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" O man, more fickle art thou than the restless sea!

It is but a few minutes past nine, and we are startled from our dream of men and things. Angry voices are heard loudly clamoring in the distance, and the tread of many feet. And soon, through the gate in the city wall to the west, and the one below us in the valley, runners appeared. They were the vanguard of the ever growing crowd headed for the hill above us, known as the place of crucifixion. In the foreground were Zadok, Amok, Shobek, Malluck, and others. They were all retainers of the high priest's palace, and had taken part in the seizure of Jesus in Gethsemane. From the courtyard, they had witnessed the greater part of the procedure against Jesus since then. And, knowing that Jesus had been sentenced to death, they had hastened on ahead of the crowd to secure a point of vantage from which to witness the execution.

Presently the whole procession pours out through the city gate. First of all, there is a motley crew, talking loudly, gesticulating wildly; they constitute the excitable, unstable crowd anxious for a Roman holiday. Then came Longinus, the Roman centurion in command of the soldiers, and in charge of the crucifixion. Following him, led by soldiers, came Jesus. He walked slowly, and with effort. Jesus was not a weakling. He was a virile, robust man. But the experiences of the past day had told on Him. He had tasted neither food nor water since the day before. The past night had given Him no wink of sleep. He had been reviled and buffeted. The flogging He received at the hands of the Roman soldiers had laid the bones bare on His back. As the custom was, they had laid on Jesus' shoulders the cross on which He was to be crucified, to carry to the place of crucifixion; but, because of His present physical condition, He had soon fallen under its weight. Near by walked Simon, the sturdy Cyrenian; for some reason, they impressed him into service as Jesus' substitute cross-bearer. From his bearing, I would judge Simon bore Jesus' cross unwillingly; but later he came to rejoice because this service was forced upon him, for he came to know what

it meant to him and to the world. Close behind came the two thieves, perspiring and cursing, bearing their own rude crosses, closely guarded by the soldiers. Following close by came the devoted women, and John, and other friends and sympathizers, distraught, sore of heart; for them the world had fallen to pieces. And then came more of the mob, the belated portion that gathered in from everywhere to join the procession; they came excited, jeering, fighting for advantage. And finally, there was a growing fringe of the crowd, mostly strangers from other lands, who had heard only vague reports about Jesus and now followed the crowd, silent but curious, wondering what it was all about. Truly >The Savior King goes forth to die!

>Goes forth in all His glory bright!

>And angels from the realms on high,

>Look down to see the wondrous sight.

>On, on to Calvary's fateful hill,

>Reviled by those He came to bless;

>But in His suffering bearing still,

>The Majesty of Righteousness!

>The Savior King goes forth to die!

Reaching the top of the hill, the soldiers made short shift of those condemned to die. Dysmas and Testas were soon borne down by the strong-armed soldiers onto two of the crosses now lying on the ground. A few swift, hard blows, and the big nails were driven home through the quivering flesh of hands and feet. Jesus, not resisting, was not handled quite so roughly, but by no means gently. The nails went also through His hands and feet. And then the crosses were raised by strong hands, dropped rudely into the quickly dug holes, and a few stones thrown in to keep them fairly upright.

The bloody deed was done, and some of the people, with pale faces and downcast eyes, began to wander away from the sickening scene. But a large part of the crowd was not satisfied with the sight of the twitching bodies and the slowly trickling streams of blood. They crowded around as near the crosses as the soldiers would permit and hurled their insults at Jesus. Even the two thieves on their crosses joined, at first, in the mad barrage of vituperation. Even the high priests, these aged men with the insignia of their high and holy office upon them, the heads of God's great church, joined in this unseemly spectacle. Caiaphas, of whom it is said that, in a sermon the night before he cried out, "Would that there was a man in Israel who would

dare to die for his people”; and Annas, who, this night, preached “Deliverance”; patriarchal looking men, like...wanton boys playing truant from school, went past Jesus wagging their heads and tauntingly said to the dying Jesus, “Come down from the cross, and we will believe you.”

Presently the sun in a cloudless, moonless heaven grew pale and refused to give its light to this scene. The earth underfoot reeled and shivered in agony. The stones on Olivet’s slope creaked uneasily, slipped from their ancient beds, and rolled noisily down into the valley, of the Kedron.

This was the panoramic scene that passed, vividly before my eyes as I sat there in Joseph’s Garden and read and reread the old, old story of how the Lord of glory died. And above me, as the first hints of the gloaming came from the valley, stood the cross athwart the sky.

As I saw these scenes of the long ago reenacted before my eyes, the conviction deepened that while this was a Jewish scene, it was more — a scene of human, yes, cosmic interest. And I began to ponder the deeper meaning of this cross athwart the sky.

Good Friday! And a bleeding victim on a rude cross athwart the sky, on a Syrian hill. And we stand by that cross with eyes dazed with tears, with minds confused by conflicting thoughts, with a great pain at our hearts. Is this one of life’s insoluble riddles? Can this be the end of the world’s best life? What is the answer? Let us see.

I have been speaking much in the singular number — of Jesus and His cross athwart the sky. In reality, as we all know, there were two other victims and two other crosses. They were in the background. But to turn to them for a moment may help us to find a solution to the problem of why there are any crosses at all in this world.

To the left of Jesus’ cross, and somewhat to the rear, there was to be seen another cross. On it Testas writhed in agony of body and mind. Testas was one of the companions of the robber chieftain Barabbas. He had become one of the destructive parasites of society. And here is where such a life always ends. It may escape here for a time, but somehow, some where, vengeance will overtake it.

In the case of Testas, and those like him, the cross is the symbol and instrument of outraged law. It can never be escaped. When men like Testas scorn the true and good and continue thus to the bitter end, they bear the cross forever; not on their backs, but in their hearts. But for men like Testas

and the thing that was eating at his soul there never would have been any crosses of any kind in the world.

On the right of Jesus, also to the rear, there stood another cross; on it there hung a third victim, Dysmas by name. This man had forgotten his father's teachings about the folly of wickedness and the rewards of righteousness, about the Messianic hopes and the heaven of God's people. He had forgotten his mother's prayers. Dysmas had become bitter, cynical, anti-social. He had been just as bad a man as Testas, his comrade in crime. But amid the varied scenes and experiences of this day something had touched Dysmas. It had all come from the near presence and conduct of Jesus. He had never before beheld such calmness in the presence of peril and pain, such gentleness and tenderness in return for unreasoning hate and brutal cruelty. Dysmas heard Jesus pray for His enemies. He heard Him talk with Him whom He called His Father. "Surely," thought Dysmas, in the intervals between his spasms of pain, "surely this man must represent another order of things. Could He be the Messiah of whom I remember hearing in my earlier days when I went to the synagogue? The Messiah come to establish a new kingdom of love and brotherhood? I Could love and trust such a man." And as Dysmas, with failing strength, dared to raise his drooping head and hesitatingly look toward Jesus as best he could out of the corner of his eye, he feebly cried, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." It was enough. In His pain, Jesus knew; He heard. And, turning His head to catch the eye of Dysmas, He said, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Here we have the great secret of that central dominating cross athwart the sky. It was God's protest against sin. It shows the end to which sin inevitably brings human life. The cross on Calvary was the symbol and instrument of God's judgment against sin. It was more. It was by the cross of Christ that justice and mercy kissed each other.

It was not the jealousy and ill-will of Caiaphas and Annas; it was not the treachery of Judas; it was not the weakness of Pilate; it was not the spears and goads of Roman soldiers; it was the midnight-hued power of the prince of hell that raised that cross athwart the sky.

All this had its place, played its part. We have no alibi to offer for any of these. They were doing what they wanted to do and what they thought would be Christ's undoing. Hell was having its day. But the Savior was not

coerced or overpowered by any or all of these. Jesus on the cross athwart the sky was not the victim of a conspiracy.

The secret of that cross is found' in the heart of God. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"; yes, to this end. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself."

All this reached its climax on the cross athwart the sky the day of darkness and death, the day of hell's short-lived jubilation, of Heaven's supreme victory of love, though it had been in process before. The saddest, most mysterious word ever uttered was that fourth word from the lips of the Christ of the cross. Centuries before, it had fallen as a prophetic utterance from the lips of God's fearfully tried prophet. Now, in all its full, deep, terrible significance, it fell from the lips of God's only begotten Son. It expressed a reality too fearful to contemplate. Jesus was bearing in His own pure heart, His own spotless life, the black, towering, crushing load of humanity's sins. And before' it could be put away, there had to be, albeit only temporarily, the turning away, in mark of the disapproval of sin, of God's loving face from the sin-bearer.

This is the meaning of that cross athwart the sky on Good Friday. It was the world atonement day. Here was paid the price of our redemption. The All -Holy willed to suffer for the unholy, the perfectly just for the unjust. And this is the reason the way back to heaven is across Calvary, hard by the cross.

## **The Final Scene**

As I pondered the scene before me and the thoughts it suggested time passed unnoticed. Ere I was aware of it, the sun had dipped beneath the western sea and twilight had settled over the landscape.

The crowd had left the hill. In the city there was a subdued hush. Men spoke in whispers. In the palace, hard by the Temple, Caiaphas and Annas rejoiced over the apparently successful issue of their carefully laid scheme, but at heart they were not rejoicing as much as they would have it appear. Indeed, they were filled with secret fear. That supernatural darkness, the

trembling' earth, those visitors from the other world long dead, that great veil of the Temple rent from top to;-bottom that they had hastened to examine; all these things filled these men with a secret foreboding that they had not as successfully gotten rid of Jesus as they at first thought.

Over the brow of Olivet, in Bethany, with the Lazarus family, were gathered the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, a few dear friends from Galilee, John, and others. They sat around in speechless, hopeless grief, assuaged by only one still lingering memory, the love given to and received from this Master of men now dead.

Presently there was life again on the hill above, beneath the crosses. Roman soldiers reappeared. Dysmas and Testas were quickly dispatched, their bodies quickly taken from their crosses, carried away, and thrown into the Valley of Hinnom. And it is evident from their actions that the soldiers intended to end Jesus life in the same way but they found Him already dead and left Him upon the cross.

Soon men and women, more valiant in Jesus' death than they had dared to be in His life, came upon the scene. They had obtained permission from the Roman governor to give Jesus burial. With lovingly tender hands, they lowered the body from the cross and gently bore it down to the corner of Joseph's Garden where I was sitting. After enswathing it in a wealth of aromatic and preservative spices, they carefully laid the body away in the rock-hewn tomb the elderly Joseph had had prepared at much expense for his own entombment. And then the great stone was rolled in place. And I sat close by the closed grave.

These are the scenes I beheld that day in Joseph's Garden. Had I fallen asleep? Had I dreamed? Had I, in reverie, on the wings of the written Word, been wafted back through the ages to witness, in spirit, the scenes of the long ago? It matters not. We go by the record. And this is the picture the record paints in all its stark naked realism.

All was quiet in Jerusalem; its citizens awed. The groups that passed and repassed on the streets were strangely quiet or spoke in awed whispers. Earth and sky, men and God, had conspired to make man serious, thoughtful. On the hill outside the wall still stood that cross. It was now relieved of its human burden. Pilate's inscription — "This is Jesus, King of the Jews," still was attached to it and flapped gently in the breeze, that April breeze that murmured its requiem. The Passover moon and the pale Syrian stars looked down on that blood-stained cross athwart the sky and the sealed

tomb hard by. If this that we see with our natural eyes, the cross and what it did to Jesus, was all that we knew of the cross, I think it would drive me to madness and unbelief. It is not the bigness and mystery of the universe; it is not the mystery of life; it is not the infinity and incomprehensible magnitude of God, that make atheists. It is the problem of evil, where men do not understand, the evil that drags life down, that could put a Christ on the cross, that is inclined to make men unbelievers.

Thank God, this is not where the story stops. In the ultimate issue, we know that the good prevails over the evil, that God is stronger than the devil, and that the cross on which the Prince of glory died was the climax of the struggle between good and evil and that in dying He was forever victorious. Never in all His history was God more godlike, more worthy of Himself, than He was in Christ on the cross, dying to save mankind.

Gustave Doré, the great French painter, once painted a picture that illustrates this. It is the picture called "Pilate's Wife's Dream." It is a picture of two crosses, rather of one cross with two views. In the foreground there is a cross, rough, threatening, hideous, an instrument of torture and death. In the distance, on a green hill far away, there is another cross. It is veiled in glory. It glorifies all around it. This second is the cross of Christ, when we know what it meant in the mind Of God and in the heart of Christ, and what it does for the penitent, believing sons of men. This is the cross as the angels saw it, the most glorious thing in all the world to us. Well may we thank God for the cross athwart the sky.

## **Prayer**

Father of mercy, God of all grace, we, Thy poor, faltering children, would come before Thee on this Good Friday evening on our knees, humbled into the dust. Holy Father, if we are not truly upon our knees, send us something that will bring us to our knees. We are the ones who put the cross on Calvary and the Christ on the cross.

Lord Christ, Thou Son of God, our brother and our friend, we laud and magnify Thy holy name. With a love higher than the heavens, stronger than the fear of death or the terrors of hell, Thou didst love us poor, sinful creatures. Out of love for us Thou didst dare to face the utmost cruelty of hate-filled men, the pangs of death on the cross, the tortures of hell itself. Thus

Thou didst redeem us. "All we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Gracious Father, we have been on our knees, humbled, tortured, with bowed heads and bleeding hearts because of our sins. Now lift us up, that we may stand before Thee with uplifted faces and hearts unafraid. The cross is the evidence of Thy love for us, high as the heavens, deep as the depths of sea, strong as cords of steel. Here our debt was paid. In the judgment executed on the cross stern as righteousness, unrelenting as justice, Thou didst make it possible to be again the gracious Father of all those who turn to Thee in penitence and faith.

Holy Spirit, touch our trembling, irresolute hearts, give us faith, give us courage, teach us that we may trust our Father and our Savior Brother, absolutely, and all the way, that nothing can separate us from their love and mire. Give us the abiding assurance of full pardon and complete restoration.

As we stand at the foot of the cross and see how, terrible a thing sin is to Thee, O God, though assured of forgiveness to the uttermost, help us to die daily unto sin and to rise, more and more, unto righteousness.

In the presence of the cross that shames our doubts, illumines our hopes, and renews our courage, oh, that we might be swallowed up in Thy love, O God; and that we might learn, with some measure of human adequacy, to love Thee in return.

As we go down from the cross athwart the sky to stand for a few moments by the rock-hewn grave in Joseph's Garden, where rested the Master for a little while ere He started on the new conquest of His world, may we learn that for us the sting has been taken from death, that the grave is but a brief resting-place, whence we shall soon start on new and eternal adventures.

To Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, coworkers in our redemption, be praise and adoration this night and forevermore. Amen.



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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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