

“Could Ye Not Watch One Hour?”

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt. 26:41).

MATTHEW CHAPTER TWENTY SIX

Our daily readings have brought us around again to a very wonderful chapter—Matthew 26. It contains many incidents, and many people are involved. We are herein given, by the all wise and infallible inspiration of the Spirit of God, the inner background of the most important event of all history. We are shown the inward relationship of these people to one another and to the strange and tragic and glorious course of events in which each played a part.

There is much mortal failure—much human weakness—much fleshly evil. It is the same old story of common, small, meaningless, human vileness and intrigue—repeated over and over in history—*except for one man*—one man who gives the whole picture meaning and power and beauty.

Here is the turning point in history: the faithfulness, and the courage, and the victory, of this one man.

We see the rulers of the Jews, the Romans, Pilate, the common Jewish multitude, the one woman who understood, and anointed Jesus for burial, the disciples, Judas, Peter, John.

And, above all, Christ himself—the one pure, solid, godly element throughout all this interplay of fleshly strife and human weakness.

* * *

"When Jesus had finished all these sayings" (v. 1)

This was the end of his public ministry—just as in Matthew 5:7 we see its beginning. How did it end? What were "all these sayings"? We glance back to the previous chapter (25)—the Parable of the Ten Virgins—oil, light, knowledge, understanding, separation, spirituality.

The Parable of the Talents—labor, service, devotion, dedication—*"always abounding in the work of the Lord."*

The Parable of the Judgment Seat—the sheep and the goats—*"Come, ye blessed"*—*"Depart ye cursed!"* On what basis?—*on what we have or have not done for others.*

"The Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified" (v. 2).

He spoke very plainly—they heard and they answered, but they never really comprehended.

Like children, they heard the words, but saw no depth of significance. He was very much alone—this was part of the terrible ordeal.

* * *

"Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes and the elders And consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him" (vs. 3-4).

They thought they were serving God. They thought they were protecting the nation. They said:

"It is better that one man die, than that the whole nation perish."

They were hypocrites, but to a large extent unconsciously and blindly. How easy this is for the flesh! They would lead their cattle to water on the Sabbath, or lift them from a pit, but a man could not be healed on the Sabbath—that was wickedness!

It is so easy to self-righteously serve the flesh and think we are serving God. What is the solution? How can we avoid this error?

Study and prayer—constant self-examination by the light of the Spirit-Word. The answer, the guidance, the safety, is there, if we seek it humbly and constantly as the *first thing in our lives*. There is no other way.

* * *

"But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people" (v. 5).

But it HAD to be on the feast day. It was so ordained from the foundation of the world—the Passover Lamb—the blood on the doorposts. So their hand was forced, and what they tried to avoid was thrust upon them.

* * *

Verse 6 is a complete change of scene—but a basic part of the picture. Bethany—Mary—the precious ointment—the preparation for his burial.

Mary, who had sat at his feet, seemed to be the only one who realized what was happening.

The Psalms reveal the heart and mind of Christ through all this ordeal. Psalm 69 is clearly a crucifixion Psalm—it speaks of the gall and vinegar (v. 20)—

"Reproach hath broken my heart. I am full of heaviness."

"I looked for some to take pity, but there was none";

"And for comforters, but I found none."

Mary's loving and understanding ministrations supplied a vital need at this point, like the angels later in the Garden—

"There came to him a woman"—Mary, the sister of Martha (see John 12:3)—". . . having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head" (v. 7).

The men failed completely to comprehend, but a few women felt the deep current of events—this Mary, and his mother Mary, and Mary Magdalene.

But immediately there was a sour note (v. 8)

"When his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?"

Judas was the spokesman and ringleader, because he was a thief and bare the bag (John 12:6). But clearly the other disciples, too, were carried away with small-minded, self-righteous condemnation.

How easy and natural and satisfying to the flesh to condemn others who are doing far more for Christ than we are!

They may even be doing it unsoundly and misguidedly in ignorance. Our knowledge may be greater, but what hypocrisy to do LESS than they, and still to criticize!

Christ turned her condemnation to an everlasting memorial of praise (v. 13)—

"Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

* * *

"Then Judas went unto the chief priests" (v. 14).

The incident of the anointing seems to have brought things to a head in Judas. It would powerfully affect him in two ways

1. The 300 pence—he was a thief;
2. The rebuke—the setback—the reference to the burial.

Judas was much more acute than the other simple disciples. He appears to have had the greatest natural ability and capacity and maturity. A man who, in such intimate contact, could maintain such perfect deception for three years was not an ordinary man.

Ahithophel was the Old Testament type of Judas. He was to David as Judas to Christ. Ahithophel was a man of great natural wisdom. We learn much about Judas from the Psalms and the story of Ahithophel.

When the turning-point came, Ahithophel perceived it immediately. He saw the handwriting on the wall—and went and hanged himself. Doubtless the anointing incident told Judas the same thing—Christ was not going to be a king but a sacrifice.

Why did Judas follow Christ? And why did Christ choose Judas? Christ said long before that Judas was a devil. He knew from the beginning Judas would betray him (John 6:64).

The picture we get in the Psalms tells us Judas was consistently, deliberately, evil and calculating. This was no sudden weakness or mere fleshly stumbling.

This was callous, premeditated self-interest. Judas clearly followed Christ for what he could get. He could see Christ as the Messiah and himself a ruler in Israel, when this long-awaited Messiah asserted his divine claim. He had the general Jewish expectation of what the Messiah would do.

He was prudent, competent, discerning, but selfish and worldly. He sought a crown, but not a cross.

We, too, can be Christ's for the same reason—selfish, personal advantage. If we are not Christ's for just pure love of Christ, we are but Judases, and if someone offered us more we would switch. We must be Christ's for Christ's sake alone, without thought of self.

Judas was a hardened criminal. Psalms 69 and 109 reveal this. He was a thief. He was a practised and accomplished hypocrite. He brazenly asked, "*Is it I?*" at the table. What cool, unfeeling, heartless self-possession!

And then the kiss in the Garden. A man with the slightest grain of goodness or decency would surely have chosen a less vicious and hypocritical method of betrayal.

But why did Christ choose such a man for a close companion? —and so treat him for three years that none of the disciples suspected him, even when told there was a traitor in their midst?

Two purposes were served. Jesus said (John 13:18)—

"I know whom I have chosen, but THAT THE SCRIPTURE MAYBE FULFILLED—"

"He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me."

A traitor was needed, so a traitor—a vessel of dishonour—was chosen.

Secondly, it was part of the trial and perfecting of Christ's character. He was "*made perfect through suffering.*" He said (Matthew 5:44)—

"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you. Do good to them that hate you."

Surely there could be no more striking example! The mind of Christ in Psalm 109 records (vs. 4-5)

"For my love they are my adversaries, but I gave myself unto prayer."

"They have rewarded me evil for good, and HATRED FOR MY LOVE."

Verses 8-16 of this Psalm, quoted by Peter in Acts 1:20, show that it applies to these very circumstances of Jesus and Judas.

* * *

"And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver."

The paltriness of the reward adds to the despicableness of the crime. It shows his value of God's most precious and valuable gift to man—like Esau, the "*profane person,*" who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage.

* * *

"And they made ready the Passover" (v. 19).

Luke records that Jesus said—

"With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15).

And John says of the same occasion (John 13:1)—

"Having loved his own, which were in the world, he loved them to the end."

Even in his agony he did not forget or neglect his infinite love for them.

* * *

"And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you that one of you shall betray me" (v. 21).

And everyone said, *"Is it I?"*—Judas along with the rest. Was there nothing in all those three years that Judas had done that would cause them to suspect, nor in all Jesus' relationships with Judas? What a marvellous testimony to the impartial love Jesus had shown to his secret enemy among them! Psalm 41:9 says—

"Yea, mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted hath lifted up his heel against me!"

How could Jesus trust him if he knew from the beginning he would betray him?

Clearly it means that he treated him with the same trust that he treated the others. He made no distinction, though he knew what he would do. There is a great lesson for us here in our treatment of others.

There is another reason why the disciples did not suspect Judas. The outward difference between him and them was not as great as we might suppose.

Truly they were basically sincere and he was not. But they were very childish and fleshly and self-centered and uncomprehending—until the shock and sorrow of the cross made them men. In the Temple on one of those last terrible days, Jesus had been speaking of many deep and beautiful things. And as they walked out together, his disciples said, in simple, uncomprehending, childlike wonder (Mark 13:1)—

"Look at these great big stones, and beautiful building!"

How would Jesus feel?

And we find in Luke that right after he tells them that one of them will betray him, they are quarrelling among themselves who shall be greatest in the Kingdom—right at the last supper, when Jesus was in his agony of love and sorrow.

They sorrowed, like sympathetic but unrealizing children, when he spoke of betrayal and death, but they were soon too preoccupied with their own selfish rivalry to remember what he had said.

It was then that Jesus girded himself with a towel, and washed their feet.

"Having loved his own, he loved them to the end"—not for what they were, but in faith for what they would be when they grew up.

* * *

"All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (v. 31).

Peter said, with the infinite assurance of immaturity and inexperience (v. 33)—

"Though all shall be offended, yet will I never be!"

And Jesus answered (v. 34)—

"This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice."

And Peter said, in vehement denial (v. 35)—

"Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee!"

And so said they all.

How sure they were of themselves! How little need they saw for preparation and prayer! Yet how pitifully soon they failed!

Then (v. 36) they came to Gethsemane, and leaving the rest of the disciples he took Peter, James, and John a little further. And he asked them (v. 38) to watch while he prayed. And he went a little from them, and prayed—

"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt" (v. 39).

Did he not KNOW that the cup *must* be drunk? That—as he himself had said—for this purpose, all that he had done previously was but the preparing?

Why then would he ask it to be removed? Was this weakness? Rebellion? Lack of faith? Why did he not accept what he knew must be? And not once, but three times over, he so prayed.

The answer is that he was "made perfect"—complete—whole—prepared—ready—"by suffering." He *"learned obedience by the things he suffered"* (Heb. 5:8-9).

He had to be developed. He had to learn. Truly he was well pleasing to God in all things at all times, but he still had to be trained and taught and developed by trial and suffering.

We see in the Garden the last great lesson being learned—the last great trial being experienced. We see in this threefold plea—these *"strong crying and tears"* (Heb. 5:7)—the reality of the struggle and the bitter agony of the development.

Mark records an expression he used on this occasion that makes these pleas easier to understand—

"Father, all things are possible for Thee!"

This indeed is true. He had often said so himself. He had spoken of the irresistible power of the faith and prayer of a righteous man, and truly he was righteous. All things are possible—why cannot this cup pass? Why cannot it be done another way?

But each time he came through conflict to the peace of obedience, resignation, and acceptance—"Thy will, not mine, be done."

There is no sin in the great struggle within. There is no sin in strong desire and hope. But always, at the end, we must each come through to the same conclusion—

"Thy will, not mine, be done."

It is often very hard, but there is no other way. And truly in our hearts we would desire no other way, for we know God's way is best.

* * *

Each time he came from prayer, he found them sleeping. How vitally he needed the comfort and strength of understanding companionship! But it was not to be. He must tread the winepress completely alone. His dependence must be wholly upon God.

Luke says they were sleeping from sorrow. Truly they could not help but sorrow for his sorrow, though they understood it not. But they could not watch with him. They did not realize how much their support would have meant to him. They had always leaned and depended on him as being of inexhaustible strength.

To Peter he said especially—

"Could ye not watch with me one hour?" (v. 40)

It was a gentle warning to Peter to examine his own strength and doubt his own assurance, and seek help before it was too late. But Peter, in his blind self-confidence, did not heed.

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (v. 41).

This is the key passage of the chapter. Here the whole lesson and meaning of the chapter is focused—

"Watch—and pray."

They were not prepared, and therefore they failed. They were caught unawares.

They were brave men—Peter did not hesitate to draw his sword to take on a multitude.

They were devoted men—they were ready to die with Christ, and they truly meant it.

They were dedicated men—they had left all to follow him.

They were independently-minded men—they chose a hard and lonely path, contrary to the whole nation and its leaders.

They were spiritually-minded men—for they perceived that Christ alone had the words of eternal life.

But they were not prepared. They thought they were ready for everything. They thoughtlessly trusted their own strength.

They did not realize the constant application of prayer and meditation necessary for strengthening the spirit for the ordeal which must sooner or later come to all.

"And they all forsook him and fled" (v. 56).

Christ himself was far stronger and more prepared than they, but he never relied on himself. He applied himself constantly to prayer. We read at other times that, as they slept, he continued all night in prayer to God.

Here lay his secret and his strength, built slowly through long, weary hours of vigil and supplication—the strength they thought they could duplicate so easily upon demand.

Can we, too, be so thoughtlessly foolish? —taking our own strength for granted, instead of constantly bending every effort to seek divine reinforcement against the day of temptation—

"WATCH—and PRAY."

We must realize **NOW** the urgency of the command. When the test comes, it is too late to prepare.

* * *

The chapter closes with Peter's violent threefold denial of Christ. What humiliation and remorse after such boastful confidence! He truly had been ready to fight for Christ, but the command to *"Put up the sword"* and the warning that—

"All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (v. 52)

—found him wholly unprepared.

If he had watched and prayed in the Garden with Christ, instead of sleeping, perhaps he would have been ready—but he had to learn a different, harder way.

Peter had to learn to listen and accept. His devotion was impulsive and thoughtless and self-confident. When Christ spoke of the necessity of his sacrifice, trying to prepare the disciples' minds, Peter instead of listening and learning said—

"No—I know better—it must be the way I think."

He thought it was devotion, but it was really self-assertion and presumption. Then when Christ was about to wash his feet, and teach him something, again he said—

"No—I know better—thou shalt never wash my feet!"

And when Christ said—

"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me"

—it STILL had to be Peter's way, not Christ's—

"No—I know better—not my feet only, but my hands and my head."

He thought it was devotion, and truly it was, but it was a devotion that had to learn how to learn. Peter wanted to be spectacular in his devotion. He wanted to walk on the water, like Christ. He would have been wiser to wait in the boat with the rest.

*We must learn the lesson well, if we wish to be useful in God's purpose, and accepted by Him. We must learn to carefully **LISTEN**, and to carefully **OBEY**.*

Careful, thoughtful, self-examining, patient *obedience* is the only true devotion. There are millions filled with self-satisfied devotion, going about to establish their own righteousness by great deeds for Christ—self-confidently following their own will, and self-assuredly dictating to God the way of life, as Peter did to Christ.

But very few are prepared to submit to God's way—to stop, and think, and study, and meditate, and learn God's desire in every little, careful detail. These are the few alone whom God will save—

"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

(Taken from "Be Ye Transformed" Volume 1, Pages 298-307 by Bro. G. Growcott.)