

SERMONS,

ADAPTED TO THE

CELEBRATION OF THE HOLY SACRAMENT

OF

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

BY

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SERMON I.

CHRIST FORETELLING THE TREACHERY OF JUDAS.

ST. MATTHEW XXVI. 20, 21, 22.

“Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve; and as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I?”

WE can hardly read these words without placing before our minds the scene they describe. It is an affecting scene, brethren. And its chief interest lies perhaps in the view which it gives us into the thoughts and feelings of those concerned in it. We take pleasure in looking into the heart of any one we love, and here is laid open to us the heart of him we love best, the blessed Jesus; and the hearts of those he loved best, his dear disciples. And these hearts are laid open to us at a time when they are filled to the full with thought and feeling.

Our Lord was now eating his last meal with his disciples. He had gathered them around him to take a final leave of them, and to institute among them his holy supper; but there was a traitor among them, and as though this were a pollution he could no longer silently endure, he abruptly tells them of it; he gives fresh sorrow to these already sorrowful men, by proclaiming one of them his future betrayer.

The account given us of this scene naturally divides itself into two parts—our Lord’s prediction of the treachery of Judas, and the effect of that prediction on those who heard it.

I. “He sat down with the twelve; and as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.” There is *the prediction*; and it discovers to us

1. *The close and constant view which the Lord Jesus seems to have taken of his final sufferings.*

We all know that he saw these sufferings before him, but we generally conceive of him as looking at them occasionally only, and then, as it were, afar off, only dimly discerning them; in the same way as a traveller may see at intervals, and at a distance before him, some dark, troubled river he is soon to pass. But the truth probably is, that his last sufferings were never for one moment out of his thoughts. They had been in his mind as God ages before, revolved and meditated there, and now he is man, they enter his human mind, and hold possession of it. He refers to them when we least expect him to do so, and he foretells circumstances connected with them, which clearly show that he saw them not confusedly and in a mass only, like objects seen at a

distance, but clearly, distinctly, in all their number and with all their aggravations. Here he predicts, and not for the first time, the treachery of Judas, and a few minutes afterwards, the denial of him by Peter, and the forsaking of him by all his disciples.

And knowledge like this must have added greatly to his daily misery. We are saved the pain of anticipation by our ignorance of our coming sorrows, but our suffering Lord could not fly from the anticipation of his. His foreknowledge brought them within reach of his mind, and they were of a nature that impelled his mind to look at and grasp them.

2. We may see next in this prediction *the naturalness of our Lord's mind*. By this I mean its resemblance to our own minds; its participation with us in the ordinary workings and feelings of our nature.

Look into your own hearts, brethren. If you have ever really loved a fellow-creature, and that fellow-creature has inflicted on you some painful injury, you have forgiven the injury perhaps, but in spite of yourselves, you cannot wholly forget it. The remembrance of it will still occasionally recur to you, and will be most likely to recur when you might suppose it the least likely—in those seasons when your love for your friend is called into the liveliest exercise. Think of that touching interview which took place between Joseph and his brethren when he made himself known to them. Not a reproach escapes him for the wrong they had done him, but yet he cannot keep it from his mind nor even from his lips. Again and again, while his heart is really melting with love for them, he reminds them of it. And now turn to the Saviour.

Never did his love for his disciples appear so drawn forth as at this period. He was about to part with them, and his whole soul seems overflowing with the love he bore them. Naturally and beautifully does St. John begin his narrative of this scene with speaking of his love. “Having loved his own,” he says, “which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” And how does he show this love? He rises, we are told, from supper, and stoops down, and washes their feet. This over, he seats himself again amongst them, and exactly at this strange moment, in the midst of this scene of tenderness and, we might have said, nothing but tenderness, he says to these wondering men, “One of you shall betray me.”

And turn to the sixth chapter of the same evangelist. “From that time,” we read, “many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.” Our Lord, touched doubtless with sorrow at this desertion, turns round and says to the twelve, “Will ye also go away?” Then Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” A noble confession, we may say, nobly given, kindling undoubtedly in the breast of Christ pleasure and love; but what comes out of this love? He thinks

immediately of the traitor among them; the betraying kiss comes into his mind; and instead of saying, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; blessed are ye, my faithful disciples, my comforters still in a world that forsakes me;" he says, and almost startles us as he says it, "Have not I chosen you twelve? and one of you is a devil."

And thus he lays open to us his resemblance to ourselves, the entireness with which he has taken our nature upon him. He has not only our outward nature, a human form like ours; and not only our inward nature, a human mind like ours; but that mind is affected as ours is; it works as our minds work and feels as they feel. We have no stranger, brethren, for our High Priest in the heavens. Lifted up above us indeed he is, so high that the throne of the everlasting Jehovah is not higher, but notwithstanding this, he is as really one of ourselves as though he were now walking the earth in our form. His heavenly exaltation has indeed wrought some change in his human mind, as our exaltation to heaven will in some degree change our minds, but it is a human mind still. He is as much a partaker of our nature and of all the sinless feelings of our nature, as he is of the eternity of his Father and the purity of the Holy Ghost.

3. Observe here too *the exceeding tenderness of Christ*.

Bearing in mind the weight of mental anguish he was now sustaining, we might have thought that it would be to him a matter of but little moment whether the men around him loved or hated him. His Father's hand was heavy upon him; it pleased an almighty God to bruise and grieve him; and his griefs, we should have said, are so profound, that the kindness or unkindness, the faithfulness or unfaithfulness, of man, will be alike unheeded by him. As for our deepening sorrows like his by any thing we can do, it would be as easy for us to deepen the gloom of midnight. But look to the fact. It would seem as though any worm of the earth could wound him. One of the vilest worms that ever crept on the earth's surface, is here putting this mighty Sufferer, and in one of his most suffering hours, to new grief. "One of you shall betray me" was not uttered by him in a moment of respite from his misery, or without emotion, as the mere prediction of a fact he cared not for; he said it with all the anguish of Gethsemane and Calvary directly before him, with the sins of a whole world pressing down on him, and the terrors of his cross well nigh overshadowing him; and said it as though he could not refrain from saying it, as though even in this situation the treachery of one bad man could inflict on him an anguish he was not able to conceal. He was "troubled in spirit," St John says, agitated and visibly so, when he "testified and said, One of you shall betray me."

We talk of feeling and tenderness, brethren, and there is the semblance of these things in our world, but here is the reality. And how cheering the thought, that this tenderness dwells in the very heart where we would most

wish it to dwell! not in the heart of one with whom we have nothing to do, but in the heart of him with whom we have the most to do; in his heart, the Christian says, who is my Redeemer and Sanctifier, my daily Comforter, “my Companion, and Guide, and familiar Friend.” It is tenderness that is even now in existence and in operation, and I am the object of it. It is mixed up with the love my exalted Lord bears to me; it mingles itself with all his dealings towards me. I feel it often in the comforts he sends to gladden me, and I have felt it too in the afflictions and sorrows wherewith he has chastened me. He could as soon forget his everlasting throne, as soon lay aside his holiness or existence, as lay aside his tenderness, or, if I am one of his, withdraw it from me. With his servant David, I shall say at the last when he has raised me to his kingdom, “Thy gentleness, O Lord, hath made me great.”

4. We are reminded also here of *the wonderful self-denial of our Lord*; his amazing command over his own feelings and conduct.

It is clear that although Judas had been now for three years constantly with him, he had never treated him differently from the other disciples. There had been nothing in his conduct toward him at all peculiar, nothing most certainly that had marked him out to his companions as a treacherous or even a suspicious man.

On the first view, this may appear a trifle. We sometimes behave alike to our best friends and our worst enemies, but we do not always know who our enemies and our friends are; men deceive us. Not so however with the Lord Jesus, He “knew from the beginning who should betray him.” The very first glance he ever had of Judas, revealed to him his betrayer. The man never once appeared before him, but he recognized in him a deceiver; never sat down with him or walked by his side, but he thought of his baseness; never gave him one word, or look, or token, of affection, but he saw concealed beneath it a traitor’s heart. And this wonderful forbearance held out to the very last. To think that within a few hours of his condemnation and death, our Lord could sit calmly down at the same table with this perfidious apostle; eat and drink with him as a friend; actually bend down before him, take up his vile feet, and wash them with his own sacred hands; and still more—bear perhaps with his presence at the supper he was instituting, and see him partaking of it; and during all this, never betray any abhorrence of him, never by any one look or gesture bring down suspicion on him:— we cannot think of forbearance like this, and not see in this patient Jesus something more than earthly—a self-command, a long-suffering, a greatness, that at once astonish and delight us. Could you have done this, brethren? You know what you feel, when you are obliged at any time to treat with common civility, for a few short minutes, a man whom you believe to be perfidious. We ministers know what we feel, when we are obliged at the table of the Lord to hold out the

emblems of his dying love to those who, we suspect, are hypocritical and base. But here is Christ doing this and far more than this, and amidst feelings of disgust and sorrow, compared with which any painful feelings of ours are as nothing; and doing it in silent, tranquil dignity. “Never man spake like this man,” said the Roman officers who were sent to take him; and surely we must say, “Never man acted like him.” Look at him in what light we may, we are forced to see that all in him is wonderful; all alike wonderful; love, tenderness, patience, strength, greatness, all passing our comprehension; all indicating a Being raised far above us; all testifying of that suffering Jesus, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

But we, in our measure, must resemble him; and not in this or that grace only, but in that combination of graces, which formed the peculiarity of his character. It still forms a main peculiarity of the Christian character. Nature, without the Spirit of Christ, may give to one man feeling and tender feeling, and to another man a great apparent self-command; but we do not often find these things combined in natural men. Their tendency is to clash one with another, and to shut the door of the heart against each other. But the Spirit of Christ comes in and triumphs over this tendency. It makes a man feeling, and it makes him firm. It softens his heart, and it strengthens his heart. Under its influence, he becomes a seeming contradiction—a babe and yet a giant. He can weep with his Lord over what another man would deem a trifle; and, if need be, he can suffer with his Lord a weight of misery that would half break that other man’s heart, and suffer it quietly, calmly, as though he suffered not at all. And this is partly that perfection of which St. Paul often speaks; that completeness of character, which he so often presses his fellow-Christians to seek. And when it is thus with us, brethren; when things contrary to our nature begin to rise up within us, and things apparently opposite one to another to meet together in us; when the cold heart begins to warm, and the hard heart to melt, and the tender heart to grow firm; when the man of feeling can reign the lord of his feelings, and the man of strength, without losing his strength, can soften and feel; then may we indeed begin to hope that “the same mind that was in Christ,” is at last in us; that we are in his hand and under his teaching; that his Spirit is moulding us into his perfect likeness, and that we shall come forth in his likeness “to the praise of the glory of his grace” in the day of his appearing.

II. We must now turn from Christ to his disciples, and notice *the effect produced on them, by his prediction.*

But our fellow-men, brethren, are poor objects of contemplation after looking at our glorious Lord. To turn to them is like turning from a lofty mountain to a petty hill, or from some wide, splendid landscape, to a pictured copy of it. But yet scripture holds up our fellow-men to us for our

contemplation, and the faint traces it enables us to discover in them of our Master's likeness, often surprise, delight, and encourage us.

In the men before us, we may observe

1. *Their simple faith in their Lord's prediction.*

It must have been very startling to them. It announced something as about to happen, which really seemed most unlikely to happen. They knew that the Jews were seeking his life, and he had at last produced something like a conviction in them that his life would be taken, but none of them had in consequence forsaken him, or wavered in the least in their adherence to him. Here they were, gathered together around him, with hearts warmer than ever with love for him, and all in appearance ready at any moment to die for his sake. And yet when he abruptly says to them, "One of you shall betray me," no doubt is expressed or even felt as to the truth of his words. Confounding as they were, with the simplicity of little children they believe them.

And this was not the usual way of these men. At other times they could scan and question their Master's words as doubtingly and rudely as others. But they were not now in their usual mind. Their Master's thrilling conduct towards them in washing their feet, and perhaps the unusual solemnity and affection of his demeanour, seem to have sobered them. They have now no heart for the indulgence of self-conceit and cavilling. They feel, and think, and speak, like Christian men; like disciples almost worthy of such a Lord.

And there are seasons perhaps in the life of every Christian, when something like such a change as this comes over him. It may be in deep affliction, or under signal mercies, or perhaps simply beneath the power of God's holy word, but, be the cause what it may, the man becomes sobered, subdued. His proud foolish heart feels for a time as though all its folly and pride had left it. He lies down at his Saviour's feet, and is content to lie there, and wishes he could lie there for ever, believing all he says, submitting to all he does, with his self-will broken, his self-dependence crushed, his high imaginations all cast down, every thought within him "brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." O that such moments would last! Blessed to you and me, brethren, have been the mercies or trials which have brought them; and blessed will any thing be to us, which brings them again.

2. Notice further *the warm love of these disciples for Christ.* We discover this in their sorrow.

It was a thought they hardly knew how to bear that he should in any way be taken from them. Ignorant as they partially were of his real character, and basely as they afterwards deserted him, yet they could not hear of his departure from them without deep sorrow of heart, without indeed emotion so strong as even to silence and apparently overwhelm them. "Now," says Jesus to them, "I go my way to him that sent me, and none of you asketh me

whither goest thou; but because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.”

Imagine these men then, in this state of mind, hearing their Lord declare that he was not only eating his last meal with them, and then going directly afterwards to prison and to death, but that he was to go there a victim to treachery, and the treachery of one of their number; that not only were the nails and spears of his enemies to enter in a few hours the form they were gazing on, but the perfidy of one of his few companions, one of themselves, to pierce his soul;—conceive them hearing and believing this, and you will not want to go far for the origin of their sorrow. “They loved their Master,” you will say, “and because they loved him, the thought of his thus suffering and his being thus betrayed into suffering, grieved and distressed them; they were exceeding sorrowful.”

And you know nothing of Christian feeling, brethren, if you cannot readily enter into their sorrow. Once get into your hearts a real love for the Lord Jesus, and it will not always be the evil of sin, or the misery it brings, or the danger attending it, that will make you weep over it; it will often be the dishonour it does to your dying Lord. And this feeling will not be confined to your own sins, it will extend to the sins of those connected with you—your families, your relatives, your friends, your neighbours. You will see in them so many injuries done, and done in a blaspheming world where they ought least to be done, to your holy Master, and the thought of them will cut you to the heart. “I thank God,” you will say, “that it is not I; but it is one of mine and you will be sorrowful, brethren, and “exceeding sorrowful,” like these troubled men. And when the sin is your own, what will you be? Ask him who has himself dishonoured his Saviour’s name, what you will be. He will tell you that you can scarcely know what the bitterness of sorrow is, till you experience this. He will say that he can think with calmness of his worldly losses and worldly troubles, of his buried friends and withered comforts, but he cannot think with calmness of a dishonoured Saviour. “Betray him?” he says, “Yes, I have done it. I have brought shame in this vile world on his blessed name, and the remembrance of it dries up my spirit. O could I wipe off the stain, my whole life should be a life of weeping. It must be a life of weeping. I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul.”

Brethren, there is no happiness, there is much misery, for any of you who love the Lord Jesus, and yet get into sinful ways. You may be poor, and yet be happy; you may scarcely know where to lay your heads, and be happy; you may be friendless and solitary in the world, and be happy; you may be ill treated and despised in it, and be happy; you may stand by the grave of all that was dear to you on earth, and even there be happy: but sin against the Lord Jesus Christ; for money, or pleasure, or pride, or any thing, betray him

in this land of his enemies, and there is no happiness for you; you have a misery to go through greater than any you have ever yet experienced; years will roll over your heads before you will know real, quiet, settled happiness again.

3. But there is one thing more to be noticed in these apostles, and that the most striking of all—*their great self-distrust*.

It might have been supposed that love like theirs, so sincere and warm, would at once have impelled them to pronounce impossible the crime their Lord predicted; that they would have acted in this case, just as they acted a little afterwards, and declared with one voice and one common feeling of indignant determination, that they would die with their Master, but not prove false to him. But mark the fact. “One of you shall betray me,” says Christ, and what follows? There is no attempt to repel the charge; not a single voice says “No.” And there is no looking about one on the other for the traitor. No man suspects his brother; not one of them suspects even Judas; each man suspects himself. As soon as their astonishment and grief would let them, eleven out of these twelve men begin to cry out, “every one of them,” and say unto him, “Lord, is it I?” Only one in the whole company is silent, and he the guilty one, the very man who was meditating the crime. He too said the same, but when? afterwards, when he felt himself obliged to say it or draw on himself suspicion.

A beautiful picture, brethren, of Christian humility; and the more beautiful, because exhibited to us in such half humbled, such half sanctified men. Shall I say, we may learn from it that there is no sin so great, or so much opposed to his present feelings and inclinations, but that the Christian may be brought to fear he may fall into it? Every real Christian here knows this. He is well acquainted with the fear of sin, and almost wishes he were better acquainted with it. He can trust his Redeemer’s grace to preserve him from every sin, but he cannot trust himself: he knows that there is not a single sin from which, without this grace, he is for a single moment safe. “I am frail enough and vile enough,” he says, “for any thing. Left to myself, I could be a Judas tomorrow.” Such a man looks with admiration at these fearful disciples, and says within himself as he looks at them, “Let me be as they are. Lord, make me also self-suspicious, fearful before thee. Let me be ever ready, as they were, to say unto thee, Is it I.”

This is not unbelieving, it is holy language, brethren, and language that undoubtedly the Lord Jesus loved to hear from his disciples. He seems to have predicted the treachery of Judas at first in this general way, that he might hear it from them. O that he were hearing it now from every one of us! We are in a situation very like that in which these men were when they uttered it. We are going to sit down, as it were, with our blessed Lord, and to eat of the supper he has provided for us. There were only twelve of them, yet one

of them was a traitor. There are many of us. How many traitors there may be among us, we know not. It is a solemn question, but it is one we have not to answer and need not ask. There is another question however which every one, who really loves the Lord his Saviour, will surely ask—"Am I in their number? Am I a traitor?" Nay, were that blessed Saviour now to pierce these walls with his voice, and tell us that there is only one such man, only one man within these walls who will betray and dishonour him before he dies, "O," I would say, "let me be among the first who says within himself when that voice is passed, Lord, is it I?" Most certainly the holiest of us all would be the first to say this; the worst of us all would say it the last.

And, for our comfort, we may regard this also as certain—the most fearful here are among the least likely here to be traitors; the most trembling heart here is the most likely heart here to be honest and sincere before its Lord. The man he will probably delight in the most today at his table, is the man who will go there with this feeling the strongest in his soul, "I am a weak, helpless, miserable sinner. Save me, Lord, save me by thy mighty Spirit from ever betraying or dishonouring thee. Thou hast died for this guilty soul of mine; thou hast washed it from sins innumerable in thy blood; thou hast clothed it in its nakedness with the robe of thine own spotless righteousness; thou hast done for it more than my tongue or my heart can tell. O do for it this one thing more—keep all hypocrisy and guile ever out of it; keep all indulged sin ever out of it, especially such sin as may lead me in the end to bring shame on thy gospel and on thee! Let me be the most afflicted, the most sorrowful man that ever went through this world of sorrow to thy kingdom, rather than leave behind me on thy church a blot or a stain."