

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS  
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

*And many Explanatory Notes.*

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MDCCCLIX.

MARK XIV. 1-9.

1 After two days was *the feast of the Passover*, and of unleavened bread: and the Chief Priests and the Scribes sought how they might take him by craft, and put *him* to death.

2 But they said, Not on the feast *day*, lest there be an uproar of the people.

3 And being in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured *it* on his head.

4 And there were some that had indignation within themselves, and said, Why was this waste of the ointment made?

5 For it might have been sold for more than three hundred pence, and have been

given to the poor. And they murmured against her.

6 And Jesus said, Let her alone; why trouble ye her? she hath wrought a good work on me.

7 For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always.

8 She hath done what she could: she is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.

9 Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, *this* also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.

THIS chapter begins that part of St. Mark's Gospel, which describes our Lord's sufferings and death. Hitherto we have chiefly seen our Saviour as our prophet and teacher. We have now to see Him as our High Priest. Hitherto we have had to consider His miracles and sayings. We have now to consider His vicarious sacrifice on the cross.

Let us first observe in these verses, *how God can disappoint the designs of wicked men, and over-rule them to His own glory.*

It is plain from St. Mark's words, and the parallel passage in St. Matthew, that our Lord's enemies did not intend to make His death a public transaction. "They sought to take Him by craft." "They said, not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar of the people." In short, it would appear that their original plan was to do nothing till the feast of the passover was over, and the passover-worshippers had returned to their own homes.

The overruling providence of God completely defeated this politic design. The betrayal of our Lord took place at an earlier time than the chief priests had expected. The death of our Lord took place on the very day when Jerusalem was most full of people, and the passover feast was at its height. In every way the counsel of these wicked men was turned to foolishness. They thought they were going to put an end for ever to Christ's spiritual kingdom; and in reality they were helping to establish it. They thought to have made Him vile and contemptible by the crucifixion; and in reality they made Him glorious. They thought to have put Him to death privily, and without observation; and instead, they were compelled to crucify Him publicly, and before the whole nation of the Jews. They thought to have silenced His disciples, and stopped their teaching; and instead, they supplied them with a text and a subject for

evermore. So easy is it for God to cause the wrath of man to praise Him. (Psalm lxxvi. 10.)

There is comfort in all this for true Christians. They live in a troubled world, and are often tossed to and fro by anxiety about public events. Let them rest themselves in the thought that everything is ordered for good by an all-wise God. Let them not doubt that all things in the world around them are working together for their Father's glory. Let them call to mind the words of the second Psalm: "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord." And yet it goes on, "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in decision." It has been so in time past. It will be so in time to come.

Let us observe, secondly, in these verses, *how good works are sometimes undervalued and misunderstood*. We are told of the good work of a certain woman, in pouring ointment on our Lord's head, in a house at Bethany.<sup>1</sup> She did it, no doubt, as a mark of honour and respect, and in token of her own gratitude and love towards Him. Yet this act of hers was blamed by some. Their cold hearts could not understand such costly liberality. They called it "waste." "They had indignation within themselves." They "murmured against her."

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<sup>1</sup> The question has often been raised, whether there were one, two, or three women who anointed our Lord during His earthly ministry. Theophylact is of opinion that there were three. For this opinion much may be said.

1. The woman spoken of in the seventh chapter of St. Luke appears first in order. The city in which this anointing took place does not appear to be Bethany. The woman is spoken of as having been "a sinner." The house is described as that of a Pharisee. The anointing was of our Lord's "feet," and not of His "head." There is strong internal evidence that the whole transaction took place at a comparatively early period of our Lord's ministry. All these points should be noticed.

2. The anointing described by St. John appears next in order. This, we are distinctly told, was "six days" before the passover. The person who anointed our Lord was Mary, the sister of Lazarus. The part of Him anointed was again His "feet," and not His "head." These points ought also to be noticed.

3. The anointing described by St. Matthew and St. Mark comes third in order. This, we are told, was only "two days" before the feast of the passover. In this case we are not told the name of the woman who anointed our Lord. But we are told that the ointment was poured on His "head."

The question, of course occurs to our minds: "Is it likely and probable that this event would take place no less than three times?" In reply to that it may be fairly said, that to anoint a person as a mark of honour and respect, was far more common in our Lord's time than we in England suppose; and that anointing was a far more frequent practice than we in this climate can imagine. And, it seems perfectly possible that the same thing may have happened three times.

The main difficulty, of course, is the close similarity of the language used at the anointing described by John, and at that described by Matthew and Mark. This can only be explained by supposing that our Lord, twice said the same things.

The spirit of these narrow-minded fault-finders is unhappily only too common. Their followers and successors are to be found in every part of Christ's visible church. There is never wanting a generation of people who decry what they call "extremes" in religion, and are incessantly recommending what they term "moderation" in the service of Christ. If a man devotes his time, money, and affections to the pursuit of worldly things, they do not blame him. If he gives himself up to the service of money, pleasure, or politics, they find no fault. But if the same man devotes himself, and all he has, to Christ, they can scarcely find words to express their sense of his folly.—"He is beside himself." "He is out of his mind." "He is a fanatic." "He is an enthusiast." "He is righteous over-much." "He is an extreme man."—In short, they regard it as "waste."

Let charges like these not disturb us, if we hear them made against us, because we strive to serve Christ. Let us bear them patiently, and remember that they are as old as Christianity itself. Let us pity those who make such charges against believers. They show plainly that they have no sense of obligation to Christ. A cold heart makes a slow hand. If a man once understands the sinfulness of sin, and the mercy of Christ in dying for him, he will never think anything too good or too costly to give to Christ. He will rather feel, "what shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits." (Psalm cxvi. 12.) He will fear wasting time, talents, money, affections on the things of this world. He will not be afraid of wasting them on his Saviour. He will fear going into extremes about business, money, politics, or pleasure; but he will not be afraid of doing too much for Christ.

Let us observe, in the last place, how *highly our Lord Jesus Christ esteems any service done to himself*. Nowhere, perhaps, in the Gospels, do we find such strong praises bestowed on any person, as this woman here receives. Three points, in particular, stand out prominently in our Lord's words, to which many who now ridicule and blame others for their religion's sake, would do well to take heed.

For one thing, our Lord says, "Why trouble ye her?"—A heart-searching question that, and one which all who persecute others because of their religion would find it hard to answer!—What cause can they show? What reason can they assign for their conduct? None! none at all. They trouble others out of envy, malice, ignorance, and dislike of the true Gospel.

For another thing, our Lord says, "She hath done a good work."—How great and marvellous is that praise, from the lips of the King of kings! Money is often given to the Church, or bestowed on charitable

institutions, from ostentation, or other false motives. But it is the person who loves and honours Jesus Himself, who really “does good works.”

For another thing, our Lord says, “She hath done what she could.”—No stronger word of commendation than that could possibly have been used. Thousands live and die without grace, and are lost eternally, who are always saying, “I try all I can. I do all I can.” And yet in saying so, they tell as great a lie as Ananias and Sapphira. Few, it may be feared, are to be found like this woman, and really deserve to have it said of them, that they “do what they can.”

Let us leave the passage with practical self-application. Let us, like this holy woman, whose conduct we have just heard described, devote ourselves, and all we have, to Christ’s glory. Our position in the world may be lowly, and our means of usefulness few. But let us, like her, “do what we can.”

Finally, let us see in this passage a sweet foretaste of things yet to come in the day of judgment. Let us believe that the same Jesus who here pleaded the cause of His loving servant, when she was blamed, will one day plead for all who have been His servants in this world. Let us work on, remembering that His eye is upon us, and that all we do is noted in His book.—Let us not heed what men say or think of us, because of our religion. The praise of Christ, at the last day, will more than compensate for all we suffer in this world from unkind tongues.

MARK XIV. 10–16.

10 And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the Chief Priests, to betray him unto them.

11 And when they heard *it*, they were glad, and promised to give him money. And he sought how he might conveniently betray him.

12 And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the Passover?

13 And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the

city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.

14 And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest-chamber, where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples?

15 And he will shew you a large upper room furnished *and* prepared: there make ready for us.

16 And his disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover.

IN these verses, St. Mark tells us how our Lord was delivered into the hands of His enemies. It came to pass through the treachery of one of His own twelve disciples. The false apostle, Judas Iscariot, betrayed Him.

We ought to mark, firstly, in this passage, *to what lengths a man may go in a false profession of religion.*

It is impossible to conceive a more striking proof of this painful truth, than the history of Judas Iscariot. If ever there was a man who at one time looked like a true disciple of Christ, and bade fair to reach heaven, that man was Judas. He was chosen by the Lord Jesus Himself to be an apostle. He was privileged to be a companion of the Messiah, and an eye-witness of His mighty works, throughout His earthly ministry. He was an associate of Peter, James, and John. He was sent forth to preach the kingdom of God, and to work miracles in Christ's name. He was regarded by all the eleven apostles as one of themselves. He was so like his fellow disciples, that they did not suspect him of being a traitor. And yet this very man turns out at last a false-hearted child of the devil,—departs entirely from the faith,—assists our Lord's deadliest enemies, and leaves the world with a worse reputation than any one since the days of Cain. Never was there such a fall, such an apostasy, such a miserable end to a fair beginning,—such a total eclipse of a soul!

And how can this amazing conduct of Judas be accounted for? There is only one answer to that question. "The love of money" was the cause of this unhappy man's ruin. That same grovelling covetousness, which enslaved the heart of Balaam, and brought on Gehazi a leprosy, was the destruction of Iscariot's soul. No other explanation of his behaviour will satisfy the plain statements of Scripture. His act was an act of mean covetousness, without a redeeming feature about it. The Holy Ghost declares plainly "he was a thief." (John xii. 6.) And his case stands before

the world as an eternal comment on the solemn words, “the love of money is the root of all evil.” (1 Tim. vi. 10.)

Let us learn from this melancholy history of Judas, to be “clothed with humility,” and to be content with nothing short of the grace of the Holy Ghost in our hearts. Knowledge, gifts, profession, privileges, church-membership, power of preaching, praying, and talking about religion, are all useless things, if our hearts are not converted. They are all no better than sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal, if we have not put off the old man, and put on the new. They will not deliver us from hell.—Above all, let us remember our Lord’s caution, to “beware of covetousness.” (Luke xii. 15.) It is a sin that eats like a canker, and once admitted into our hearts, may lead us finally into every wickedness. Let us pray to be “content with such things as we have.” (Heb. xiii. 6.) The possession of money is not the one thing needful. Riches entail great peril on the souls of those who have them. The true Christian ought to be far more afraid of being rich than of being poor.

We ought to mark, secondly, in this passage, the *intentional connection between the time of the Jewish passover and the time of Christ’s death*. We cannot doubt for a moment that it was not by chance, but by God’s providential appointment, that our Lord was crucified in the passover week, and on the very day that the passover lamb was slain. It was meant to draw the attention of the Jewish nation to Him as the true Lamb of God. It was meant to bring to their minds the true object and purpose of His death. Every sacrifice, no doubt, was intended to point the Jew onward to the one great sacrifice for sin which Christ offered. But none, certainly, was so striking a figure and type of our Lord’s sacrifice, as the slaying of the passover lamb. It was preeminently an ordinance which was a “schoolmaster unto Christ.” (Gal. iii. 24.) Never was there a type so full of meaning in the whole circle of Jewish ceremonies, as the passover was at its original institution.

Did the passover remind the Jew of the marvellous deliverance of his forefathers out of the land of Egypt, when God slew the first-born? No doubt it did. But it was also meant to be a sign to him of the far greater redemption and deliverance from the bondage of sin, which was to be brought in by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Did the passover remind the Jew, that by the death of an innocent lamb, the families of his forefathers were once exempted from the death of their first-born? No doubt it did. But it was also meant to teach him the far higher truth, that the death of Christ on the cross was to be the life of the world.

Did the passover remind the Jew that the sprinkling of blood on the door-posts of his forefathers’ houses, preserved them from the sword of

the destroying angel? No doubt it did. But it was also meant to show him the far more important doctrine that Christ's blood sprinkled on man's conscience, cleanses it from all stain of guilt, and makes him safe from the wrath to come.

Did the passover remind the Jew that none of his forefathers were safe from the destroying angel, in the night when he slew the first-born, unless he actually ate of the slain lamb? No doubt it did. But it was meant to guide his mind to the far higher lesson, that all who would receive benefit from Christ's atonement, must actually feed upon Him by faith, and receive Him into their hearts.

Let us call these things to mind, and weigh them well. We shall then see a peculiar fitness and beauty in the time appointed by God for our Lord Jesus Christ's death on the cross. It happened at the very season when the mind of all Israel was being directed to the deliverance from Egypt, and to the events of that wondrous night, when it took place. The lamb slain and eaten by every member of the family, the destroying angel,—the safety within the blood-sprinkled door, would have been talked over and considered in every Jewish household, the very week that our blessed Lord was slain. It would be strange indeed if such a remarkable death as His, at such a time, did not set many minds thinking, and open many eyes. To what extent we shall never know till the last day.

Let it be a rule with us, in the reading of our Bibles, to study the types and ordinances of the Mosaic law with prayerful attention. They are all full of Christ. The altar,—the scape-goat,—the daily burnt-offering,—the day of atonement, are all so many finger-posts pointing to the great sacrifice offered by our Lord on Calvary. Those who neglect to study the Jewish ordinances, as dark, dull, and uninteresting parts of the Bible, only show their own ignorance, and miss great advantages. Those who examine them with Christ as the key to their meaning, will find them full of Gospel light and comfortable truth.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It may be well to observe in this connection, that it admits of much question, whether the common view of the word "passover" is the correct one. At any rate, the following passage from Bishop Lowth on Isaiah xxxi. 5. deserves careful consideration. He says:

"The common notion of God's passing over the houses of the Israelites is, that in going through the land of Egypt to smite the first-born, seeing the blood on the door of the houses of the Israelites, He passed over, or skipped those houses, and forbore to smite them. But that this is not the true notion of the thing, will be plain from considering the words of the sacred historian, where he describes very explicitly the action: 'For Jehovah will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He seeth the blood on the lintels and on the two side posts, Jehovah *will spring forward over or before the door*, and will not suffer the destroyer to come into your houses to smite you.' Exod. xii. 23.—Here are manifestly two distinct agents, with which the notion of passing over is not consistent; for that supposes but one agent. The two agents are, the destroying angel passing through to smite every house, and Jehovah the protector, keeping pace with

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him, who seeing the door of the Israelites marked with blood, leaps forward, throws Himself with a sudden motion in the way, opposes the destroying angel, and protects and saves that house against him, nor suffers him to smite it." The words of Isaiah xxxi. 5, ought to be studied attentively, in order to understand the fitness and propriety of this interpretation.

MARK XIV. 17–25.

17 And in the evening he cometh with the twelve.	were it for that man if he had never been born.
18 And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with me shall betray me.	22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake <i>it</i> , and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body.
19 And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, <i>Is it I?</i> and another <i>said, Is it I?</i>	23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave <i>it</i> to them: and they all drank of it.
20 And he answered and said unto them, <i>It is</i> one of the twelve that dippeth with me in the dish.	24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.
21 The Son of man indeed goeth, as it is written of him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! good	25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

THESE verses contain St. Mark's account of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The simplicity of the description deserves special observation. Well would it have been for the Church, if men had not departed from the simple statements of Scripture about this blessed sacrament! It is a mournful fact that it has been corrupted by false explanations and superstitious additions, until its real meaning, in many parts of Christendom, is utterly unknown. Let us however, at present, dismiss from our minds all matters of controversy, and study the words of St. Mark with a view to our own personal edification.

Let us learn from the passage before us, that *self-examination should precede the reception of the Lord's Supper*. We cannot doubt that this was one object of our Lord's solemn warning, "One of you which eateth with me shall betray me." He meant to stir up in the minds of His disciples, those very searchings of heart which are here so touchingly recorded: "They began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, *Is it I?* and another said, *Is it I?*" He meant to teach His whole Church throughout the world, that the time of drawing near to the Lord's table should be a time for diligent self-inquiry.

The benefit of the Lord's Supper depends entirely on the spirit and frame of mind in which we receive it. The bread which we there eat, and the wine which we there drink, have no power to do good to our souls, as medicine does good to our bodies, without the cooperation of our hearts and wills. They will not convey any blessing to us, by virtue of the minister's consecration, if we do not receive them rightly, worthily, and with faith. To assert, as some do, that the Lord's supper must do good to all communicants, whatever be the state of mind in which they receive it, is a monstrous and unscriptural figment, and has given rise to gross and wicked superstition.

The state of mind which we should look for in ourselves, before going to the Lord's table, is well described in the Catechism of the Church

of England. We ought to “examine ourselves whether we repent truly of our former sins,—whether we steadfastly purpose to lead a new life,—whether we have a lively faith in God’s mercy through Christ,—and a thankful remembrance of His death,—and whether we are in charity with all men.” If our conscience can answer these questions satisfactorily, we may receive the Lord’s supper without fear. More than this God does not require of any communicant. Less than this ought never to content us.

Let us take heed to ourselves in the matter of the Lord’s supper. It is easy to err about it on either side.—On the one hand, we are not to be content with staying away from the Lord’s table under the vague plea of unfitness. As long as we so stay away, we are disobeying a plain command of Christ, and are living in sin.—But, on the other hand, we are not to go to the Lord’s table as a mere form, and without thought. As long as we receive the sacrament in that state of mind, we derive no good from it, and are guilty of a great transgression.—It is an awful thing to be unfit for the sacrament, for this is to be unfit to die. It is a no less awful thing to receive it unworthily, for this is most provoking to God. The only safe course is to be a decided servant of Christ, and to live the life of faith in Him.—Then we may draw near with boldness, and take the sacrament to our comfort.

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, that *the principal object of the Lord’s Supper, is to remind us of Christ’s sacrifice for us on the cross.* The bread is intended to bring to our recollection the “body” of Christ, which was wounded for our transgressions. The wine is intended to bring to our recollection the “blood” of Christ, which was shed to cleanse us from all sin. The atonement and propitiation which our Lord effected by His death as our Surety and Substitute, stand out prominently in the whole ordinance. The false doctrine which some teach, that His death was nothing more than the death of a very holy man, who left us an example how to die, turns the Lord’s supper into an unmeaning ordinance, and cannot possibly be reconciled with our Lord’s words at its institution.

A clear understanding of this point is of great importance. It will place us in the right position of mind, and teach us how we ought to feel in drawing near to the Lord’s table.—It will produce in us true *humility* of spirit. The bread and wine will remind us how sinful sin must be, when nothing but Christ’s death could atone for it.—It will produce in us *hopefulness* about our souls. The bread and wine will remind us that though our sins are great, a great price has been paid for our redemption.—Not least, it will produce in us *gratitude*. The bread and wine will remind us how great is our debt to Christ, and how deeply bound we are to

glorify Him in our lives. May these be the feelings that we experience, whenever we receive the Lord's supper

Finally, we learn from these verses, *the nature of the spiritual benefits, which the Lord's Supper is intended to convey, and the persons who have a right to expect them.* We may gather this lesson from the significant actions which are used in receiving this sacrament. Our Lord commands us to "eat" bread and to "drink" wine. Now eating and drinking are the acts of a living person. The object of eating and drinking is to be strengthened and refreshed. The conclusion we are meant to draw, is manifestly this, that the Lord's supper is appointed for "the strengthening and refreshing of our souls," and that those who ought to partake of it are those who are lively, real Christians. All such will find this sacrament a means of grace. It will assist them to rest in Christ more simply, and to trust in Him more entirely. The visible symbols of bread and wine will aid, quicken, and confirm their faith.

A right view of this point is of the utmost moment in these latter days. We must always beware of thinking that there is any way of eating Christ's body, and drinking Christ's blood, but by faith,—or that receiving the Lord's supper will give any man a different interest in Christ's sacrifice on the cross from that which faith gives. Faith is the one grand mean of communication between the soul and Christ. The Lord's supper can aid, quicken, and confirm faith, but can never supersede it, or supply its absence. Let this never be forgotten. Error on this point is a most fatal delusion, and leads to many superstitions.

Let it be a settled principle in our Christianity, that no unbeliever ought to go to the Lord's table, and that the sacrament will not do our souls the slightest good, if we do not receive it with repentance and faith. The Lord's supper is not a converting or justifying ordinance, and those who come to it unconverted and unjustified, will go away no better than they came, but rather worse. It is an ordinance for believers, and not for unbelievers,—for the living, and not for the dead. It is meant to sustain life, but not to impart it,—to strengthen and increase grace, but not to give it,—to help faith to grow, but not to sow or plant it. Let these things sink down into our hearts, and never be forgotten.

Are we alive unto God? This is the great question. If we are, let us go to the Lord's supper, and receive it thankfully, and never turn our backs on the Lord's table. If we do not go, we commit a great sin.

Are we yet dead in sin and worldliness? If we are, we have no business at the communion. We are on the broad way that leadeth to destruc-

tion. We must repent. We must be born again. We must be joined to Christ by faith. Then, and not till then, we are fit to be communicants.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> There are two expressions in the passage now expounded, which deserve a special notice. One is, the “fruit of the vine.” The other is “the kingdom of God.”

1. The words, “fruit of the vine,” applied by our Lord to the cup of wine which He had just been giving to His disciples, in the institution of the Lord’s supper, appear entirely to overthrow the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation. The wine, it appears, did not really and literally become Christ’s blood, as the Roman Catholics say. Our Lord Himself speaks of it as the juice of grapes, “the fruit of the vine.” It is clear therefore, that when He said of that cup of wine before, “this is my blood,” He meant nothing more than this, “this represents—is an emblem of—my blood.”

2. The words, “kingdom of God,” applied by our Lord to a time and state of things yet future, appear to show plainly that He did not consider God’s kingdom to have come, when He spoke. Moreover the words have not yet received a fulfilment, as it is not known that our Lord administered the Lord’s supper to His disciples after His resurrection. The words therefore are meant to turn our minds towards the time of our Lord’s second advent. Then, and not till then, “the kingdom of God” will be fully set up. Then, and not till then, we shall sit down at the marriage supper of the Lamb, and drink the new wine in the kingdom.

MARK XIV. 26–31.

26 And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.

27 And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

28 But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

29 But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet *will* not I.

30 And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, *even* in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

31 But he spake the more vehemently, If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise. Likewise also said they all.

WE see in these verses, *how well our Lord foreknew the weakness and infirmity of His disciples*. He tells them plainly what they were going to do. “All ye shall be offended because of me this night.” He tells Peter in particular of the astounding sin which he was about to commit: “This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.”

Yet our Lord’s fore-knowledge did not prevent His choosing these twelve disciples to be His apostles. He allowed them to be His intimate friends and companions, knowing perfectly well what they would one day do. He granted them the mighty privilege of being continually with Him, and hearing His voice, with a clear foresight of the melancholy weakness and want of faith which they would exhibit at the end of His ministry. This is a remarkable fact, and deserves to be had in continual remembrance.

Let us take comfort in the thought that the Lord Jesus does not cast off His believing people because of failures and imperfections. He knows what they are. He takes them, as the husband takes the wife, with all their blemishes and defects, and, once joined to Him by faith, will never put them away. He is a merciful and compassionate High-priest. It is His glory to pass over the transgressions of His people, and to cover their many sins. He knew what they were before conversion,—wicked, guilty, and defiled; yet He loved them. He knows what they will be after conversion, weak, erring, and frail; yet He loves them. He has undertaken to save them, notwithstanding all their shortcomings, and what He has undertaken He will perform.

Let us learn to pass a charitable judgment on the conduct of professing believers. Let us not set them down in a low place, and say they have no grace, because we see in them much weakness and corruption. Let us remember that our Master in heaven bears with their infirmities, and let us try to bear with them too. The Church of Christ is little better than a great hospital. We ourselves are all, more or less, weak, and all daily need the skilful treatment of the heavenly Physician. There will be no complete cures till the resurrection day.

We see, in the second place, in these verses, *how much comfort professing Christians may miss by carelessness and inattention*. Our Lord spoke plainly of His resurrection: “After that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.” Yet His words appear to have been thrown away, and spoken in vain. Not one of His disciples seems to have noticed them, or treasured them up in his heart. When He was betrayed, they forsook Him. When He was crucified, they were almost in despair. And when He rose again on the third day, they would not believe that it was true. They had heard of it frequently with the hearing of the ear, but it had never made any impression on their hearts.

What an exact picture we have here of human nature! How often we see the very same thing among professing Christians in the present day! How many truths we read yearly in the Bible, and yet remember them no more than if we had never read them at all! How many words of wisdom we hear in sermons heedlessly and thoughtlessly, and live on as if we had never heard them! The days of darkness and affliction come upon us by and bye, and then we prove unarmed and unprepared. On sick-beds, and in mourning, we see a meaning in texts and passages which we at one time heard listlessly and unconcerned. Things flash across our minds at such seasons, and make us feel ashamed that we had not noticed them before. We then remember to have read them, and heard them, and seen them, but they made no impression upon us. Like Hagar’s well in the wilderness, they were close at hand, but, like Hagar, we never saw them. (Gen. xxi. 19.)

Let us pray for a quick understanding in hearing and reading God’s word. Let us search into every part of it, and not lose any precious truth in it for want of care. So doing, we shall lay up a good foundation against the time to come, and in sorrow and sickness be found armed.

Let us mark how little reason ministers have to be surprised, if the words that they preach in sermons are often unnoticed and unheeded. They only drink of the same cup with their Master. Even He said many things which were not noticed when first spoken. And yet we know that “never man spake like this man.” “The disciple is not greater than His Master, nor the servant than his Lord.” We have need of patience. Truths that seem neglected at first, often bear fruit after many days.

We see in the last place, in these verses, *how much ignorant self-confidence may sometimes be found in the hearts of professing Christians*. The apostle Peter could not think it possible that he could ever deny his Lord. “If I should die with thee,” he says, “I will not deny thee in any wise.” And he did not stand alone in his confidence. The other disciples were of the same opinion. “Likewise also said they all.”

Yet what did all this confident boasting come to? Twelve hours did not pass away before all the disciples forsook our Lord and fled. Their loud professions were all forgotten. The present danger swept all their promises of fidelity clean away. So little do we know how we shall act in any particular position until we are placed in it! So much do present circumstances alter our feelings!

Let us learn to pray for humility. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Prov. xvi. 18.) There is far more wickedness in all our hearts than we know. We never can tell how far we might fall, if once placed in temptation. There is no degree of sin into which the greatest saint may not run, if he is not held up by the grace of God, and if he does not watch and pray. The seeds of every wickedness lie hidden in our hearts. They only need the convenient season to spring forth into a mischievous vitality. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "He that trusteth his own heart is a fool." (1 Cor. x. 12. Prov. xxviii. 26.) Let our daily prayer be, "Hold thou me up and I shall be safe."

MARK XIV. 32–42.

32 And they came to a place which was named Gethsemane: and he saith to his disciples, Sit ye here, while I shall pray.	sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?
33 And he taketh with him Peter and James and John, and began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy;	33 Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh <i>is</i> weak.
34 And saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death: tarry ye here, and watch.	39 And again he went away, and prayed, and spake the same words.
35 And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.	40 And when he returned, he found them asleep again, (for their eyes were heavy,) neither wist they what to answer him.
36 And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.	41 And he cometh the third time, and saith unto them, Sleep on now, and take <i>your</i> rest: it is enough, the hour is come; behold, the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.
37 And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon,	42 Rise up, let us go; lo, he that betrayeth me is at hand.

THE history of our Lord's agony in the garden of Gethsemane is a deep and mysterious passage of Scripture. It contains things which the wisest divines cannot fully explain. Yet it has upon its surface plain truths of most momentous importance.

Let us mark, in the first place, *how keenly our Lord felt the burden of a world's sin*. It is written that He "began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy; and saith unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful unto death,"—and that "he fell on the ground, and prayed, that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him."

There is only one reasonable explanation of these expressions. It was no mere fear of the physical suffering of death, which drew them from our Lord's lips. It was a sense of the enormous load of human guilt, which began at that time to press upon Him in a peculiar way. It was a sense of the unutterable weight of our sins and transgressions which were then specially laid upon Him. He was being "made a curse for us." He was bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows, according to the covenant He came on earth to fulfil. He was being "made sin for us who Himself knew no sin." His holy nature felt acutely the hideous burden laid upon Him. These were the reasons of His extraordinary sorrow.

We ought to see in our Lord's agony in Gethsemane the exceeding sinfulness of sin. It is a subject on which the thoughts of professing Christians are far below what they should be. The careless, light way in which such sins as swearing, sabbath-breaking, lying and the like, are often spoken of, is a painful evidence of the low condition of men's moral feelings. Let the recollection of Gethsemane have a sanctifying effect upon us. Whatever others do, let us never "make a mock at sin."

Let us mark, in the second place, *what an example our Lord gives us of the importance of prayer in time of trouble*. In the hour of His distress we find Him employing this great remedy. Twice we are told that when His soul was exceeding sorrowful, “He prayed.”

We shall never find a better receipt than this for the patient bearing of affliction. The first person to whom we should turn in our trouble is God. The first complaint we should make should be in the form of a prayer. The reply may not be given immediately. The relief we want may not be granted at once. The thing that tries us may never be removed and taken away. But the mere act of pouring out our hearts, and unbosoming ourselves at a throne of grace will do us good. The advice of St. James is wise and weighty: “Is any afflicted? Let him pray.” (James v. 13.)

Let us mark, in the third place, *what a striking example our Lord gives us of submission of will to the will of God*. Deeply as His human nature felt the pressure of a world’s guilt, He still prays that, “if it were possible,” the hour might pass from him.” Take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt.”<sup>4</sup>

We can imagine no higher degree of perfection than that which is here set before us. To take patiently whatever God sends,—to like nothing but what God likes,—to wish nothing but what God approves,—to prefer pain, if it please God to send it, to ease, if God does not think fit to bestow it,—to lie passive under God’s hand, and know no will but His,—this is the highest standard at which we can aim, and of this our Lord’s conduct in Gethsemane is a perfect pattern.

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<sup>4</sup> Men are so apt to run into error on the subject of the divine and human natures in Christ, that the following quotation may be worth reading.

“There are two distinct wills in Christ. But although they be truly distinct and different one from the other, yet they are not contrary one to the other, but they are subordinate each to other; the human will of Christ being always subject to His divine will, and most ready to be ordered and ruled by it. Therefore here we see that He doth submit His will, as He was man, to the divine will of God the Father, which divine will of the Father was also Christ’s own will. This truth we are to hold and maintain against those old heretics, which were called Monothelites, because they held there was but one kind of will in Christ, namely His divine will.—This heresy sprung up in the Eastern church about 600 years after Christ; and it did very much molest and trouble the church for many years.—It was a branch of the gross heresy of Eutyches which sprung up 200 years before. This Eutyches confounded the two natures in Christ, holding that as there was but one Person after the personal union, so there was but one nature in Christ,—viz. the divine nature, the human nature being swallowed up. To maintain this the better, his followers maintained that Christ had but one kind of will. This heresy was condemned by the 6th general council at Constantinople, as well as by other ancient councils. And the fathers of the church in those times, did confute it by these very words of our Saviour which we have now in hand.”—*Petter on Mark*.

Let us strive and labour to have “the mind that was in Christ” in this matter. Let us daily pray and endeavour to be enabled to mortify our self-will.—It is for our happiness to do so. Nothing brings us so much misery on earth as having our own way.—It is the best proof of real grace to do so. Knowledge, and gifts, and convictions, and feelings, and wishes, are all very uncertain evidences. They are often to be found in unconverted persons. But a continually increasing disposition to submit our own wills to the will of God, is a far more healthy symptom. It is a sign that we are really “growing in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

Let us mark, lastly, in these verses, *how much infirmity may be found even in the best Christians*. We have a painful illustration of this truth in the conduct of Peter, James, and John. They slept when they ought to have watched and prayed. Though invited by our Lord to watch with Him, they slept. Though warned a short time before that danger was at hand, and their faith likely to fail, they slept. Though fresh from the Lord’s table, with all its touching solemnities, they slept. Never was there a more striking proof that the best of men are but men, and that, so long as saints are in the body, they are compassed with infirmity.

These things are written for our learning. Let us take heed that they are not written in vain. Let us ever be on our guard against the slothful, indolent, lazy spirit in religion, which is natural to us all, and specially in the matter of our private prayers. When we feel that spirit creeping over us, let us remember Peter, James, and John in the garden, and take care.

The solemn counsel which our Lord addresses to His disciples should often ring in our ears: “Watch and pray lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.” It should be the Christian’s daily motto from the time of his conversion to the hour of his death.

Are we true Christians? and would we keep our souls awake? Let us not forget that we have within us a double nature,—a ready “spirit” and weak “flesh,”—a carnal nature inclined to evil, and a spiritual nature inclined to good. These two are contrary one to the other. (Gal. v.17.) Sin and the devil will always find helpers in our hearts. If we do not crucify and rule over the flesh, it will often rule over us and bring us to shame.

Are we true Christians, and would we keep our souls awake? Then let us never forget to “watch and pray.” We must watch like soldiers,—we are upon enemy’s ground. We must always be on our guard. We must fight a daily fight and war a daily warfare. The Christian’s rest is yet to come. We must pray without ceasing, regularly, habitually, carefully, and at stated times. We must pray as well as watch, and watch as well as pray. Watching without praying is self-confidence and self-conceit. Praying without watching is enthusiasm and fanaticism. The man who

knows his own weakness, and knowing it both watches and prays, is the man that will be held up and not allowed to fall.

MARK XIV. 43–52.

43 And immediately, while he yet spake, cometh Judas, one of the twelve, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the Chief Priests and the Scribes and the elders.

44 And he that betrayed him had given them a token, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss that same is he; take him, and lead *him* away safely.

45 And as soon as he was come, he goeth straightway to him, and saith, Master, master; and kissed him.

46 And they laid their hands on him, and took him.

47 And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the High Priest, and cut off his ear.

48 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and *with staves* to take me?

49 I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not but the Scriptures must be fulfilled.

50 And they all forsook him, and fled.

51 And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about *his* naked *body*; and the young men laid hold on him:

52 And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.

LET us notice in these verses, *how little our Lord's enemies understood the nature of His kingdom*. We read that Judas came to take Him “with a great multitude, with swords and staves.” It was evidently expected that our Lord would be vigorously defended by His disciples, and that He would not be taken prisoner without fighting. The chief priests and scribes clung obstinately to the idea, that our Lord's kingdom was a worldly kingdom, and therefore supposed that it would be upheld by worldly means. They had yet to learn the solemn lesson contained in our Lord's words to Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world:—now is my kingdom not from hence.” (John xviii. 36.)

We shall do well to remember this in all our endeavours to extend the kingdom of true religion. It is not to be propagated by violence, or by an arm of flesh. “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal.” “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” (2 Cor. x. 4. Zech. iv. 6.) The cause of truth does not need force to maintain it. False religions, like Mahometanism, have often been spread by the sword. False Christianity, like that of the Roman church, has often been enforced on men by bloody persecutions. But the real Gospel of Christ requires no such aids as these. It stands by the power of the Holy Ghost. It grows by the hidden influence of the Holy Ghost on men's hearts and consciences. There is no clearer sign of a bad cause in religion than a readiness to appeal to the sword.

Let us notice, secondly, in these verses, *how all things in our Lord's passion happened according to God's word*. His own address to those who took Him, exhibits this in a striking manner: “the Scriptures must be fulfilled.”

There was no accident or chance in any part of the close of our Lord's earthly ministry. The steps in which He walked from Gethsemane to

Calvary, were all marked out hundreds of years before. The twenty-second Psalm, and the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, were literally fulfilled. The wrath of His enemies, His rejection by His own people,—His being dealt with as a malefactor,—His being condemned by the assembly of the wicked,—all had been foreknown, and all foretold. All that took place was only the working out of God's great design to provide an atonement for a world's sin. The armed men whom Judas brought to lay hands on Jesus, were, like Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib, unconscious instruments in carrying God's purposes into effect.

Let us rest our souls on the thought, that all around us is ordered and overruled by God's almighty wisdom. The course of this world may often be contrary to our wishes. The position of the Church may often be very unlike what we desire. The wickedness of worldly men, and the inconsistencies of believers, may often afflict our souls. But there is a hand above us, moving the vast machine of this universe, and making all things work together for His glory. The Scriptures are being yearly fulfilled. Not one jot or tittle in them shall ever fail to be accomplished. The kings of the earth may take counsel together, and the rulers of the nations may set themselves against Christ. (Psal. ii. 2.) But the resurrection morning shall prove that, even at the darkest time, all things were being done according to the will of God.

Let us notice, lastly, in these verses, *how much the faith of true believers may give way*. We are told that when Judas and his company laid hands on our Lord, and He quietly submitted to be taken prisoner, the eleven disciples "all forsook Him and fled." Perhaps up to that moment they were buoyed up by the hope that our Lord would work a miracle, and set Himself free. But when they saw no miracle worked, their courage failed them entirely. Their former protestations were all forgotten. Their promises to die with their Master, rather than deny Him, were all cast to the winds. The fear of present danger got the better of faith. The sense of immediate peril drove every other feeling out of their minds. They "all forsook him and fled."

There is something deeply instructive in this incident. It deserves the attentive study of all professing Christians. Happy is he who marks the conduct of our Lord's disciples, and gathers from it wisdom!

Let us learn from the flight of these eleven disciples, not to be overconfident in our own strength. The fear of man does indeed bring a snare. We never know what we may do, if we are tempted, or to what extent our faith may give way. Let us be clothed with humility.

Let us learn to be charitable in our judgment of other Christians. Let us not expect too much from them, or set them down as having no grace at all, if we see them overtaken in a fault. Let us not forget that even our

Lord's chosen apostles forsook Him in His time of need. Yet they rose again by repentance, and became pillars of the Church of Christ.

Finally, let us leave the passage with a deep sense of our Lord's ability to sympathize with His believing people. If there is one trial greater than another, it is the trial of being disappointed in those we love. It is a bitter cup, which all true Christians have frequently to drink. Ministers fail them. Relations fail them. Friends fail them. One cistern after another proves to be broken, and to hold no water. But let them take comfort in the thought, that there is one unfailing Friend, even Jesus, who can be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, and has tasted of all their sorrows. Jesus knows what it is to see friends and disciples failing Him in the hour of need. Yet He bore it patiently, and loved them notwithstanding all. He is never weary of forgiving. Let us strive to do likewise. Jesus, at any rate, will never fail us. It is written, "His compassions fail not." (Lam. iii. 22.)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The question has often been asked, "Who was the 'certain young man,' mentioned at the end of this passage, on whom the young men laid hold, and who fled away naked?" St. Mark is the only evangelist who relates this circumstance; and he has given us no clue to further knowledge as to who it was, or why the event is mentioned.

No satisfactory answer to these questions has yet been given. The utmost that can be said of any of the explanations attempted, is, that they are conjectures and speculations.

"Some," says Petter in his commentary on Mark, "have thought that it was one of the twelve disciples, viz., James the son of Alpheus, the Lord's brother, or kinsman of our Saviour, (whose appearance was perhaps like our Lord's.)" This is the view of Epiphanius and Jerome. Others have thought that it was John, the beloved disciple. This is the view of Ambrose, Chrysostom, and Gregory. But it could be neither of them, nor any other of the twelve, because it is said immediately before, that they "all fled" upon the taking of our Saviour, whereas this young man followed our Saviour at this time. It is more likely that it was some good young man, who dwelt near the garden of Gethsemane, who hearing the noise and stir that was made about the taking and binding of our Saviour, did arise suddenly out of his bed to see what was the matter, and perceiving that they had cruelly taken and bound our Saviour, and were leading Him away, did follow after Him to see what would be done with Him, whereby it appears that he was a well-wisher to our Saviour."

Theophylact and Euthymius think it probable that it was some young man who followed our Lord from the house where He ate the Passover with His disciples. Some think that it was the Evangelist Mark himself.

Some have thought that St. Mark's purpose in relating the event, is to show the cruelty, rage, and ferocity of those who took our Lord. They were ready to lay hands on any one who was anywhere near Him, and to make prisoners indiscriminately of all who even appeared to be connected with Him.

Some have thought that the whole transaction exhibits the utter desertion of our Lord. "This young man," says Clarius, "would rather escape naked than be taken as one of the followers of Christ."

Some have thought that it is related to show the real peril in which the disciples were, and to make it plain that they saved their lives only by their flight.

One eminent divine regards the whole event as strongly figurative. He sees in it an antitype of what took place on the day of atonement, and at the cleansing of a leper. He

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considers the young man escaping to represent the goat let go free, and the bird let loose; while our Lord represents the goat offered up, and the bird slain. See Lev. xiv. 7 and xvi. 22.

I offer no opinion on any of the above explanations, excepting that I look on the last as eminently fanciful and unsatisfactory. Bullinger remarks sensibly, "It does not interest us much to know who this young man was, and it would not bring any very great fruit to us, if we did know. If it had been useful and wholesome for us to know, the Spirit of God would not have been silent, seeing that He is often marvellously diligent in relating very minute things."

MARK XIV. 53–65.

53 And they led Jesus away to the High Priest: and with him were assembled all the Chief Priests and the elders and the Scribes.

54 And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the High Priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.

55 And the Chief Priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none.

56 For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.

57 And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying,

58 We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands.

59 But neither so did their witness agree together.

60 And the High Priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest

thou nothing? what is *it which* these witness against thee?

61 But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the High Priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?

62 And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

63 Then the High Priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses?

64 Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.

65 And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophesy, and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

SOLOMON tells us in the book of Ecclesiastes, that one evil he has seen under the sun, is when “folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in low place.” (Eccles. x. 6.) We can imagine no more complete illustration of his words than the state of things we have recorded in the passage before us. We see the Son of God, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” arraigned as a malefactor before “the chief priests, and elders, and scribes.” We see the heads of the Jewish nation combining together to kill their own Messiah, and judging Him who will one day come in glory to judge them and all mankind. These things sound marvellous, but they are true.

Let us observe in these verses, *how foolishly Christians sometimes thrust themselves into temptation*, We are told that when our Lord was led away prisoner, “Peter followed Him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.”<sup>6</sup> There was no wisdom in this act. Having once forsaken his Master and fled, he ought to have remembered his own weakness, and not to

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<sup>6</sup> In the expression “warmed himself at the fire,” it is worthy of remark, that the Greek word which we translate “fire,” is not the same as that translated “fire of coals,” in John xviii. 18. It would rather bear the meaning of “light,” or a fire so blazing as to give light.

The remark is not without interest, as it explains how easily Peter was recognized and discovered by those who sat around him, as one of Christ’s disciples. The bright light of the fire shining upon him made concealment impossible.

have ventured into danger again. It was an act of rashness and presumption. It brought on him fresh trials of faith, for which he was utterly unprepared. It threw him into bad company, where he was not likely to get good but harm. It paved the way for his last and greatest transgression,—his thrice-repeated denial of his Master.

But it is an experimental truth that ought never to be overlooked, that when a believer has once begun to backslide and leave his first faith, he seldom stops short at his first mistake. He seldom makes only one stumble. He seldom commits only one fault. A blindness seems to come over the eyes of his understanding. He appears to cast over-board his common sense and discretion. Like a stone rolling down-hill, the further he goes on in sinning, the faster and more decided is his course. Like David, he may begin with idleness, and end with committing every possible crime. Like Peter, he may begin with cowardice,—go on to foolish trifling with temptation, and then end with denying Christ.

If we know anything of true saving religion, let us ever beware of the beginnings of backsliding. It is like the letting out of water, first a drop and then a torrent. Once out of the way of holiness, there is no saying to what we may come. Once giving way to petty inconsistencies, we may find ourselves one day committing every sort of wickedness. Let us keep far from the brink of evil. Let us not play with fire. Let us never fear being too particular, too strict, and too precise. No petition in the Lord's prayer is more important than the last but one, "Lead us not into temptation."

Let us observe, in the second place, in these verses, *how much our Lord Jesus Christ had to endure from lying lips, when tried before the chief priests*. We are told that "many bare false witness against Him; but their witness agreed not together."

We can easily conceive that this was not the least heavy part of our blessed Saviour's passion. To be seized unjustly as a malefactor, and put on trial as a criminal when innocent, is a severe affliction. But to hear men inventing false charges against us and coining slanders,—to listen to all the malignant virulence of unscrupulous tongues let loose against our character, and know that it is all untrue,—this is a cross indeed! "The words of a talebearer," says Solomon, "are as wounds." (Prov. xviii. 8.) "Deliver my soul," says David, "from lying lips and a deceitful tongue." (Psalm cxx. 2.) All this was a part of the cup which Jesus drank for our sakes. Great indeed was the price at which our souls were redeemed!

Let it never surprise true Christians if they are slandered and misrepresented in this world. They must not expect to fare better than their Lord. Let them rather look forward to it, as a matter of course, and see in

it a part of the cross which all must bear after conversion. Lies and false reports are among Satan's choicest weapons. When he cannot deter men from serving Christ, he labours to harass them and make Christ's service uncomfortable. Let us bear it patiently, and not count it a strange thing. The words of the Lord Jesus should often come to our minds: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you." "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." (Luke vi. 26. Matt. v. 11.)

Let us observe, lastly, in these verses, *what distinct testimony our Lord bore to His own Messiahship, and second advent in glory*. The high priest asks Him the solemn question, "Art thou the Christ, the Son of the blessed?" He receives at once the emphatic reply, "I am: and ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven."

These words of our Lord ought always to be had in remembrance. The Jews could never say after these words, that they were not clearly told that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of God. Before the great council of their priests and elders, He declared, "I am the Christ." The Jews could never say after these words, that He was so lowly and poor a person, that He was not worthy to be believed. He warned them plainly that His glory and greatness was all yet to come. They were only deferred and postponed till His second advent. They would yet see Him in royal power and majesty, "sitting on the right hand of power," coming in the clouds of heaven, a Judge, a Conqueror, and a King. If Israel was unbelieving, it was not because Israel was not told what to believe.

Let us leave the passage with a deep sense of the reality and certainty of our Lord Jesus Christ's second coming. Once more at the very end of His ministry, and in the face of His deadly enemies, we find Him asserting the mighty truth that He will come again to judge the world. Let it be one of the leading truths in our own personal Christianity. Let us live in the daily recollection, that our Saviour is one day coming back to this world. Let the Christ in whom we believe, be not only the Christ who died for us and rose again,—the Christ who lives for us and intercedes, but the Christ who will one day return in glory, to gather together and reward His people, and to punish fearfully all His enemies.

MARK XIV. 66–72.

66 And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the High Priest:

67 And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth.

68 But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew.

69 And a maid saw him again, and began to say to them that stood by, This is *one* of them.

70 And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art *one* of them: for thou art a Galilæan, and thy speech agreeth *thereto*.

71 And he began to curse and to swear, *saying*, I know not this man of whom ye speak.

72 And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

A SHIPWRECK is a melancholy sight, even when no lives are lost. It is sad to think of the destruction of property, and disappointment of hopes which generally attend it. It is painful to see the suffering and hardship, which the ship's crew often have to undergo in their struggle to escape from drowning. Yet no shipwreck is half so melancholy a sight as the backsliding and fall of a true Christian. Though raised again by God's mercy, and finally saved from hell, he loses much by his fall. Such a sight we have brought before our minds in the verses we have now read. We are there told that most painful and instructive story, how Peter denied his Lord.

Let us learn, in the first place, from these verses, *how far and how shamefully a great saint may fall*. We know that Simon Peter was an eminent apostle of Jesus Christ. He was one who had received special commendation from our Lord's lips, after a noble confession of His Messiahship: "Blessed art thou Simon Bar-jona:"—"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He was one who had enjoyed special privileges, and had special mercies shown to him. Yet here we see this same Simon Peter so entirely overcome by fear that he actually denies his Lord. He declares that he knows not Him whom he had accompanied and lived with for three years! He declares that he knows not Him who had healed his own wife's mother, taken him up into the mount of transfiguration, and saved him from drowning in the sea of Galilee! And he not only denies his Master once, but does it three times! And he not only denies Him simply, but does it "cursing and swearing!" And above all, he does all this in the face of the plainest warnings, and in spite of his own loud protestation that he would do nothing of the kind, but rather die!

These things are written to show the Church of Christ what human nature is, even in the best of men. They are intended to teach us that, even after conversion and renewal of the Holy Ghost, believers are com-

passed with infirmity and liable to fall. They are meant to impress upon us the immense importance of daily watchfulness, prayerfulness, and humility, so long as we are in the body. "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Let us carefully remember that Simon Peter's case does not stand alone. The word of God contains many other examples of the infirmity of true believers, which we shall do well to observe. The histories of Noah, Abraham, David, Hezekiah, will supply us with mournful proof, that "the infection of sin remains even in the regenerate," and that no man is so strong as to be beyond the danger of falling. Let us not forget this. Let us walk humbly with our God. "Happy is the man that feareth alway." (Prov. xxviii. 14.)

Let us learn, in the second place, from these verses, *how small a temptation may cause a saint to have a great fall*. The beginning of Peter's trial was nothing more than the simple remark of "a maid of the High Priest." "Thou also wert with Jesus of Nazareth." There is nothing to show that these words were spoken with any hostile purpose. For anything we can see, they might fairly mean that this maid remembered that Peter used to be a companion of our Lord. But this simple remark was enough to overthrow the faith of an eminent apostle, and to make him begin to deny his Master. The chiefest and foremost of our Lord's chosen disciples is cast down, not by the threats of armed men, but by the saying of one weak woman!

There is something deeply instructive in this fact. It ought to teach us that no temptation is too small and trifling to overcome us, except we watch and pray to be held up. If God be for us we may remove mountains and get the victory over a host of foes. "I can do all things," says Paul, "through Christ that strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 22.) If God withdraw His grace, and leave us to ourselves, we are like a city without gates and walls, a prey to the first enemy, however weak and contemptible.

Let us beware of making light of temptations because they seem little and insignificant. There is nothing little that concerns our souls. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. A little spark may kindle a great fire. A little leak may sink a great ship. A little provocation may bring out from our hearts great corruption, and end in bringing our souls into great trouble.

Finally, let us learn from these verses *that backsliding brings saints into great sorrow*. The conclusion of the passage is very affecting. "Peter called to mind the words that Jesus said unto him. Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice." Who can pretend to describe the feelings that must have flashed across the apostle's mind? Who can con-

ceive the shame and confusion, and self-reproach, and bitter remorse which must have overwhelmed his soul? To have fallen so foully! To have fallen so repeatedly! To have fallen in the face of such plain warnings! All these must have been cutting thoughts. The iron must indeed have entered into his soul. There is deep and solemn meaning in the one single expression used about him,—“when he thought thereon he wept.”

The experience of Peter is only the experience of all God’s servants who have yielded to temptation. Lot, and Samson, and David, and Jehoshaphat in Bible history,—Cranmer and Jewell in the records of our own English Church, have all left evidence, like Peter, that “the backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.” (Prov. xiv. 14.) Like Peter, they erred grievously. Like Peter, they repented truly. But, like Peter, they found that they reaped a bitter harvest in this world. Like Peter, they were freely pardoned and forgiven. But, like Peter, they shed many tears.

Let us leave the passage with the settled conviction that sin is sure to lead to sorrow, and that the way of most holiness is always the way of most happiness. The Lord Jesus has mercifully provided that it shall never profit His servants to walk carelessly and to give way to temptation. If we will turn our backs on Him we shall be sure to smart for it. Though He forgives us, He will make us feel the folly of our own ways. Those that follow the Lord most fully, shall always follow Him most comfortably. Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after other gods.” (Psalm xvi. 4.)