

With His Stripes We Are Healed

"Leaving us an example, that we should follow in his steps"—1 Peter 2:21

MARK CHAPTERS 15 and 16

THE third portion of our Readings today, relating to the death of Christ, and his resurrection, opens an avenue of life for evermore. The purpose of our meeting this morning is to call these things to mind.

The details of the Mosaic Law, through which we read year by year, are all types and shadows of him who was to come, God's well-beloved Son, in whom was no guile.

Our readings from the Psalms also paint a picture of the trials and sufferings of him who was the Lamb of God, enduring without complaint what was necessary in the purpose of God—

"Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

The focal point of all our readings is contained in Mark 15 & 16.

Yesterday we read of the institution of the memorial feast, which is designed to direct our minds to the only means of salvation, and to the great love and mercy extended by God.

We see Christ's disciples around him, completely oblivious to the necessary trial and anguish which he had to endure that night—that "night to be much remembered," typically illustrated by Israel's partaking of the Passover.

We see Peter, confident and assured, as he stands and declares his firm conviction that he would never deny his Lord. But Jesus quietly said—

"Verily I say unto thee that this day, even in this night before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice."

And Peter stoutly asserted—

"If I should DIE with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise!"

And all the disciples concurred in this statement. Shortly afterwards, when the band of the enemy was around them, they all forsook him and fled.

In the midst of the trial Peter, to see the end—the end, as he thought, of all his hopes and desires—made his way, with the help of John, into the assembly of those who despised the Lord. Three times he was charged: three times he denied—

"I know not this man of whom ye speak!"

Are we confident, as we are assembled together, that we would never deny our Lord as Peter did? And when we stand alone with the enemy—sin in all its forms—around us, have we the same confidence that Peter declared to Christ?—

"I will die with thee."

Or do we declare—

"I know not this man of whom ye speak."

This can be done by public denial in our actions, or our way of life, or by our silence and failure to openly confess him to the world.

The Master was standing in such a position that he could see and hear Peter. When Peter failed in the hour of need, there was no railing upon him of "I told you so." Only a look of sadness. Peter later appears to refer to what he saw upon this occasion (1 Peter 3:9)—

"Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing;
"Knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing."

And 1 Peter 2:21-23—

"For even hereunto were ye called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps.

"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;

"Who when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not."

—*Peter himself was an eye-witness of these things*—

". . . when he suffered he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously."

Such is the One who comes to us in the reading this morning: no vindictiveness in his reply, but a gentle meeting of loving reconciliation and forgiveness with Peter later on.

Why did he not discard Peter, who failed so terribly? Because Peter was contrite. Peter left this scene, after the third denial, and wept bitterly.

He washed away his sin in tears.

In Galilee, after his resurrection, Jesus gently instructs Peter—

"Lovest thou me more than these?"

Thrice was this repeated, and Peter somewhat disturbed replied—

"Master, thou knowest all things; thou KNOWEST that I love thee!"

To which Christ replied—

"Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep."

Peter was humbled. He recognized his need, his desperate need for salvation, his need for strength from God.

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THE scene turns to the trial before Pilate. Notice the contrast in Christ's attitude before Pilate, and before the Jews. To Pilate's question—

"Art thou King of the Jews?"

—there was a clear definition of the Truth—

"For this cause came I into the world, that I might bear witness unto this Truth."

The King of the Jews; the King of the World! Our position before the world must be like the Master's, for he said—

"Follow me."

Our declaration of Christ as the King of the World, and of our association with him when we stand before any, must be clear and emphatic; no silence, no denials—

"He that confesseth in me before men, in him will I confess before the angels of God."

This is what we are striving toward, the end and purpose of our whole life—a confession of association with him, at his lips at the judgment seat.

But when the leaders of the Jews brought their charges against Christ, which he knew were false, he answered nothing, absolutely nothing.

How human to have retorted bitterly, to exclaim that their charges were wicked and false! Hereby Christ has set us an example of non-retaliation, of reviling not again, of suffering quietly when we are threatened.

There was perfect self-control. He spoke only when and as God would have him speak. How important that we recognize these principles of life, that we revile not again. Paul said in 1 Cor. 13 that we should not be provoked, nor think evil, but bear all things in love.

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A CUSTOM, common at the time of the Passover, was the release of a prisoner. Such a prisoner for consideration at this moment was Barabbas—bound, taken in insurrection as a murderer (15:7). This is significant. Barabbas means "son of the father."

Here are two men classified as "Son of the Father": the one a murderer, the other completely free from sin. The one was the son of the devil, the seed of the serpent—murder, violence, insurrection. Christ said—

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye will do."

This is the significance of Barabbas—the "son of his father" the devil.

Barabbas was "bound." Here, before the assembly, was the binding of sin, the binding of that which had brought death, the binding of the murderer.

The people were given their choice. On the one hand, the means of salvation, the Son of God who brought Life, who taketh away the sin of the world. On the other hand, the son, the murderer that brought Death

In their responsible condition, they chose the son of the murderer. They did not want sin to be bound; they desired to continue in sin.

Brethren and sisters, we stand in the same place. We have our choice of receiving our means of salvation, or of receiving the son of iniquity in our lives. Ours is the choice, and it determines our destiny. The one brings Life; the other Death.

The lesson is clear, as we stand before him at the present time, to "examine ourselves whether we be in the Faith or not."

"But the chief priests moved the people that he (Pilate) should rather release Barabbas unto them" (15:11).

These people, whom Christ came to save, chose death. The same choice rests with us. What do WE want? The very people who one week before would have made him king, who had cried—

"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord!"—now chose the son of the murderer. How sad! How weak and faltering is human nature! The whole picture of the release of Barabbas is an illustration of the instability and insecurity of anything built on the flesh.

The final illustration of the perversity of the flesh is depicted in the Revelation where, after the benign reign of Christ and the Saints in blessing all people and nations, we see the loosing again of this son of the devil—that he might go forth and deceive the whole world, compassing the camp of the Saints about, after 1000 years of Divine blessing (Rev. 20:7-9).

But the end is the final destruction of the workers of iniquity, the final destruction of Sin's flesh—the eternal victory of Righteousness and Truth.

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"Crucify him! Crucify him!"

—cried the very people who would have made him a king a few days before. Brethren and sisters, it is very necessary, as we so frequently read in 1 Cor. 11, that we be not responsible for the death of Christ. As we partake of these emblems of his death, we are instructed by Paul to "examine ourselves" (1 Cor. 11:26-27)—

"For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death, till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup unworthily, shall be GUILTY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD."

These people were guilty of the death of Christ, as we read (Acts 3:14-15)—

"Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you, and **killed the Prince of Life.**"

Pilate turned Christ over to their desires, but not before he had scourged Christ. Do we see the picture, brethren and sisters?—denied by his disciples on this night much to be remembered (they had even been quarrelling about who should be the greatest in the Kingdom); betrayed by one of the twelve; the sleepless night; his sweating as it were great drops of blood; the mental strain; the anxiety—and yet through it all shines his love for his brethren.

Do we realize what that is: "scourged," cruelly lashed by the order of a man who had just declared—

"I find no fault in him."

"And he opened not his mouth."

Why was all this necessary? Why?? Because of God's great holiness and abhorrence of sin, and the great dishonouring that sin does to His Name. We MUST enter into this picture to be healed. As Isaiah declared—

"With his stripes we are healed" (53:5).

This scourging was necessary.

Peter again calls to mind the same thought—

"By his stripes we are healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

Brethren and sisters, WE MUST BE IDENTIFIED WITH THESE STRIPES. Paul said (Gal. 6:17)—

"I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

We must not despise our association with Christ. Here is the Son of God, in his shame and suffering for us. Are we his brethren and sisters?

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MARK 15:16-20 takes our minds to the actions of the soldiers in relation to Christ. They take off his clothes, and robe him in purple, and plait a crown of thorns, and press it down upon his head. Then they derisively mock him as "King of the Jews."

The crown of thorns, the Stephanos, the victor's crown—it only comes by trial and tribulation. It is the token of victory over sin and death.

Though this scene does not present salvation on the surface, but rather apparent failure and defeat, yet in the broad picture of the divine purpose, Christ overcame and wrought victory by his death—the only means to life for ever. It is the only way to the true Kingship. Paul declared (Heb. 2:14):

"That through death he might destroy him that hath the power of death."

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WE next find Christ "outside the camp," led away to Golgotha to be crucified. As the atoning sacrifice for the whole Mosaic economy had to be burnt "outside the camp," so Christ was crucified outside Jerusalem. The lesson clearly teaches that salvation is not by the works of the Law, but only by the mercy of God through the faith of the New and Abrahamic Covenant. Paul says (Heb. 13:12)—

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

And he exhorts (vs. 13-14)—

"Let us go forth therefore unto him, without the camp, bearing his reproach.

"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

The Master, weary, struggling to conform to that which God required of him, is compelled to bear his cross. A comparison of all the Gospel records seems to indicate that Christ staggered under the load, and it became necessary for the soldiers to find an assistant. The cross is then laid on "one Simon a Cyrenian."

Does this not tell us that Christ was one with us, brethren and sisters?—that the struggle was great, that he was unable, without assistance, to carry that cross?

Did not Moses have his hands held up by Aaron and Hur? Do we not each require to have our hands held up by the ministrations of all our brethren and sisters to help us in the walk and work of the Truth?

We are given no more detail about Simon the Cyrenian. Did he accept the Truth? Was he "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and chanced to pass by at the right moment to be of service to Christ? God knows. He was compelled to bear Christ's cross.

We are compelled to bear the cross, often in ways not to our knowing, and perhaps as suddenly as this burden was thrust upon Simon. Are we ready for this task?

Simon's sons were known to the ecclesias. They are identified as "Alexander and Rufus" (15:21). What a wonderful salvation to the faithful, that at the judgment seat they may find these men who were identified with this darkest hour of the Saviour's agony.

"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

"And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children,

"My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou are rebuked of Him" (Heb. 12:4-5).

We should be impressed more intensely each year with the magnitude of that which has been accomplished on our behalf, when we understand what was necessary upon this occasion.

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"They parted his garments among them" (15:24).

Christ had nothing of a material nature. He had no where to rest his head (Luke 9:58)—

"The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

At his crucifixion they take the last shreds away from him—his garments. Paul told Timothy (1 Tim. 6:7)—

"We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out."

Faith is the only thing which remains. All else is vanity and must be left behind. Yea, it will rise as a witness against us at the judgment seat.

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"And the Scripture was fulfilled which said, And he was numbered with the transgressors"

(15:28).

"He was numbered with the transgressors." If we were required to select a means of salvation, we naturally would never have selected the line of Christ.

We are repeatedly impressed in our daily readings through God's Word, of the peculiarities of some of the ancestors of Christ. We would have chosen a select group without blemish to be the human forebears of the son of God; but this was not the Divine method.

And now as he is presented to the world upon the cross for all to see, as Moses lifted up the serpent upon the pole in the wilderness, so Christ was lifted up with the transgressors.

Do we despise the shame? Christ faced the trial, the anguish, the shame. He patiently accepted it all as the will of God—

"If it be possible, Father, let this cup pass from me.

"Nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done."

God's will WAS necessary. These things would not have been done to God's Own Son if they had not been necessary. We may never more than partly understand many things in the wisdom of God, but we must in love and faith accept all.

On the cross, as others viewed the situation—completely blind to the realities—they mocked his claims and his position in the Divine purpose—

"They that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads and saying,

"Ah, thou that destroyest the Temple, and buildest it in three days!

"Save thyself, and come down from the cross!" (15:29).

But this would never have convinced them. Nor in their condition would it have been an acceptable conviction. Christ had already answered the objection in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:31)—

"Neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead."

They would not have believed, if he had come down from the cross. But it was not to be; God required it otherwise.

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"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (15:34).

Christ is here presented as one of us—

"As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. 2:14).

"We have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities;

"But was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

God had not forsaken Christ. This is evident through the whole transaction. The earthquake, the darkness, the rending of the Temple-Veil from top to bottom—all indicated that God was near and dear to His Son. Did not Christ declare in his final breath (Luke 23:46)—

"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Once again we are impressed with the oneness of Christ with those he came to save—that he was of "like passions" with us. But he saw the end of the trial, and resigned himself into the hand of God, declaring, "It is finished."

Even the Gentiles are convinced by these things—

"Truly this man was the Son of God."

—said the Roman centurion who stood over against him (15:39).

Are we as convinced as was this foreigner that Christ IS the Son of God; does the whole course of our life show that it is a wholehearted CONVICTION that transforms us, and not just an acceptance?

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THE picture moves afar off, to a little company beholding at a distance. Certain women who had ministered to Christ—their hearts and desires enwrapped in the promise of God which they had anticipated to be fulfilled in this righteous man—sadly view the tragic scene—

"Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,
"Who also, when he was in Galilee, followed him and ministered unto him" (15:40).

These women, even in this dark hour of despair, clung to their hope in God, and prepared sweet spices and ointments to anoint his body for burial; not failing to follow the chain of events as his body was removed from the cross and deposited in the cave of Joseph of Arimathea:

"They beheld where he was laid" (15:47).

Trials like this manifest clearly the hearts of the Master's true followers.

Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man (one of those whom Christ had previously declared would find it difficult to enter the Kingdom of God), now came boldly into the presence of Pilate, and begged Jesus' body.

Because he trusted in God, he who had worshipped Jesus secretly for fear of the Jews, now in his death declared him openly and boldly. This word "boldly" (15:43) implies a dreadful ordeal, a now-victorious struggle with fear. He went in to the Roman governor and begged the body of a dead Saviour.

Will we permit ourselves to be identified in such a fashion, alone before the authorities—fearless and faithful in love, when hope seems to have failed?

Joseph provided his own sepulchre for the One in whom he trusted, a sepulchre hewn out of the rock. Thus were fulfilled Isaiah's words—

"He made his grave with the rich in his death."

And those faithful women, through the darkness of the Sabbath, await the opportunity to anoint the body of Jesus.

They moved in faith against the Roman Empire.

"And when the Sabbath was passed, they had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him.

"And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun" (16:1-2).

Though they moved in faith and trust, they were perplexed. Who should roll away the great stone from the entrance to the sepulchre? But this did not deter their steps from that unto which they had lovingly set their hands in service—

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them"
(Ps. 34:7).

They trusted that God would take care of that which was too heavy for them. We must always do the same, having done the part that we can do. God never expects us to do more than we have strength to accomplish.

But He does expect us to go— in faith and hope—as far as we can.

When they arrived at the tomb, the angels had done their work, and much more than they anticipated. These women moved in faith—and the angels worked with them.

"They beheld the place where the Lord lay" (15:47).

We also behold the place where our Master lay, week by week as we meet around the memorial table, in memory of his death—

"As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come"

(1 Cor. 11:26). —E. F. H. 8/67 Berean
