

## The Betrayers and the Betrayed

### *Psalm 41*

In John 13:18, which he heard as part of last week's Passion History, Jesus foretold that He would be betrayed by one of His disciples. So, said Jesus, the Scriptures had declared, "He which did eat my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." These are the words of our Psalm this evening, a Psalm which Jesus Himself identified as His own words, spoken in prophecy hundreds of years before. Had Jesus not told us so, we would perhaps not think that the Messiah was speaking in this Psalm. With the word of our Savior to vouch for it, He has done far more than identify a prophecy. He has given us a deeper look into His own heart, on the night in which He was betrayed. His grief is great, for though He knew that Judas would betray Him, this did not change the fact that Judas was one of His dearest disciples, one of the twelve. Jesus called Him His own dear friend, His close companion. These words are not mere rhetoric. They express His bitterness and grief in a most heartfelt way.

The betrayal by Judas was the foremost among many others. If Judas betrayed Jesus, the leaders of Jesus' own nation betrayed Him first. The chief priests, and elders who should have been among the first to recognize and embrace the Messiah, hardened their hearts and plotted to destroy Him. Satan had filled their hearts also. The only difference is, they were never Jesus' friend to begin with. Judas, however, was.

It is so easy to assume that Jesus would not be so effected or shaken by all of the people who turned against Him. In the Psalms, we learn otherwise. Only friends and family can betray. Perhaps the bitter cup would be easier, if Jesus did not love these people so. But He did, because He is the Lord of grace. His very nature is compassion for the unworthy, yes, even for His openly hostile enemies. Because Jesus was without any sin of His own, He responded well in all things, even His own betrayal. He did not hate when He was hated, or lash out in bitterness against His oppressors; but to think that He was uncaring or unfeeling in the midst of such persecution is entirely wrong. In the Psalms our Lord speaks out with words which eloquently describe to us His deep anguish. In tonight's Psalm, we especially see how it was not only Judas who grieved Him, but also His own countrymen. When He was at the lowest point in His humility, when He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows as at no other time, the wolves of His own people showed no mercy. When He was showing them the greatest love the world has even known, they were showing him the greatest hatred that men can devise in

their hearts.

Our Psalm begins with an admonition to consider the poor. It is difficult to understand how these verses apply to the rest of the Psalm, since their thought seems very different from the remaining verses. Yet when we look at verse 4, we are struck by this statement, "Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." These are the first words of the speaker, of Christ. In is here where we would turn away, and respond, "Ah, this is not Christ after all speaking then." But we cannot do so. We must face these words honestly. Either Jesus lied when he identified Himself as the speaker of this Psalm, or the Scriptures are in error, or these really are His Words, and Jesus could truly lament, to the Lord, "I have sinned against Thee!" These words are hard to hear, not because they imply that Jesus was a sinner, for we know that He was innocent of all transgressions. They are hard because they demonstrate in no uncertain terms how entirely Jesus took upon Himself the guilt of our sins. Unless He could speak these words, then He did not truly bear our sins. This is how utterly He too our place. This is how utterly poor He became for us. When these first verses admonish you to consider the poor, remember how Jesus first considered our spiritual poverty and was moved to compassion. Even as He considered our poverty, we should consider Him now, as He becomes poor for us. He is now the lowly and the downtrodden, for He is heavy laden with our guilt. This is His time of trouble, the crisis of His faith, His greatest hour of temptation.

2 Corinthians 8:9 reminds us: "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." Look upon Him, the Psalm says, and consider Him. See indeed the sorrows which He bears, and in considering what you see, you shall be blessed. Look and see the grace of God revealed to sinners such as you, and believe what you see. He has made Himself poor so that you might be made rich. Consider this Man in faith, and you will become a partaker of all the blessings He wins for you. Christ, our Lord cared indeed for the poor, the poor in Spirit which needed His forgiveness, and His life. He considered them indeed, as He bore their iniquities, and for their sake, He was crucified.

As the Psalm continues, our Lord speaks words which give Him comfort during His own suffering. He endures all these things for the sake of our sin, of our spiritual poverty. Even in His low estate, He still regards our great need of salvation. He knows that He is righteous, and that His struggle is just. Therefore, though His cross is before Him, He can go forward knowing that He

has done all things well. And for that, the Father will bless Him. He will deliver His Son from death in a glorious resurrection. His name will be exalted in the earth, and He will triumph over all His enemies.

But as the betrayer approaches, that vindication waits for the future, a hope that sustains Him. But for now, He bears our sins, and so cries out in verse 4 to the Father, "Have mercy on Me!" His is a mission of mercy indeed, as He, the Lamb of God, offers His life in sacrifice for us. Yet despite this, enemies have arisen all about Him from His own countrymen. They speak evil against Him, saying such things as, "When will He die, and His name perish?" These things they speak amongst themselves, yet our Lord knows their thoughts and schemes. He knows that even as He humbles Himself, His enemies plot against Him in the hopes that He will fall, and that His name will be forgotten in the earth.

Sometimes they come out to speak to Him. Throughout His ministry, the chief men of the Jews often came to speak to Jesus and ask Him questions. They probably sounded sincere, yet they had no desire to learn anything from Him. Their questions were deceitful; their words were lies. They sought to trap Him and find a cause against Him to take His life. But they had to be careful. After all, the people liked Jesus, and as much as they hated Jesus, they feared the people more. The time must be right. Events must be arranged. Therefore they gathered themselves together in secret, and sought some opportunity to destroy Jesus, some way to take Him and kill Him. Just when it seemed that there would be no way to do this, suddenly the solution comes to them, and from one of Jesus' own disciples. Judas, for a price, would lead them to Jesus. He would betray Him. Oh, how the enemies of Christ rejoiced when the betrayer came to them to make an alliance!

And how Jesus grieved: "My own dear friend, with whom I so often broke bread, has lifted up his heel against me." Yet, He still looks onward, in hope. He knows that He still has His integrity, for truly, though He bears the sins of all, He Himself has done no wrong. The Father is truly well pleased with Him, even as He declared on the mount of transfiguration. The day will come when all His enemies, who for a time prevail, will be utterly overthrown. They will all stand before the Lord, and will receive their due justice. Indeed, He will point to His own suffering, death, and resurrection as His greatest and most glorious work, and show to them how their plotting and scheming, whereby they attempted to thwart the course of history, was turned against them by God to His great glory. How greatly this gives Him relief, as well it should.

We also do not know any greater hurt than when we

suffer for no sin of our own, and are hated and opposed and tormented by others without reason and without cause. Thus by virtue of our faith in our Redeemer, we are the poor in this world. We bear the scorn and anger which the devil directs at the Son of God. More the fiercer is his wrath since he has already been defeated, destroyed by his own schemes. Righteous though the blood of Jesus has made us, perfectly cleansed from the filthiness of our sin, yet we are surely no greater than our Lord. He was persecuted in His righteousness. So also, we are persecuted in His righteousness. But as it was with our Lord, who could confidently affirm His integrity before the Father in heaven, our yoke is easy to bear. For now we know that we suffer for righteousness' sake. And more than this, we know that we shall be vindicated yet, and rise above our enemies in triumph.

Therefore all the more can Christ rejoice in this Psalm, for He knows that He is the most beloved of the Father, and that by His death he will bear much fruit. He will make for His Father in heaven, a holy communion of saints. He shall yet stand before the face of His Father, and take His place at the right hand of God, with the countless thousands of the redeemed standing before Him, shouting triumphant cries of praise to the Lord of our Salvation. With this surety, Jesus sets His face forward to the cross, with this sure hope, and can greatly rejoice, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen!"