

Melting the Betrayer

by Robert Murray M'Cheyne

Jesus' love and conviction are used to awaken the heart of Judas, the betrayer, and to seek the salvation of those unconverted persons who sit down at His table.

Scripture: Matthew 26:21

Topics: "Betrayal", "Christ's Love"

Description

Robert Murray M'Cheyne emphasizes the importance of recognizing the presence of betrayers at the Lord's Supper, using the example of Jesus who, despite knowing Judas would betray Him, sought to awaken his conscience through love and warnings. M'Cheyne argues that Christ's repeated references to His betrayer were not harsh but rather a compassionate effort to melt Judas' heart and lead him to repentance. He highlights that Jesus' actions, such as washing Judas' feet and sharing the Passover meal, demonstrate His deep love and desire for the salvation of even the most hardened sinners. The preacher warns that many may partake of the Lord's table unworthily, and urges listeners to reflect on their own hearts and relationship with Christ. Ultimately, M'Cheyne calls for a response to Christ's love, urging all to seek genuine repentance and connection with the Savior.

Transcript

THERE ARE MANY excellent and most Christian men who think that the feast of the Lords Supper should never be sullied or interrupted by allusions to those who may be eating and drinking unworthily. They think that when men have, by their own solemn act and deed, deliberately seated themselves at the table of the Lord-that table to which none but believers in Jesus are invited-they think that, for the time being, at least, it is the part of that charity which hopes all things, to address them as if all were the genuine disciples of Jesus, and children of God. These good men know well that there are always many intruders into that holy ordinance; they know that many come from mere custom, and a sense of decency, and from a dislike to be marked out as openly irreligious and profane; and though they feel, in addressing the whole mass as Christians, many a rise of conscience within, many a sad foreboding that the true guests may be the little flock, while the intruders may be the vast majority. Yet they do not feel themselves called upon to disturb the enjoyment of the believing flock, however few they may be, by insinuating any such dark suspicion that there may be some there who have already sold their Lord for their sins - some who, though they may eat bread with Him, yet lift up the heel against Him.

Now a most complete answer to the scruples of these good men is to be found in the example of our blessed Lord. In that night, so much to be remembered, in which He instituted the Lord's Supper-a night in which nothing but kindness and tenderness flowed from His blessed lips - we find that no fewer than five times over did He begin to speak about His betrayer. In many respects that was the most wonderful evening that ever was in the world, and that upper room in Jerusalem the most wonderful room that ever was in the world. Never did the shades of evening gather around a more wonderful company-never did the walls of an upper chamber look upon so wonderful a scene.

Three strange events were crowded into that little space. First, there was the washing of the disciples' feet-the Lord of glory stooping as a servant to wash the feet of poor worms! Second, there was the last Passover-eating of the lamb and the bitter herbs-which had been the memorial of the dying Savior to all believing Jews, but which was now to come to an end. Third, there was the first Lord's Supper-the breaking of bread and pouring out of wine, and the giving and the receiving of it; which was to be the memorial of His dying love even to the end of the world. Oh! what an assemblage of love was here, what a meeting together of incidents, each one more than another picturing forth the inexpressible love of Jesus! Oh! what an awfully tender hour was this! Oh! what an awfully tender joy was now thrilling through the bosoms of His believing disciples! Oh! brethren, what an exalting gladness would now fill the bosom of the courageous Peter! What an adoring love the breast of the Israelite indeed, the simple-hearted Nathanael! And what a breathing of unspeakable affection in the heart of the beloved John, as he leaned on the dear Savior's bosom! Oh! who would break in on such an hour of holy joy with harsh and cruel words about the betrayer? Who would dare to ruffle the calm tranquility of such a moment by one word of dark suspicion? Hush! brethren, it is the Savior that speaks: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."

I trust, then, my friends, you see plainly, from the example of our blessed Lord, that the awfully solemn warning of the text, instead of being a rash and unwarrantable intrusion upon the joyous feelings with which every true disciple should encompass the table of the Lord, is, of all other Scriptures, the most appropriate, and the most like what Jesus would have us to say upon this solemn occasion. It is not, then, with the harshness of unfeeling man, but it is with the tenderness of the compassionate Jesus that we repeat these words in your hearing: Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."

There is a cruel kindness, almost too cruel, one would think, for this cruel world, which is sometimes practiced by the friends of a dying man, when from day to day they mark the approaches of death upon his pallid cheek, and yet they will not breathe a whisper of his danger to him. They flatter him with murderous lies-that he is getting better and will yet see many days when his days are numbered. But ten thousand times more cruel, more base and unfeeling would that minister be who, set over you by God to care for your never-dying souls, should yet look upon those of you who surround so willingly the table of the Lord, but whose whole life, and walk, and conversation, proclaim you to be the betrayers of that Lord, and not once lift up the warning cry: "Ye are not all clean. Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

Question: What could be Christ's reason for so often and so solemnly speaking of His betrayer?

Answer: I can see no other reason for it but that He might make one last effort to melt the heart of His betrayer.

Doctrine: Christ is earnestly seeking the salvation of those unconverted persons who sit down at His table.

There are two arguments running through the whole of this scene, by means of which Jesus tried to melt the betrayer. First, His perfect knowledge of him. As if He had said: I know thee, Judas; I know your whole life and history; I know that you have always been a thief and a traitor; I know that you have sold me for thirty pieces of silver; I know all your plans and all your crimes. In this way He tried to awaken the traitor-to make him feel himself a lost sinner. Second, His anxious love for him. As if He had said: I love you, Judas; I have left the bosom of the Father just for lost sinners like you; I pitied you before the world was; I am quite willing still to be a Savior to you. In this way He tried to win the traitor-to draw him to Himself

Christ Knows Judas' Whole Heart

All the Savior's dealings with Judas were intended to convince him that He knew his whole heart: "I know you, Judas, and all your crimes."

This was plainly His intention when washing the disciples' feet and telling them, that if they be bathed in His blood, they need nothing more than to have their feet washed-their daily sins wiped off daily: "Ye are clean every whit." He then adds, but "Ye are not all clean." This was evidently intended as a hint to Judas, to awaken his guilty conscience.

And then, when He had sat down again, to partake of the Passover with them, and had sent around the cup of the Passover, saying, as we are told in Luke: "Take this and divide it among yourselves," He would not let Judas slumber, as if He were unknown to him; but declares more plainly than before: "I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me." This was evidently intended as a plainer intimation to Judas that, however concealed he might be to others, he was naked and laid open to the eyes of the Savior, with whom he had to do.

And, thirdly, when He was about to put the bread and wine into their hands, to institute the holy ordinance of the Supper, He would not do it without a still more convincing proof to the conscience of Judas that He knew him perfectly: "As they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me: and they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered, He it is that dippeth his hand with me in the dish; he it is that betrayeth me. And Judas answered and said, Lord, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said." Here we find the Savior no longer deals in hints and intimations, but tells him plainly he is the man. Oh! my friends, if we did not know the deceitfulness of the natural heart, how it evades the most pointed declarations of the Word, we would be amazed that the heart of Judas was not overwhelmed with the conviction: "Thou, Lord, sees me. But no; the arrows of the Savior, so faithfully directed, yet strike off from his heart as from a flinty rock, and Judas sits still at the table of the Lord, still secure, to receive with his bloody hands (those hands which so lately had received the thirty pieces of silver, the price of blood) the symbols of the Savior's broken body, which he himself was to betray. Ah! my friends, are there no hearts here like Judas', from which the plainest arrows of conviction, having written on them: "Thou art the man," glance off, without even wounding?. Are there none of you who sit Judas-like, with unclean hands to receive the memorials of the Savior whom you are betraying?

And last of all, when the feast of love was over when Judas, with unaffected conscience, had swallowed down the bread and wine, whose sacred meaning he did not, and could not, know--Jesus, deeply affected, "being troubled in spirit," made one last effort, more pointed than all that went before, to thrust the arrow of conviction into the heart of Judas. When the beloved John, lying on Jesus' breast, said unto him: "Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it. And when he had

dipped the sop, he gave it" (unseen, it would appear by all the rest) "to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And Jesus said unto him, That thou doest, do quickly."

That this pointed word of the Lord was intended to awaken Judas, and for no other reason, is plain from the fact that "no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor." So secretly, but so powerfully, did the Savior seek to awaken the slumbering conscience of the traitor. How was it possible he could miss the conviction that Christ knew all the thoughts and intents of his heart? How did he not fall down and confess that God was in him of a truth? Or like the Samaritan woman: "Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?" But Satan had his dark mysterious hold upon him; and not more dark was the gloomy night which met his eyes as he issued forth upon his murderous errand than was the dark night within his traitorous breast.

Now, brethren, the same Savior is this day in the midst of us. He walks in the midst of the seven gold candlesticks-His eyes are like a flame of fire, and He searches the reins and the hearts. Think of this, you that are open sinners, and yet dare to sit down at the table of Christ-swearers - drunkards - Sabbath-breakers - unclean. Ministers and elders may not know your sins; they are weak and short-sighted men. Your very neighbors may not know your sins; you may hide them from your own family. It is easy to deceive man; but to deceive Christ is impossible. He knows your whole history; He is present at every act of dishonesty-of filthiness--of folly. The darkness and the light are both alike to Him. Think of this, you that live in heart-sins, rolling sin beneath your tongue as a sweet morsel-you that put on the outward cloak of seriousness and sobriety that you may jostle and sit down among the children of God-you that have the speech of Canaan in your lips, but hatred and malice, and the very breath of hell in your hearts-you that have the clothing of sheep, but inwardly are ravening wolves-you that are whited sepulchers, beautiful without, but within full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Think of this, you that know yourselves unconverted, and yet have dared to sit down at the table of Christ. Christ knows you-Christ could point to you-Christ could name you-Christ could give the sop to you. You may be hidden to all the world, but you are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom you have to do. Oh! that you would fall down beneath His piercing glance, and say: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Oh! that every one of you would say: "Lord, is it I?"

Christ's Love Used to Win Judas' Heart

The second argument which Christ made use of to melt and win the heart of Judas was His love: I have loved you, Judas, and came to save you.

This was plainly His intention when washing the disciples' feet. He did not shrink from the traitors feet; yes, He not only stooped to wash the feet of those who were to forsake Him and flee-He not only washed the feet of Peter, who was, before the cock crowed, to deny Him with oaths and curses-but He washed also the feet of Judas, the very feet which had gone, two days before, to the meeting of priests in Caiaphas' palace where he sold the Savior for thirty pieces of silver, the value of a slave; and it was in his hearing He spoke the gentle words: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." If, then, the Savior's washing the feet of the eleven was so blessed a proof of His tenderness to His own disciples, how much more is His washing the feet of him who (He knew) had betrayed Him, a proof of His love to sinners, even the chief! He willed not the death of Judas-He wills not the death of any one of you. You think that because you have betrayed the Savior and come to the feast without any warrant or title, an unbidden intruder, therefore

Jesus cannot love you. Alas! this shows your own heart, but not Christ's heart. Behold Jesus washing the feet of Judas and wiping them with the towel wherewith He was girded; behold His anxiety to awaken and to win the heart of the traitor Judas. And then think how the more you are a traitor and a betrayer, the more Jesus pities you and waits upon you, willing still to wash and to save you saying: "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?"

The second instance of Jesus' love to the traitor is when He had sat down again and was eating the Passover along with the other eleven, He did not shrink from eating meat with the traitor. Yes, He not only sat down to eat with the eleven who were to forsake Him and flee - He not only allowed John to recline on His bosom and Peter to sit at the table, but He suffered Judas to dip his hand in the very same dish with Him, even when He knew that he was fulfilling that prophecy which is written, "He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up his heel against me." It was a blessed proof of the Saviors love to His believing disciples, as is recorded by Luke when he said: "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." One would have thought that to the eye of the Savior this Passover must have appeared covered with threatening clouds-involved in the deep gloom of the garden of Gethsemane, and the bloody cross from which the sun himself hid his beam. You always find that when you are in immediate expectation of some calamity; it renders gloomy and uninviting every event that bespeaks its near approach.

You would have thought, then, that the human soul of Jesus must have shrunk back from this Passover with horror. But no, he felt the shrinking of humanity which more plainly showed itself in the garden. But His love for His own disciples was stronger than all beside, and made Him look forward to this Passover when He was to picture out to them His dying love more clearly than ever with intense desire: "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." But how much more wonderful is the proof of the Savior's love to the unbelieving-to those who care not for Him, but are His betrayers and murderers-when, with such divine complacency, He dips His hand in the same dish with Judas and tells him, at the same time, that He does it not through ignorance, but that the prophecy might be fulfilled: "He that eateth bread with me, hath lifted up the heel against me."

Ah! my unbelieving friends, I know well the dark suspicions that lurk in your bosoms. Because you have done everything against Christ, you think that He cannot have any love for you; but behold, dark and proud sinners, how lovingly, how tenderly, He tries, if it may be, to awaken and to win over the heart of Judas! And then think how anxious He is this day to win and awaken you, though you are of sinners the chief - to bow that brazen neck - to break that heart of adamant-to wring a tear from those eyes that never wept for sin.

The third instance of Jesus' love to the traitor is His faithful declaration of his danger to him: "The Son of Man goeth, as it is written of him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had never been born." In the two former instances Jesus had shown His love by showing how willing He was to save him to the very uttermost that He would bear all things to save him; but now He uses another way-He shows him the terror of the Lord tells him that if he will persist, "it had been good for him that he had not been born."

As a mother, when she wishes her child to take some wholesome medicine, first wins upon its love, and then, if that will not do, tries to win upon its fears; with the same, more than mother's tenderness, did Jesus first try to win upon the affections, and now upon the fears of Judas. And He is the same Savior this day in the upper chambers of the universe that He was that night in the upper chamber at Jerusalem; and

He sends His messengers to you to carry the same messages of kindness and of love. It is only in love that He threatens you. And, oh! that in love we might speak the threatening to you that if you have no part in Jesus, and yet, by sitting down at His table, are becoming guilty of the body and blood of our Lord, it were better for you that you had not been born.

It is a happy thing to live; there is a blessedness which cannot be expressed in having life. The fly that lives but for a day-the veriest worm or insect that crawls upon the ground has an amount of blessedness in the very fact that it lives, which it is far beyond the skill of man to calculate. To breathe, to move, to feel the morning sun and the evening breeze-to look out upon the green world and the blue sky-all this is happiness immense-immeasurable.

It never can be said of a fly or worm that it had better never been born; but, alas! it may be said of some of you: If you are living, but not living united to Christ-if you are sitting at the table of Christ, and yet unconverted-it had been good for you that you had not been born.

Ah! my friends, there was once a heathen man who always wept, and got the name of the Weeping Philosopher. One would almost think that he had known this truth which we preach unto you-that if that union which you make with the bread and wine at the holy table be not a picture and a seal of the union between your soul and the Savior of sinners, you had far better never have been born. Better not to be, than to be only in hell. "They shall wish to die, and shall not be able; they shall seek to die, and death shall flee from them."

The fourth and last instance of Jesus' love to the traitor is the most touching of all. After the Supper was over, Jesus was troubled in spirit, and testified and said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."

It was but a few days before that He came riding down the declivity of Mount Olivet upon an ass' colt; and His disciples, behind and before, were all rejoicing and praising God, crying "Hosanna!" and Jesus-what was He doing? He was weeping: "When he came near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." He wept over the very city which He doomed to destruction.

And just so here: when His disciples on every hand were filled with a holy joy, and John most of all rejoicing, for he lay in the bosom of Immanuel, what was Christ doing-the author of all their joy? He was heavy and troubled in spirit. He was always the man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, but now a ruffle of deeper sorrow came over the placid calm of His holy features-He was troubled in spirit, and said: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, one of you shall betray me." He had tried all arguments to move His betrayer-He had unbosomed the tenderness of His love-He had shown the dreadfulness of His anger. But when He saw that all would not do to move his hard heart-when He saw the heartless unconcern with which Judas could swallow down the bread, and share in the blessed cup, the spirit of the Savior sank within Him; and the last effort of His love to awaken the impenitent murderer was, to unbosom the depth of His sorrows and to breathe out with many sighs the words: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me."

My friends, there may be some within these walls with a heart as hard as that of Judas. like Judas, you are about to partake of the most moving ordinance the world ever saw; like Judas, you may eat of the bread and drink of the wine; and like Judas, your heart may grow harder, and your life more sinful than ever. And you think, then, that Jesus is your enemy? But what does the Bible say? Look here: He is troubled in

spirit-He weeps as He did over Jerusalem. Yes, He that once shed His blood for you, now sheds His tears for you. Immanuel grieves that you will not be saved. He grieved over Judas, and He grieves over you. He wept over Jerusalem, and He weeps over you. He has no pleasure that you should perish-He had far rather that you would turn and have life.

There is not within these walls one of you so hard, so cruel, so base, so unmoved, so far from grace and godliness, so Judas-like that Jesus does not grieve over your hardness-that you will still resist all His love-that you will still love death, and wrong your own soul. Oh! that the tears which the Savior shed over your lost and perishing souls might fall upon your hearts like drops of liquid fire-that you might no more sit unmelted under that wondrous love which burns with so vehement a flame which many waters cannot quench-which all your sin cannot smother-the love which passes knowledge. Amen.

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