

## Scriptures and Doctrine :: PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS

**PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/4 20:38**

PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS

Alexander Maclaren

Luke 22:24-37

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. 25. And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. 26. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. 27. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as He that serveth. 28. Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. 29. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; 30. That ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. 31. And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 32. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. 33. And he said unto Him, Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death. 34. And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me. 35. And He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 36. Then said He unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. 37. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And He was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end.—LUKE xxii. 24-37.

It was blameworthy, but only too natural, that, while Christ's heart was full of His approaching sufferings, the Apostles should be squabbling about their respective dignity. They thought that the half-understood predictions pointed to a brief struggle immediately preceding the establishment of the kingdom, and they wished to have their rank settled in advance. Possibly, too, they had been disputing as to whose office was the menial task of presenting the basin for foot-washing. So little did the first partakers of the Lord's Supper discern the Lord's body, and so little did His most loving friends share His sorrows.

I. Our Lord was not so absorbed in His anticipations of the near Cross as to be unobservant of the wrangling among the Apostles. Even then His heart was enough at leisure from itself to observe, to pity, and to help.

So He at once turns to deal with the false ideas of greatness betrayed by the dispute. The world's notion is that the true use and exercise of superiority is to lord it over others. Tyrants are flattered by the title of benefactor, which they do not deserve, but the giving of which shows that, even in the world, some trace of the true conception lingers.

It was sadly true, at that time, that power was used for selfish ends, and generally meant oppression. One Egyptian king, who bore the title Benefactor, was popularly known as Malefactor, and many another old-world monarch deserved a like name.

Jesus lays down the law for His followers as being the exact opposite of the world's notion. Dignity and pre-eminence carry obligations to serve. In His kingdom power is to be used to help others, not to glorify oneself. In other sayings of Christ's, service is declared to be the way to become great in the kingdom, but here the matter is taken up at another point, and greatness, already attained on whatever grounds, is commanded to be turned to its proper use.

The way to become great is to become small, and to serve. The right use of greatness is to become a servant.

That has become a familiar commonplace now, but its recognition as the law for civic and other dignity is all but entirely owing to Christianity. What conception of such a use of power has the Sultan of Turkey, or the petty tyrants of heathen lands? The worst of European rulers have to make pretence to be guided by this law; and even the Pope calls himself the servant of servants.

It is a commonplace, but like many another axiom, universal acceptance and almost as universal neglect are its fate. Ingrained selfishness fights against it.

Men admire it as a beautiful saying, and how many of us take it as our life's guide?

We condemn the rulers of old who wrung wealth out of their people and neglected every duty; but what of our own use of the fraction of power we possess, or our own demeanour to our inferiors in world or church?

Have all the occupants of royal thrones or presidential chairs, all peers, members of Parliament, senators, and congressmen, used their position for the public weal?

Do we regard ours as a trust to be administered for others? Do we feel the weight of our crown, or are we taken up with its jewels, and proud of ourselves for it?

Christ's pathetic words, giving Himself as the example of greatness that serves, are best understood as referring to His wonderful act of washing the disciples' feet.

Luke does not record it, and probably did not know it, but how the words are lighted up if we bring them into connection with it!

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**Re: PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/5 16:30**

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II. Verses 28 to 30 naturally flow from the preceding. They lift a corner of the veil, and show the rewards, when the heavenly form of the kingdom has come, of the right use of eminence in its earthly form. How pathetic a glimpse into Christ's heart is given in that warm utterance of gratitude for the imperfect companionship of the Twelve!

It reveals His loneliness, His yearning for a loving hand to grasp, His continual conflict with temptations to choose an easier way than that of the Cross. He has known all the pain of being alone, and feeling in vain for a sympathetic heart to lean on.

He has had to resist temptation, not only in the desert at the beginning, or in Gethsemane at the end, but throughout His life. He treasures in His heart, and richly repays, even a little love dashed with much selfishness, and faithfulness broken by desertion.

We do not often speak of the tempted Christ, or of the lonely Christ, or of the grateful Christ, but in these great words we see Him as being all these.

The rewards promised point onwards to the perfecting of the kingdom in the future life. We notice the profound thought that the kingdom which His servants are to inherit is conferred on them, 'as My Father hath appointed unto Me,'—that is, that it is a kingdom won by suffering and service, and wielded by gentleness and for others. 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.'

The characteristics of the future royalty of Christ's servants are given in highly figurative language. A state of which we

have no experience can only be revealed under forms drawn from experience; but these are only far-off approximations, and cannot be pressed.

The sacred Last Supper suggested one metaphor. It was the last on earth, but its sanctity would be renewed in heaven, and sadness and separation and the following grief would not mar the perfect, perpetual, joyful feast. What dim visions of rule and delegated authority may lie in the other promise of judging the twelve tribes of Israel, we must wait till we go to that world to understand.

But this is clear, that continuing with Jesus here leads to everlasting companionship hereafter, in which all desires shall be satisfied, and we shall share in His authority and be representatives of His glory.

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**Re: PARTING PROMISES AND WARNINGS - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/5/6 5:00**

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III. But Jesus abruptly recalls Himself and the Twelve from these remoter prospects of bliss to the nearer future of trial and separation.

The solemn warning to Peter follows with startling suddenness. Why should they be fighting about precedence when they were on the verge of the sorest trial of their constancy? And as for Peter, who had, no doubt, not been the least loud-voiced in the strife, he needed most of all to be sobered. Our narrow limits forbid our doing even partial justice to the scene with him; but we note the significant use of the old name 'Simon,' reminding the Apostle of his human weakness, and its repetition, giving emphasis to the address.

We note, too, the partial withdrawal of the veil which hides the spirit world from us, in the distinct declaration of the agency of a personal tempter, whose power is limited, though his malice is boundless, and who had to obtain God's permission ere he could tempt. His sieve is made to let the wheat through, and to retain the chaff. It will be hard to empty this saying of its force. Christ taught the existence and operation of Satan; but He taught, too, that He Himself was Satan's victorious antagonist and our prevailing intercessor. He is so still. He does not seek to avert conflict from us, but prays that our faith fail not, and Himself, too, fulfils the prayer by strengthening us.

Faith, then, conquers, and withstands Satan's sifting. If it holds out, we shall not fall, though all the winds howl round us. We are not passive between the two antagonists, but have to take our share in the struggle. Partial failures may be followed by recovery, and even tend to increase our power to strengthen other tempted ones, by the experience gained of our own weakness, which deepens humility and forbearance with others' faults, and by the experience of Christ's strength, which makes us able to direct them to the source of all safety.

Peter's passionate avowal of readiness to bear anything, if only he was with Christ, is the genuine utterance of a warm impulsive heart, which took too little heed of Christ's solemn warning, and fancied that the tide of present feeling would

always run as strong as now. Emotion fluctuates. Steadfast devotion is chary of mortgaging the future by promises. He who knows himself is slow to say, 'I will,' for he knows that 'Oh that I may!' is fitter for his weakness. Very likely, if Peter had been offered fetters or the scaffold then and there, he would have accepted them bravely; but it was a different thing in the raw, cold morning, after an agitating night, and the Master away at the far end of the great hall. A flippant maid's tongue was enough to finish him then.

It is sometimes easier to bear a great load for Christ than a small one. Some of us could be martyrs at the stake more easily than confessors among sneering neighbours. Jesus had spared the Apostle in the former warning of his fall, but He spoke plainly at last, since the former had been ineffectual; and He addressed him by his new name of Peter, as if to heighten the sin of denial by recalling the privileges bestowed.

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IV. The last part of the passage deals with the new conditions consequent on Christ's departure.

The Twelve had been exempt from the care of providing for themselves while He was with them, but now they are to be launched into the world alone, like fledglings from the nest. Not that His presence is not with them or with us, but that His absence throws the task of providing for wants and guarding against dangers on themselves, as had not been the case during the blessed years of companionship. Hence the injunctions in verse 36 lay down the permanent law for the Church, while verse 37 assigns as its reason the speedy fulfilment of the prophecies of Messiah's sufferings.

Substantially the meaning of the whole is: 'I am on the point of leaving you, and, when I am gone, you must use common-sense means for provision and protection. I provided for you while I was here, without your co-operation. Remember how I did so, and trust Me to provide in future, through your co-operation.'

The life of faith does not exclude ordinary prudence and the use of appropriate means. It is more in accord with Christ's mind to have a purse to keep money in, and a wallet for food-stores, than to go out, as some good people do, saying, 'The Lord will provide.' Yes, He will; but it will be by blessing your common-sense and effort.

As to the difficulty felt in the injunction to buy a sword, our Lord would be contradicting His whole teaching if He was here commanding the use of arms for the defence of His servants or the promotion of His kingdom. That He did not mean literal swords is plain from His answer to the Apostles, who produced the formidable armament of two.

'It is enough.' A couple are plenty to fight the Roman Empire with. Yes, two too many, as was soon seen. The expression is plainly an intensely energetic metaphor, taking line with purse and scrip.

The plain meaning of the whole is that we are called on to provide necessary means of provision and defence, which He will bless.

The only sword permitted to His followers is the sword of the Spirit.

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