

THE PRESENT TRUTH

Bishop Stephen D. Lewis

It Was For Us

No traces of His recent suffering were to be seen as the Saviour stepped forth to meet His betrayer. Standing in advance of His disciples, He asked the mob: "Whom seek ye?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am He." As Jesus spoke these words, the angel who had recently ministered to Him moved between Him and the mob. A divine light illuminated the Saviour's face, and a dovelike form overshadowed Him. In the presence of this divine glory the murderous throng could not stand for a moment. They staggered back. The priests, elders, and soldiers dropped as dead men to the ground. The angel withdrew, and the light faded away. Jesus could have escaped, but He remained, calm and self-possessed. His disciples were too much amazed to utter a word.

The Roman soldiers soon started to their feet. With the priests and Judas, they gathered about Christ. They seemed ashamed of their weakness, and fearful that He would escape. Again the question was asked by the Redeemer: "Whom seek ye?" Again they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." The Saviour then said, "I have told you that I am He: if therefore ye seek Me, let these [pointing to His disciples] go their way." John 18:7, 8.

In this hour of trial, Christ's thoughts were for His beloved disciples. He did not wish to have them suffer, even though He must go to prison and to death. Judas, the betrayer, did not forget the part he was to act. He came to Jesus, and kissed Him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" Matthew 26:50. His voice trembled as He added, "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" Luke 22:48. These gentle words should have touched the heart of Judas; but all tenderness and honor seemed to have left him. Judas had yielded himself to the control of Satan. He stood boldly before the Lord, and was not ashamed to give Him up to the cruel mob. Christ did not refuse the traitor's kiss. In this He gave us an example of forbearance, love, and pity. If we are His disciples, we must treat our enemies as He treated Judas.

The murderous throng became bold as they saw Judas touch the form which had so recently been glorified before their eyes. They now laid hold of the Saviour, and bound those hands that had ever been employed in doing good. The disciples did not think that Christ would allow Himself to be taken. They knew that the power which could strike down the mob as dead men could keep them helpless till Christ and His companions should escape.

They were disappointed and indignant as they saw the cords brought forward to bind the hands of Him whom they loved. Peter, in his anger, rashly drew his sword, and tried to defend his Master. But he only cut off an ear of the high priest's servant. When Jesus saw what was done, He released His hands, though held firmly by the Roman soldiers, and saying, "Suffer ye thus far" (Luke 22:51), He touched the wounded ear, and it was instantly made whole.

He then said to Peter, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" Matthew 26:52-54. "The cup which My Father hath given Me, shall I not drink it?" John 18:11. Christ then turned to the chief priests and the captains of the temple, who were with the mob, and said, "Are ye come out as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took Me not: but the Scriptures must be fulfilled." Mark 14:48, 49.

The disciples were offended when they saw that the Saviour made no effort to deliver Himself from His enemies. They blamed Him for not doing so. They could not understand His submission to the mob, and, terror-stricken, they forsook Him and fled. Christ had foretold this desertion. "Behold," He had said, "the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." John 16:32.

Before Annas, Caiaphas, and the Sanhedrin: Jesus was followed from the garden of Gethsemane by the hooting mob. He moved painfully, for His hands were tightly bound, and He was closely guarded. He was taken first to the house of Annas, who had formerly been the high priest, but whose place was then filled by his son-in-law, Caiaphas. The wicked Annas had requested that he might be the first to see Jesus of Nazareth a bound captive. He hoped to draw from Him some evidence by which to secure His condemnation. With this in view he questioned the Saviour with regard to His disciples and His teachings. Christ answered: "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing." Then, turning upon the questioner, He said, "Why askest thou Me? Ask them which heard Me, what I have said." John 18:20, 21. The priests themselves had set spies to watch Christ and report His every word. Through these spies they knew of His sayings and of His works at every gathering of the people He had attended. The spies had sought to entrap Him in His words, that they might find something by which to condemn Him. So the Saviour said, "Ask them which heard Me." Go to your spies. They have heard what I have said. They can tell you what My teaching has been. The

words of Christ were so searching and pointed that the priest felt that his prisoner was reading his very soul. But one of the servants of Annas, thinking that his master was not treated with proper respect, struck Jesus in the face saying: "Answerest Thou the high priest so?" To this Jesus mildly said: "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?" John 18:22, 23.

Christ could have summoned legions of angels from Heaven to His aid. But it was a part of His mission to endure in His humanity all the taunts and insults that men might heap upon Him. From the house of Annas, the Saviour was taken to the palace of Caiaphas. He was to be tried before the Sanhedrin, and while its members were being called together, Annas and Caiaphas again questioned Him, but they gained no advantage. When the members of the Sanhedrin had assembled, Caiaphas took his seat as the president. On each side were the judges; before them stood the Roman soldiers guarding the Saviour; back of these was the accusing mob. Caiaphas then bade Jesus heard a word. Had He responded by even one soul-searching look, such as He gave the buyers and sellers in the temple, the whole murderous throng would have been compelled to flee from His presence.

The Jews were at this time subject to the Romans, and were not allowed to punish any one with death. The Sanhedrin could only examine the prisoner, and pass judgment to be ratified by the Roman authorities. To accomplish their wicked purpose, they must find something against the Saviour that would be regarded as criminal by the Roman governor. They could secure abundant evidence that Christ had spoken against the Jewish traditions and many of their ordinances. It was easy to prove that He had denounced the priests and scribes, and that He had called them hypocrites and murderers. But this would not be listened to by the Romans, for they themselves were disgusted with the pretensions of the Pharisees.

Many charges were brought against Christ, but either the witnesses disagreed, or the evidence was of such a nature that it would not be accepted by the Romans. They tried to make Him speak in answer to their accusations, but He appeared as if He had not heard them. The silence of Christ at this time had been thus described by the prophet Isaiah: "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth." Isaiah 53:7. The priests began to fear that they would fail of obtaining any evidence which they could bring against their prisoner before Pilate. They felt that one last effort must be made. The high priest raised his right hand toward Heaven, and addressed Jesus in the form of a solemn oath: "I adjure Thee by the living God, that Thou tell us whether Thou be the Christ, the son of God." Matthew 26:63.

The Saviour never denied His mission or His relation to the Father. He could remain silent to personal insult, but He ever spoke. Every ear was bent to listen, and every eye was fixed upon Him as He answered: "Thou hast said." In the custom of those days this was the same as answering, "Yes," or, "It is as thou hast said." This was the strongest form of an affirmative answer. A heavenly light seemed to illuminate the pale countenance of the Saviour as He added: "Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of Heaven." Matthew 26:64.

In this statement the Saviour presented the reverse of the scene then taking place. He pointed forward to the time when He will occupy the position of supreme Judge of Heaven and earth. He will then be seated upon the Father's throne, and from His decisions there will be no appeal. He brought before His hearers a view of that day, when, instead of being surrounded and abused by a riotous mob, He will come in the clouds of Heaven with power and great glory. Then He will be escorted by legions of angels. Then He will pronounce sentence upon His enemies, among whom will be that same accusing throng.

As Jesus spoke the words declaring Himself to be the Son of God, and Judge of the world, the high priest rent his robe, as if to show his horror. He lifted his hands toward Heaven, and said: "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now ye have heard His blasphemy. What think ye?" The judges answered, "He is guilty of death." Matthew 26:65, 66. It was contrary to the Jewish law to try a prisoner by night. Though the condemnation of Christ had been determined, there must be a formal trial by day. Jesus was taken to the guard room, and there suffered mockery and abuse from the soldiers and the rabble.

At daybreak He was again brought before His judges, and the final sentence of condemnation was pronounced. A satanic fury then took possession of the leaders and the people. The roar of voices was like that of wild beasts. They made a rush for Jesus, crying, "He is guilty, put Him to death!" and had it not been for the soldiers, He would have been torn in pieces. But Roman authority interposed, and by force of arms restrained the violence of the mob. Priests, rulers, and the rabble joined in abusing the Saviour. An old garment was thrown over His head; and His persecutors struck Him in the face, saying: "Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?" Matthew 26:68. When the garment was removed, one of the mocking throng spat in the Saviour's face. The angels of God faithfully recorded every insulting look, word, and act against their beloved Commander. One day those base men who scorned and spat upon the calm, pale face of Christ will look upon it in its glory, shining brighter than the sun. {The Story of Jesus Pg. 109-117}