

Luke 22:31-62 (H. R.) 54939

Christian Truth: Volume 33, Simon Peter, The History of: Part 5 - the Sepulcher (22:31-62)

Luke 22:31-62

Peter had learned (John 13) what was necessary in order to have communion with the Lord. Recalling the blessings which had been unfolded to him since the beginning of his career, it would seem as if the circle were complete, and there remained nothing more to learn. But there was one thing without which all these blessings would be of no effect-the knowledge of and judgment of the flesh, and of its absolute worthlessness before God. And this we have in Luke 22:31.

Satan had desired to have this disciple that he might sift him as wheat. As in Job's case, the enemy had presented himself before God to accuse him. Availing himself of the moment favorable to his designs, when the Lord would be taken away from them, and they would be externally unprotected, he asked to put him into the sieve, in the certainty that nothing would remain which God could accept. In this way he thought to wrest him from Christ, but he was mistaken. No doubt not much of Peter would remain in the sieve; but what God had wrought in the disciple must remain. In his enmity Satan forgot that if he had all power over the flesh, he had none with regard to God and what came from Him. God granted his request because He had purposes of grace and love toward Peter, as He had of old toward Job. Peter was to be left in the enemy's hands that he might learn himself. Such dealing was needful for his blessing.

But if the enemy had displayed his activity, Christ had been at work before him, and had anticipated the moment of the sifting. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." v. 32. He had interceded for Peter even before anything had passed in his conscience. The first act, that which regards God, had taken place unknown to Peter, and in view of his fall, which had not yet occurred. The second act came after the fall, when "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (v. 61), and reached his conscience. One look from Christ was the starting-point of all the blessings which followed, recalling his heart to the love which had been in exercise to prevent his falling, and assuring him that this love, inexhaustible in its supply, was not changed by his unfaithfulness, and at length, reaching his conscience, caused him to shed bitter tears of repentance in the presence of such grace.

Then only, when truly restored, would Peter be able to strengthen his brethren (v. 32), and to deal with the hearts and consciences of others. Ministry can only be exercised in self-judgment.

The Lord (v. 33) allowed Peter's self-confidence to be plainly manifested. "Lord, I am ready to go with Thee, both into prison, and to death." "I am ready." This was the flesh, ready to face everything. The flesh, even when warned, is always self-confident. If it had had even one atom of strength, the Lord's solemn warning should have hindered it from falling. But now the moment came when Peter, left to his own resources (vv. 35-38), accompanied the Lord to Gethsemane, and the Master was left alone. Not one of His disciples could watch one hour with Him. "Watch and pray," He said, "that ye enter not into temptation." Matt. 26:41. "Watch and pray"-that was what Jesus did. If Peter had listened (he slept in presence of temptation as he had done in presence of glory), he would have been on his guard against the temptation, and in dependence on God, and he would not have entered into it. To enter into temptation as a man in the flesh was to succumb to it. Christ alone could enter into it and come out divinely victorious, obtaining the victory in dependence. He could have used His power to deliver Himself. At the sight of Him His enemies went backward and fell to the ground. He could have asked for legions of angels; but He submits, endures the treachery of Judas, yields all His rights (and what rights!) into the hands of men, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, without a protestation or murmur. Peter did not watch or pray. He entered into temptation, and succumbed at once. He drew the sword with impatience, he followed afar off, and entered into the high priest's court. The flesh could take him thus far, but then all its strength came to naught at the word of a servant.

The Sepulcher

John 20:1-18

The cross could no longer hold its victim. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus were God's chosen instruments for giving the Savior a place with the rich in His death.

It was not everything, to know a love which had brought the Lord down to death for them; there remained a capital point to be learned. What did the sepulcher contain? What had death done with the Savior? or else, What had the Savior done with death? If the grave had held Him, His work was vain, and not one of those for whom He had given Himself was acquitted or justified.

Mary found the sepulcher open. Peter and John ascertained that it was empty. Peter went in and saw. The attributes of death were there, testifying by their presence that death had been unable to hold its prey, and that, without struggle or conflict, the victory over it had been peaceful. The napkin was wrapped together in a place by itself, as one does with a garment when preparing to go out. The "It is finished" was proved. The love which had undertaken the work had completed it; and the disciples, who as yet knew not the scripture, were convinced by the testimony of their eyes. They believed, and went away again unto their own homes.

This was a great step no doubt; but, shame be to these two disciples, it was little in comparison to what a poor woman found at the sepulcher. Mary Magdalene-knowing the love of Christ who had delivered her from the seven demons-loved the Lord with an affection which sprang from the greatness of His love, and which far exceeded her intelligence. While the intelligence of Peter and John could be engaged and satisfied with a work, Mary's affection could not be. She needed more; she wanted the Person who was her Object. Peter who had gone

into the sepulcher had seen only the linen clothes and the napkin. Mary was seeking a Person, and as she wept, stooped down and looked into the sepulcher and saw the angels. The linen clothes had been enough for the disciples, but the angels were not enough for Mary. Even in their presence, and without awaiting their answer, she turned back; for she wanted her Lord. At first her utter ignorance of the things that were to come to pass hindered her from recognizing Him; but Jesus said to her, "Mary"-one single word, "Mary."

Was it surprising that there should be a link of affection between Mary and Jesus, and that the Savior in the perfection of His Person should win all the thoughts and love of such a failing, ignorant creature? It should not be surprising since she had been the object of such goodness and such a deliverance. But that there should be a link of affection from Jesus to Mary—that was the wonderful thing. Among thousands of thousands He knew her by name as His sheep. He remembered the most wretched. She said unto Him, "Master." He replies not, "Go to My servants," but, "Go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." Mary's affection in clinging to Christ received a revelation greater (in some ways) than all those which Peter had had up to this time. Knowing only His work, the disciples had gone away again to their own home; Mary Magdalene with love which clung to His Person, had learned at the Savior's feet the most glorious results of His sacrifice. This is why Peter and John are so in the shade in this scene; a weak woman in all the modesty of her position outstrips them. Their feet were swift, no doubt, to lead them to the sepulcher. Mary was the first to know the path which leads straight to the Father and, retracing her steps with this marvelous revelation, she was the first to carry the message to the disciples.

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