

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE – “LORD, HELP ME!”

We are drawing near to the end. Not Judas alone but all those who looked for a Messiah who should be the temporal Ruler and Liberator of His people, were grievously disappointed when our Lord declared that He had not come to be a king of the world. It was an earthly kingdom that they wanted, not the Kingdom of Heaven of which He spoke.

According to the rabbis, the Messiah was to march at the head of His people against all heathen nations, to make them subject to the Jews, and to rule from Jerusalem over the whole earth. There was to be a reign of a thousand years, a reign of prosperity, glory and pleasure for the people of God. The fruit trees and the harvest fields were to yield their produce continually, and every product of every clime was to be found in Palestine in an abundance such as the wildest imagination only could conceive. Jewish children were brought up from their earliest years with these expectations, and even our Lord's disciples were full of such earthly hopes. So that when, about this time, their Master began to break gently to them that He was going to redeem the world, not by fighting against the Romans, but by shedding His Blood, they could not understand what He meant.

His enemies—the priests, the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Herodians—were glad to see the people disappointed, and their enthusiasm for Jesus of Nazareth cooling. They told them that a poor, unlearned man, the son of a carpenter, could never be the glorious Messiah of whom Moses and the Prophets had spoken. They reproved the poor sick people who came to Him on the Sabbath to be cured. They followed Him about, watching Him, laughing at Him, putting difficult questions to Him in the hope of puzzling Him.

For a long time our Lord bore meekly with the Pharisees, who were among the most violent of His enemies. He answered their questions, though He knew they were only asked to entrap Him, and gently pointed out to them the sins which made them displeasing to God. But when He saw that they continued to shut their eyes to the light, and that they were leading the people away from Him, He fearlessly and publicly rebuked them for their hypocrisy and pride, and warned them of the terrible punishment they were preparing for themselves.

One day He told the people this parable:

"Two men went up into the Temple to pray, the one a Pharisee and the other a publican. The Pharisee, standing, prayed thus with himself :

"God, I give Thee thanks that I am not like the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week, I give tithes of all that I possess."

And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards Heaven, but struck his breast, saying:

"O God, be merciful to me a sinner." I say to you this man went down to his house justified;

that is, pleasing to God,' rather than the other, because everyone that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." How the pride of the Pharisees must have been stung by this parable! To think of anyone daring to compare a Pharisee with a publican, and preferring the publican ! From this time their rage against our Lord knew no bounds, and they leagued with their enemies, the Sadducees and the Herodians, to bring about His destruction. He knew all their plots, but went calmly on His way, teaching and healing, casting out devils, and training His Apostles, knowing that His enemies could do nothing against Him until His hour should come.

On a certain day, when He had been telling the people that in the Kingdom of God the last should be first and the first last—a prospect very unwelcome to the Pharisees— some of these came and said to Him:

"Get Thee hence, for Herod hath a mind to kill Thee." He answered : "Go and tell that fox: Behold, I cast out devils and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I am consummated." " No man," He said another day, " taketh My life away from Me, but I lay it down of Myself, and I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again."

One day our Lord crossed the northern border of Palestine and came into the heathen land of Phoenicia.

"He would that no man should know it," says St. Mark, "but He could not be hid." His fame had gone beyond the limits of His own little country, and a poor pagan woman came to Him in her distress. Her daughter was possessed by an evil spirit, and the mother, who had heard of the cures in Palestine, hoped that Jesus of Nazareth would have pity on her child. So she came after Him crying out:

"Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously troubled by a devil." But He answered her not a word. "What an unheard of thing is this ! " says St. John Chrysostom, "He helped those who were undeserving ; He would not send away those who came to tempt and hurt Him, but for one who ran after Him and humbly implored His aid He had not a word." The disciples, annoyed at the disturbance she was making, came to Him, saying:

"Send her away, for she crieth after us." But she would not be sent away, and, paying no heed to them, she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. And He, answering, said: "I was not sent but to the sheep that are lost of the house of Israel." What a disappointment ! And she had been told He was so kind to those in trouble. Anyone but a mother would have lost heart and gone away disconsolate ; but she did not give in, she was not discouraged. She came and fell down at His feet and adored Him, saying:

"Lord, help me!" And He said:

"It is not good to take the bread of the children and to cast it to the dogs." To this poor woman these words sounded harsher than they do to us, for the dogs of the East are not

the companions and pets we make them, but starving, wretched creatures for which nobody cares. It is not fit, our Lord meant, that the favours granted to the children of God, that is, to the Jews, should be given to pagans like her. Will she go away now, hurt or brokenhearted? No, she is too humble to be hurt, too resolute to be brokenhearted. She will turn His words against Him and make them plead her cause,

"Yes, Lord," she says eagerly, " for the whelps also eat under the table of the crumbs of the children. What Thou sayest is true. It is not fit to take the children's bread for the dogs, but it is fit to give just the crumbs to the little dogs waiting under the table for them. This will not hurt the children. I am only a dog, but a little one to whom some broken bits might perhaps out of kindness be given."

How could our Lord hold out any longer ! He had determined to set this poor heathen before His followers to the end of time as a model of the humble, persevering prayer that wins reward at last. Therefore He was obliged to try her by seeming hard. It was all seeming. From the first He was full of compassion for her and her unhappy child. He longed to help her, and had to hold back the tender, pitying words His heart was prompting Him to say. They came at last as an outburst of admiration that He could no longer restrain:

"O woman, great is thy faith, be it done unto thee as thou wilt!" He who rebuked His disciples for their little faith was delighted with what He found in this Canaanite. He liked, too, the way in which she turned His words about the dogs against Him. St. Mark says it was this sharpness of hers that in the end gained her cause. And Jesus said:

"For this saying, go thy way, the devil is gone out of thy daughter." And, when she was come into her house, she found the girl lying upon the bed, and that the devil was gone out. Was it worthwhile to have waited patiently and humbly, and to have persisted in spite of weariness and delay ?