

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX – THE BEGINNING OF THE END

At last His hour was come. It was time to go up to Jerusalem for the offering of the Great Sacrifice. Before setting out, He took the disciples apart and said to them:

"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified, and the third day He shall rise again." St. Luke tells us that "they understood none of these things." Accustomed to see Him followed by admiring crowds, untouched by the hands raised to stone Him, and by the officers sent to make Him prisoner, they would not believe that harm could come to Him. On the contrary, they thought He was going up to Jerusalem to take possession of His throne and begin His glorious reign as the Messiah-King. He had promised them that they too should sit on thrones. It was time to remind Him of this and to secure the first places in the new Kingdom, so at least thought James and John. They slipped away from the rest and returned presently with their mother, who came with them to our Lord, adoring and asking something of Him:

"Master," they said, "we desire that whatsoever we shall ask Thou wouldst do it for us."
"What would you that I should do for you?" He replied.

"Grant to us that we may sit, the one on Thy right hand and the other on Thy left in Thy glory." What a time for such a petition! When He had scarcely finished speaking of His bitter sufferings that were at hand—then to come begging for honours! Yet their gentle Master did not reproach them.

"You know not what you ask," He said. "Can you drink of the chalice that I drink of?" They said to Him: "We can." He said to them: "Of My chalice indeed you shall drink, but to sit on My right hand or on My left is not Mine to give to you, but for them for whom it is prepared by My Father." And the ten hearing it began to be much displeased with James and John. Jesus called them all round Him and told them that in His Kingdom those who want to be first must make themselves the servants of the rest. This settled the dispute for the time. He knew the day would come when, by the grace of His Holy Spirit, these jealousies, quarrels and desires of earthly greatness would cease—and He waited.

On His way to Jerusalem our Lord was accompanied by a multitude of pilgrims going up for the Pasch, and as they approached Jericho the crowd around Him became enormous. Past the gardens of roses, for which the city was famous, past the orchards of figs and dates, it moved slowly along till He suddenly stopped beneath a sycamore tree growing by the wayside, and looked up. The crowd came to a standstill. Zaccheus, the chief of the tax gatherers, had climbed up there because he wanted to see Jesus, who, he had been told, was the Friend of publicans and sinners. He was too short to see over the shoulders of others, and no one would make way for him. He had made himself rich at the expense of

his fellow-countrymen and in the service of the Romans, and, therefore, was hated and despised by all. But he was determined to see Jesus, and, without minding the laughter of the passersby, had climbed up into the tree beneath which the Lord must pass. What was his astonishment to see Him stop, look up, and call him by his name:

"Zaccheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house." His house! the house of a publican ! He of all that crowd to have the honour of entertaining the Master! "He made haste and came down," says St. Luke, " and received Him with joy. And, when all saw it, they murmured, saying that He was gone to be a guest with a man that was a sinner." Zaccheus took the harsh judgment humbly; his heart was too full of gladness to mind it, and he was ready to pay any price for the favour shown him. He came and stood before our Lord to make his confession and purpose of amendment and satisfaction:

"Behold, Lord," he said, " the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of anything, I restore him fourfold." Jesus said to him: "This day is salvation come to this house. For the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Here was the absolution.

Next morning our Lord set out again on His way, "a very great multitude " going before, following, thronging Him as before. Blind Bartimeus, the beggar, sat by the wayside, and, hearing the tramping past of many feet, he asked what it meant, and was told that Jestis of Nazareth was passing by. An intense desire to recover his sight sprang up within him:

"Jesus, Son of David!" he cried, "have mercy on me!" And many rebuked him that he might hold his peace, but he cried a great deal more: "Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus standing still commanded him to be called. The people were kinder then: "Be of better comfort," they said, " arise, He calleth thee." He leaped up, cast aside his outer garment that he might move the faster, flung out his arms for some one to lead him. And, trembling with hope, came and fell down at our Lord's feet, his hands clasped, his sightless eyes lifted to the face of Jesus.

"What wilt thou that I do for thee? " Jesus asked. "Rabboni, that I may see!" "Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole." And immediately he saw and followed Him in the way glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise to God.

Accompanied by the crowd, our Lord went on to Bethany, where He arrived on Friday, " six days before the Passover," says St. John, for Thursday, when the Paschal lamb was slain, was regarded as the first day of the Festival. With the Twelve He went to the house of His friends, leaving the multitude to go on to Jerusalem. The excitement there was intense, both among rulers and people, for the chief priests had now given commandment that if anyone knew where Jesus of Nazareth was he was to tell them, that they might apprehend Him, On every side inquiries were being made for Him. Standing in the Temple men said to one another:

"What think you that He has not come to the festival day?" Presently word was brought by the crowds from Jericho that He was at Bethany. At once a great multitude flocked out there, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might see Lazarus whom He had raised from the dead. Numbers came back believing in Him. Enraged beyond measure at the enthusiasm spreading on every side, the chief priests thought of killing Lazarus also. From this time forward it is these priests who take the lead in all the plots for bringing our Lord to death. The people, in Galilee especially, believed in Him, but the rulers—the Scribes and Pharisees, the ancients, the wealthy Sadducees, the Herodians, the Sanhedrin, and the priests, who had been against Him from the first, were only hardened by His miracles. The resurrection of Lazarus at the very gates of Jerusalem brought their fury to a climax. But nothing could be done as long as He had these huge crowds as a bodyguard. His reputation, then, must be destroyed and the people turned against Him. In and out, then, among the crowds went the rulers stirring the people up against Jesus of Nazareth, declaring in words of fierce indignation that He was a blasphemer, who gave Himself out to be the Son of God, a friend of publicans and sinners, an impostor who pretended to be the Messiah, and would get them all into dreadful trouble with the Romans, as other impostors had done, a dealer with the Evil One, by whose help He cast out devils. The people were puzzled; they saw that all the respectable part of the nation was against Him; they were terrified of the Romans, and they began to waver. This was the state of things in Jerusalem. On Friday and Saturday our Lord remained quietly with His friends at Bethany. They were always glad to have Him under their roof, and now more than ever when others whom He had loved and comforted were afraid to harbour Him or show Him gratitude.

On Saturday evening He was at the house of Simon the Leper, in the same place, and St. John says they made Him a supper there. It was a wealthy home, and everything provided was of the best. Our Lord was in the place of honour, and, as the guests reclined round the tables, every eye turned in wonder and admiration to the calm face of Him who lay there upon His couch, so grave yet so attractive, the Man whom the rulers were hunting to His death. Beside Him was His friend Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. The presence of those two made the supper a time of solemn thought; the guests spoke quietly, noise and merriment were felt to be out of place. Martha did the honours and served, more quietly than once before, but eager still, delighted to be near our Lord, to show reverence to Him and His, waiting on the disciples herself that their awkward ways might pass unnoticed, and by her kindness and heartiness making them feel at home.

During the supper Mary came in carrying in an alabaster box a pound of ointment of right spikenard. She anointed the feet of Jesus as before and wiped them with her hair, and, breaking the box, poured it out upon His head, and the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment. At this Judas, usually so cautious and silent, could not conceal his vexation, and, unmindful both of the reverence due to his Master and of what was becoming in a guest, called out:

"Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" "Now he said this," says St. John, "not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief,

and, having the purse, carried the things that were put therein." The other disciples, some of them at least, followed his example, and, filled with indignation, said:

"To what purpose is this waste?" "Let her alone, why do you molest her?" said our Lord. "She hath wrought a good work upon Me. For the poor you have always with you, and whensoever you will you may do them good, but Me you have not always. What she had she hath done; she is come beforehand to anoint My body for the burial. Amen I say to you, wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, that also which she hath done shall be told for a memory of her."