

A Night of Sorrow — Propitiation.

Matthew 26 - 27.

Night Scenes of Scripture

Seventeen Bible Night Scenes, illustrating and elucidating various truths of the Gospel.

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Chapter 5.

A Night of Sorrow — Propitiation.

The eternal destiny of every soul of man hangs upon his relation to Christ. Your eternal destiny, my friend, depend upon it, hangs upon your relation to the One of whose sorrow and death these scriptures speak. It is of paramount and vital importance that you should know Him and the meaning of His suffering and death. As He passed out of this scene, the Roman centurion, and those that were with him, said, "Truly this was the Son of God." And if He be the Son of God, what should the relation of your soul and mine be to Him? Surely one of confidence — not of rejection. Nay, more, it should be one of attachment. It is a blessed thing to be attached to Jesus. It is an awful thing not to be attached to Him. Very solemn are the words of the apostle: "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema-Maranatha," i.e., "cursed when He comes." Do you love Him? He loves you. I hope you will begin to love Him tonight, for He is worthy.

We have already looked together in part at the sorrowful tale of the Lord's rejection. Man did not want Him at the outset of His history here, and the close of that wondrous tale of incarnate grace reveals the same indifference — yea, hatred towards Him. Over thirty years rolled by between the second of Matthew, and the sad scene recorded in the twenty-sixth of Matthew. For eighteen of those thirty years a veil is drawn over His life. Then He emerges and comes out into view before men. He is baptized by John the Baptist, and while praying in the middle of the river Jordan, He is suddenly owned from heaven as the Son of God. "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," said the Father.

Again, as we have been contemplating, on the mount of transfiguration the heavens are opened, and the Father's voice is heard a second time, proclaiming, "This is my beloved Son," and, when poor Peter had put Moses and Elijah on an equality with Jesus, then is it that the Father emphatically adds, "Hear ye him." Moses must be silent, and Elijah must not speak. Their day has gone by; the Son of God is here to reveal what no servant could do — the love, the

nature, the heart of the Father — hence the words, "Hear him." But, alas! the world had no wish for Jesus. it had no heart for Jesus.

All that can be said is that the world put up with Him for the three and a half years of His public ministry. They did not mind eating the bread created by His mighty hands in the days of hunger. They, did not mind their lepers being cured, the blind receiving sight, and their dead being raised. They did not mind their need being met — their mere physical need; but inasmuch as He was the light, the truth, and the living expression of what God is in His own Person upon earth, the world, always afraid of Light and Truth which reveal moral state, got tired of Him, could not bear Him, and said, first quietly, then boldly and openly, We must get rid of Him. A terrible tale for the Holy Ghost to tell us! A frightful charge to lie at the world's door!

Man could not bear the presence of the blessed Son of God. That is the solemn lesson which one learns in the gospels. He was rejected on earth from the outset. Matthew 2 showed us that. We find in the opening of John's Gospel that "he came to his own, and his own received him not." The Jew, to whom He first came, did not want Him, and He was rejected and slain of the Gentiles. In the chapters before us we reach the climax, and the truth of what was really in the heart of man comes out. They plotted to get rid of Him. Once or twice previously had the religious leaders of the nation tried it, but could not manage it. At length the fitting moment came.

The twenty-sixth of Matthew opens two days before the feast of the passover, or on what we should call our Wednesday. Our Lord said to His disciples, "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified." He does not say the Son of Man is going to *be* betrayed. He says *He is* betrayed. Thereafter we read: "Then assembled together the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people unto the palace of the High Priest, who was called Caiaphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill *him*." There was a confederation of the heads of the nation to put Him to death. The priests, the scribes, the elders of the people — all the heads of the nation — gathered together in solemn conclave to see if they could, by any possibility, take Him and put Him to death. "But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people." Now the very thing they did not want God brought about, because Scripture had to be fulfilled, and at the very moment when Israel was sacrificing the paschal lamb, according to the Word of God, I repeat, at that very moment, Christ, the true Paschal Lamb, was sacrificed also. "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" is the touching way this is described by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 5: 7).

Now the way it came about is very solemn, because so frightfully descriptive of what the human heart left to itself, and hence under Satan's power, can do. Jesus is betrayed by a man who had been His companion for several years. That is what made me call this "A night of sorrow," for I can conceive of nothing more sorrowful to the Lord — nor is any page of man's history darker before God — than the circumstances taking place during the night, which Matthew here describes to us. Three men pass before you — Judas, Peter, and Jesus. They give us two warnings and an example. Judas exhibits the wickedness of the flesh, Peter shows us the weakness of the flesh, while Jesus passes before the eye as the perfect example of what man should be in a moment of deepest sorrow and trial.

Christ is therefore here the lovely pattern and example to His people. He is brought before us by the Spirit of God in this way. When the greatest pressure is brought to bear upon Him, then all the sweetness and perfection of His holy nature, and the blessed kindness of His heart, are only made the more manifest. It is when the sugar-cane is crushed that the sweetness comes out, and it is when the Lord is passing through unexampled and unparalleled sorrow that His blessed perfection and changeless grace are made more manifest than anywhere else.

A question of interest arises here, viz., Why do you find the evangelist Matthew at this point introducing into his narrative the account of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany? It is not given by Matthew in its historical place, i.e., it is not in its chronological order. It had happened several days sooner, as a matter of fact (see John 12: 1-12), and its relation should have come in between the twentieth and twenty-first chapters to make it chronologically correct. Why then does Matthew bring it in here? I have no doubt it is brought in, in connection with the perfidy of Judas. It flings the baseness of Judas into most terrible relief, as you see the devoted affection that marks the woman that anointed Jesus.

The chief priests were looking for an opportunity of laying hold of Jesus. What was this occasion? The Spirit of God tells us the story of what took place four days previously. If you will read the twelfth of John's Gospel you will find that "Jesus, six days before the passover, came to Bethany," and there, in the house of Simon the leper, He was anointed. There it is that Mary, with a heart full of love for Him, brings her box of ointment, and breaks it over His feet, as John says. On the other hand, Matthew tells us that it was His head that was anointed.

The difference is easily explained. Matthew looks at Jesus as the Messiah, and as such He is King of the Jews, and in the light of His kingship Mary therefore anoints His head. John, however, presents Him as the Son of God, and shows Mary anointing His feet. She sees Him travelling through this sandy desert, and is careful that His feet do not lack ointment. In point of fact, it was done to both His head and His feet, but each evangelist records what suits his gospel.

Mary could never forget that He had walked with her in her sorrow. Crushed by the power of death, when Lazarus fell asleep, she had known the sympathy of Jesus in the moment of her deepest sorrow, and she had also seen Him take her brother from the grave. She had learned what His grace could do, and what was His power also. He had walked with her in the moment of her sorrow, and now, in the hour of His sorrow, she is, so to say, walking with Him. The Lord greatly valued her affection, and said that wherever the gospel goes the story of that woman must also go. He will never allow it to be forgotten that when the world did not want Him one heart wanted Him above all things else. Is there a Mary here tonight? Is there a heart in this hall that wants Him above everything else? Happy indeed are you if you have put Christ before everything.

Christ was everything to Mary. That is the point in Matthew's relation of the scene, and what a contrast to this was the action of Judas. He and his fellow-disciples grumbled over the waste of the three hundred pence — £10 according to our money [in 1895, an estimated minimum of \$30,000 in 2000]. Judas thought of himself, the others were full of philanthropy. It could have gone to the poor. Yes, there are a good many people who think more of philanthropy than of Christ; but Mary thought more of Christ than of philanthropy. But is not philanthropy a

good thing? No doubt it is, for the Lord says, "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good, but me ye have not always." Here was a woman whose heart was wrapped up in Him. Judas was angry, I have no doubt, at the loss of the money which, as he was a thief and bore the bag, he could have purloined.

It is easy to appreciate what led to the scene that follows. Judas and his fellow-disciples are rebuked for troubling the woman. The Lord says, "Why trouble ye the woman, for she hath wrought a good work upon me?" Any one can learn the lesson here that devotion to Christ is worth everything to Him — is better than anything else. She was devoted to Christ. "She has wrought a good work upon me: let her alone," are weighty words which we should all ponder.

Immediately after this, away goes Judas, saying to himself, "I have lost that money; I must make it up." The love of money was his ruin, and he sold his soul for gold. The thought entered the wretched man's mind clearly at this moment to sell his Master, so that he might recoup himself for the money just lost. Having made up his mind, what did he do? Evidently he walked straight into the midst of the priestly conclave gathered together at that time. Verse 3 records the conclave; verses 6 to 13 relate Mary's love; and verse 14 shows Judas visiting the priests, and making his bargain. They were considering how they could get hold of Jesus, and Judas at the moment was considering how much money he could make by giving Him up.

Is Judas' brother in this meeting tonight? Is the man whose only desire is to make money here tonight? Ah! man, God gives you a warning tonight. God has told this story of Judas to warn money-lovers. Well, Judas, the traitor, enters the company of the bloodthirsty religionists of the day. Truly was it a hellish conclave! He is a bargaining sort of a man, and he says, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" They were delighted to see him. What will you give me? How much do you think He is worth? What will you give for my Master, the Son of God? What will you give for Him? Such was the haggling that heaven heard. And the reply? "Thirty pieces of silver!" Why, the meanest and most miserable slave in the slave-market would have brought more money. That is why it says so ironically in Scripture, "A goodly price that I was prized at of them" (Zech. 11: 13). Think of it! Thirty pieces of silver! And yet for those paltry thirty pieces of silver will that poor man — now filled with the devil — really sell the Son of God, his Master, to the priests, and his own soul to the devil at the same moment.

As regards the chief priests, we read, "they were glad" when the traitor offered to sell his Lord, and covenanted to give him the money. Then follow the striking words, "And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him." Now the opportunity comes. The night before the passover was to be kept by all Israel, the Lord and His beloved disciples meet by appointment in the upper room. Very sweet and very touching are the details of what took place. He had sent two of His disciples — Peter and John — to prepare the passover; and John tells us that when they had prepared it, and had sat down, the blessed Lord washed their feet, so that they might eat it with real comfort. He loved, and loves, to put His own at perfect rest in His presence, and to this all His precious ministry of grace tends.

I pass over the touching details of that last supper. Oh! what a moment it was for the Lord, knowing, as He did, what was coming upon Him. At length He breaks the news to them that one of them would betray Him. "And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you

shall betray me." The effect of His words is noticeable. One gospel says, "Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake" (John 13: 22). Can you understand that? Oh, man, before your conscience is awakened, you look upon other people. Sinner, when you are accused of your godlessness and guilt before God, you think of other people. When you hear of men going to hell, you look for other men going there — not yourself. When you hear of the godless, you think of others, not of yourself. So was it then. "They looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake." Presently, the Holy Ghost tells us, conscience began to work, and each then says, "Lord, is it I?" Have you ever awakened to learn that, just because you are a sinner, you are a lost man? You are a guilty man, and therefore a condemned one. Possibly not yet self-condemned. Have you ever, as a sinner, asked yourself the question — Is it I? Oh, but, you say, I could not betray Christ. Well, I am perfectly sure I could, knowing my own heart. And, my dear friends, the person who is certain that he can never do it is the very person who will go and do it. Mark that! "Ah! sir," said a broken-hearted girl to me during the past week, "if anybody had told me that I could have been in this case today, I would not have believed it, but now I see my sin indeed." That girl received Christ as her Saviour, thank God!

Do you think Judas a bad man? Judas and you and I are cast in the same mould. We are children of the same parents. Do not be too hard on Judas. I pity him from the bottom of my heart. Poor Judas! Where is he now? Sinner, take care lest you spend eternity with him! Look how the Lord seeks to reach his conscience, and is He not seeking to reach yours also? He says, "He it is to whom I shall give a sop when I have dipped it." Presently He gives this expression of special interest to Judas. The dipping of a piece of food into the vinegar, and giving it to a guest, was in the East an expression of very deep interest. He dips the sop, and gives it to Judas; and the latter steeled his heart against grace, and determined to go on in his wickedness, "and Satan entered into him." The last act of grace on the Saviour's part, instead of softening him, hardens his heart. And, mark you, if you do not get saved and converted, the devil will harden your heart. If you despise the grace that lingers over you, the next thing you will find is that your heart will get harder and harder.

The last thing Judas does is to despise the touch of grace. "And Satan entered into him." Awful words! Fairly in the devil's net through his own cupidity, and now hardening himself against grace, off he sets to do his deadly work, thinking — if not saying — I know where He will be found, and where He can be caught tonight. "He then, having received the sop, went immediately out; and it was night" (John 13: 30). It was night, indeed, in every sense of the word. Then the Lord tells Peter and the other disciples what would take place. They should all deny and forsake Him. He tenderly warns Peter: "This night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." Peter replies: "If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." Doubtless he meant it when he so spake, but self-confidence is not power in the moment of trial, and so when the trial came he fell.

Leaving the upper room, the blessed Lord with His disciples now crosses over the brook Kedron. Judas knew the place, because this was a well-known place of retirement for Jesus and His disciples. He was wont to go there. Arrived in the garden of Gethsemane, He withdraws from the main company of His disciples, taking with Him now only Peter, James, and John. These three He had taken with Him to the mount of transfiguration, and they went to sleep in the presence of His glory. Now He takes them into the garden, and they go to sleep in the presence

of His sorrow. Such is man. Such is human nature. Such are you and I. We can be alike indifferent to the glory and the sorrow of Christ. They go to sleep, while the blessed Lord passes from them a little distance and prays. Have you ever pictured this scene of sorrow in the garden? Ah! what sorrow filled the Saviour's heart. Think what lay before Him. All that God or man could put into the cup of woe, He was about to drink, He foresaw. It says, "Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth" (John 18: 4). The Lord knew at that moment everything coming upon Him, and knowing everything, He went calmly forth to meet it. How He felt everything! — the betrayal of Judas — the coming denial of Peter — the forsaking of all the disciples — the being cast out and cast off by His earthly people the Jews, misunderstood and unwanted — the failure of His earthly mission — the temptations of the enemy — the bearing of sin — the forsaking of God — wrath, judgment, and death as the end of His pathway here.

Oh, beloved friends, sorrow might well break His heart; and I do not wonder that He says, as He goes away yonder to pray, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26: 38). Think of that. Or, again: "Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness" (Ps. 69: 20).

But some one may inquire, Was propitiation effected by all this? No, my friends. Propitiation — the meeting of the righteous claims of God, the glorifying Him about sin, the making of atonement in respect thereof — was not effected by the living agonies of Jesus, neither by the sorrows He tasted, nor by the tears He shed. In the garden you have our Lord calmly, quietly pondering everything, facing everything, looking at everything, weighing everything, and that is what produced this deep sorrow in His blessed soul — but Gethsemane was not Golgotha. In Gethsemane He looked at and measured everything. In the garden He took the cup, if I might so say, and looked at its ingredients; on the cross He drank its contents. He bowed before His Father's will as He says, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." You have the perfection of Christ there, the absolute perfection of His soul as He shrinks from the cup — for having to do with sin was in it. He bows before God's will, prepared to drink it. Precious Saviour! He sees what is coming, and since it is for God's glory, He accepts it without a murmur. In that cup of which the Lord speaks, there was not lacking one single element of sorrow that either the hand of man or the hand of God could furnish. I do not doubt that Satan too, at that moment, drew near to the Lord, and put before Him what must be the consequence if He was determined to drink that cup. They had met in the wilderness before, and Satan was overcome by the obedience of Christ, and His dependence on the Father. But Satan returns to the assault. Jesus had said, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14: 30); and again, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22: 53).

I do not doubt, therefore, that Satan pressed on the spirit of Jesus what must be the consequences if He was determined to go on to the end that He had in view, viz., death, as God's judgment on man, and the being forsaken by God on the cross. But, oh, blessed be His name, He did not turn from it. If you and I saw sorrow coming, we should try to avoid it. Were some great crushing blow about to fall on you tomorrow, would you not avoid it if it were possible? You would not be human if you did not. Jesus saw what was coming. He weighed it, fathomed it,

measured it to the bottom, if I may so say; and then He said to His Father, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Jesus is here seen as the perfectly subject man. What a man! That man is my Saviour, thank God! Is He yours? That man has redeemed me by His obedience even unto death, and by drinking the cup. Could you but see what was in that cup, you would trust and adore Him. It was the cup of judgment, the cup of wrath, the cup of indignation, the hiding of God's face, the expression of what God must be in regard to sin. Do you not see that it was the expression of God's holy nature in respect of sin. It was the expression of the judgment of God against the sin of the first man. Christ drained that cup. Blessed be His name, on the cross He drank that cup to the very dregs; but in this night of sorrow I see the blessed Lord anticipating it all, and, as He prays, in an agony, deprecating what He was willing to drink, "his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

What that agony was we can gather from the touching words: "Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong cryings and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared" (Heb. 5: 7). While He deprecated death, He said, I will die. Though He deprecated the cup, He said, I will drink it. He deprecated the judgment, but said, I will bear it. "Not what I will, but what thou wilt," was His resolve. The will of God must be done. He came to do it. What was the will of the Father? That He should die, "the just for the unjust." That He should give Himself to death, which had no claim on Him. Blessed be His name, He did die that He might be free to give you and me eternal life.

He looked at the cup, deprecated it, but said, I will drink it. Our eternal salvation hung upon His drinking that cup. If He did not bear that wrath and judgment, we must; and if He did not drink that cup, we must drink it. If He did not drink it for you, my hearer, you must yet drink it. Could you drain it? Sinner! you, who do not think much about the subject, if you go into judgment, and drink the cup of God's wrath, do you think you will drain it? You foolish man! Drain it? You will drink, and drink, and drink it again as the eternal ages roll on, but you will never drain it. Thank God, my Saviour has drained it for me. He has drained it to the very dregs, and has filled another cup — the cup of salvation — to the brim with love, and has put that cup to my lips, and I drink, and receive eternal life.

If you think that you will escape God's judgment of sin, apart from the cross of His Son, you have made a huge mistake. Do not be foolish, God is not mocked. God has said that sin must be judged, and hence, of necessity, propitiation must be effected ere man can be saved. This Christ alone could do. How was that propitiation effected? It was not, I repeat, by the tears of Jesus in the garden, nor by the bloody sweat of the Lord in the garden, nor by the living agonies of the Saviour — though in all these we see the intensity of the purpose of His life. Propitiation could only be, and, thank God, was effected by His death, when "by the eternal spirit he offered himself without spot to God," was made sin, sustained God's righteous judgment thereof, and poured out His soul an offering for sin even unto death. His shed blood thereafter tells of the reality of His death.

No sooner does the blessed Saviour, in the scene before us, express His determination to drink the cup, than a company led by Judas arrives. The traitor appears with an armed band. And now let us follow the Lord for a moment or two. They take Him, and bind Him fast. One gospel says, "Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest" (John 18: 24). Annas mocks Him, and sends Him to his son-in-law, Caiaphas. There he is jeered at, mocked, spat on, and smitten with rods. They even blindfold Him, and then when He is smitten, ask, "Who is it that smote thee?" That is what man will do to Jesus, the Son of God. "He is brought like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." He makes no reply. He bears it all in patient grace. He bears all the jeering, and jibing, and mockery without resistance, Presently Peter comes in, and three times he denies his Lord. "I know not the man," he cries with oaths. Thus one who really loved Him denies his Master.

And then what happens? "The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter." Was it a withering, scornful look that said, "Miscreant! false man! you do not know me?" No, I believe the look was a tender heart-broken look, that said louder than words: "Peter, you do not know me. I know you, Peter, and I love you, and I will die for you." That look broke Peter's heart, and he "went out and wept bitterly." Christ is then taken away, first to Pilate, next to Herod, and then back to Pilate, where again he is mocked, and jeered at, crowned with thorns, and arrayed in a gorgeous robe to give the semblance of royalty.

Every insult that men could possibly heap on Him is done. Everybody sets Him at naught. What does He do? He bears it. At length the choice is made between Him and Barabbas, the murderer and the robber, the very scum of the earth, who is about to die for his own sins. Pilate asks the multitude which they will have released to them, and they cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas." Barabbas is released, and the Son of God goes, bearing the robber's cross, to Calvary to die. I have little doubt that the cross which was designed for Barabbas was laid on Jesus, and He falters under its weight as He goes to Calvary, where they crucify Him. But nothing but love is seen in Him. At length He is heard to cry out in agony, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was in that darkness that the sin of man was being estimated, and Jesus by His sufferings there, was effecting propitiation, and making atonement, as He met all the claims of God in righteousness and holiness. He then lays down His precious life.

There is a deep unspeakable significance in that cross. There He is made sin, and there God forsakes Him. The work of atonement is there "finished" by the suffering, dying Saviour. He dies with a cry that rends the rocks, and the veil of the temple is rent by God's own hand from top to bottom. Propitiation is effected. All God's claims in righteousness are met, and what is the result? The Holy Ghost comes down to tell you and me, that there is cleansing and salvation for the worst sinner, through the blood of this beloved One, who died on that tree.

Oh! there was never a night of sorrow like that. There was never suffering like the suffering of Jesus. How precious are the words: "Christ suffered for sins once, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." Oh, may the Holy Ghost lead you to rest your poor guilty soul on that precious Saviour. You may know Him as your own from this moment forth. Will you not praise Him? Shall not your heart be all for Him in future?

I judge the centurion's heart was reached, as he said, "Truly this is the Son of God"; and I have no doubt that man was converted from what he heard. God grant that you may be converted from what you have heard tonight, for mark you, if you are not converted, you will have to be judged by Jesus. Make up your mind. You had better make it up. God help you to be decided for Christ from this moment forth.