

## **You are those who have stood by me in my trials (Luke 22:28)**

Before the age of the mobile phone you used to meet interesting people on public transport

- In 1983 I met a young lady from Northampton on a National Express coach to London
- She corresponded with me, after we had been in conversation about her baby's baptism
- I did not do the baptism, but fifteen years later I did conduct that young lady's Mother's funeral
- An older woman from Suffolk corresponded with me for several years
- I even managed to have a good time of fellowship with a German-speaking student
- Who spoke no English (I don't speak German) on a train in Switzerland
- For the student was wearing a little fish badge and carrying a Bible

To me testimony, standing for Jesus and bearing witness to him, is an important part of being a Christian

- sometimes it will be relatively easy to stand for Jesus; other times it will be more difficult
- I have been sworn at, spat at, threatened and slapped for being a Christian
- But happily such things do not happen often, though as someone said 'At least that is a response'
- And a response can be easier to cope with than a wall of indifference

As the first Good Friday approached, Jesus knew that the time of testing, trial and temptation was upon them

- But while Jesus was speaking about all that would happen
- The disciples are openly squabbling about who will be the greatest in the Kingdom
- It's easy to have a very topsy-turvy view of the Kingdom of God
- And in the next few days the disciples would have to learn a vivid lesson about true greatness
- For Jesus demonstrates true greatness in the service and obedience that take him to the cross

This is an obvious reminder to us in church of how easy it is to get things in the wrong perspective

- Isn't it the case that most arguments in church take place in the area of who is running it
- And whether my status, position and chosen role in the church are suitably acknowledged and regarded?
- while Jesus is preparing for the cross, the disciples are thinking of their importance
- while he is preparing for suffering, they are preparing for greatness
- in response Jesus teaches that faithful service in a lowly place is itself true greatness
- This does not mean that believers should avoid positions of responsibility either in the church or the world
- Rather it means that we should be content to serve in whatever way God appoints
- If it is a lowly service we should do that faithfully
- If it is a position that carries more prestige with it then we must handle it appropriately
- Not with the objectionable characteristics of secular rulers
- Who lord it over others and seek only to draw attention and talked about their status
- Rather they should follow his example, and just do the work that God appointed

In a sense it is a saying about reputation; true greatness is not worrying about reputation, or veneration

- Seeking to be treated as a worthy, an elder or a dignitary
- But being content to be treated as someone who is not afforded great status
- In the ancient world this would be as a youngster, or a waiter or a slave
- Jesus made himself of no reputation and was humble and gave himself that example to follow
- Therefore, in the same spirit the leader must be as one who serves
- Though people would naturally give greater status to the diner than to the waiter
- A value of the kingdom is to treat people all the same – whatever we might perceive their status to be
- It's a small thing to learn and to practice in our daily dealings with everyone. Jesus continues with:

## I A PREDICTION THAT SOME WILL FALL

It is easy for us only to remember the failures of the disciples; Judas who betrayed Jesus

- Thomas who doubted Jesus was risen; Peter who denied Jesus in his hour of need
- James and John, who along with Peter, fell asleep when they should have prayed
- Let alone the others who do not seem even to have made it to the place of prayer
- And yet Jesus commends the disciples, saying, 'You are those who have stood by me in my trials' (28)

It is easy for us to think that the temptations for Jesus, and his disciples too, ended in the wilderness (Lk. 4:13)

- but that is clearly not the case, especially as the intensity of the conflict heightens
- Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Satan has asked to sift you (pl. all the disciples) as wheat (intense temptation)
- 'but I have prayed for you (singular), Simon, that your faith may not fail
- It seems here that faith and weakness can go together, for Jesus also commissions Simon Peter
- 'When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' a reminder that our own failures can help others
- Peter's reply is over-optimistic, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.'
- When he is not under pressure he is bold in his testimony – but under pressure he replies
- I am not with him, I do not know him, I do not talk like him

It is easy for us to be hard on Peter, when every day, we deny Jesus, if not by our words then by our silence

- Or when we miss the opportunity – a preacher from a previous circuit told of his visit to Australia
- Taking his grandchildren to the swings, he met a young Mum and remarked she seemed radiantly happy
- She replied, 'about six weeks ago, Jesus entered my life and he is my personal Lord and Saviour.'
- To which the Preacher responded, 'I've been a Methodist all my life.' An opportunity missed!

## II A PROMISE THAT ISRAEL WILL BE RENEWED

Jesus encourages the disciples that they have stood beside him in his trials and will eat at his table

- For 'Israel' we may read the 'people of God', for Israel were the people of the promise, a people of faith
- the New Testament shows us that the people of God are those who trust in Jesus
- in this context 'judging' (Lk. 22:30) is in the sense of 'ruling over' like the judges in the Old Testament
- not adjudicating in a trial. This promise is given to Peter and the other disciples
- despite their failures they are given a promise of renewal, that the people of God will be renewed
- someone once said to me that the trouble with the church community is that we have
- a long memory for failures and a short memory for the grace of God – when it should be the other way
- Peter (who denied him), Thomas (who doubted him), James and John (arguing about who is the greatest)
- Still had a vital part to play in the Kingdom of God
- Though the New Testament nowhere gives us a licence to live as we choose
- disregarding his commandments and standards, but the gospel is ultimately about trusting Jesus
- How sad it is that there are people, even within the church, who have no gospel
- there is no gospel 'good news' in a religion of good works, observances, attendances
- some of us, like Peter, fail on the big occasions, publicly – in style
- others fail like the other disciples, by falling asleep or being out of touch
- but the real believer is looking only to Jesus and all that he has accomplished

Jesus reminds them that when they went out under his commission they did not lack anything

- but now the conflict is intensifying to such an extent that even purse, bag and sword are not enough
- while Jesus spoke figuratively the disciples reply literally, they have two swords, figuratively enough

### III A PRAYER THAT THE WILL OF GOD WILL BE DONE

In each of my previous circuits I have had held a prayer meeting

- the most people that have ever come was 17, the fewest people that have ever come was one (just me)
- The fact that prayer was important for Jesus, ought to teach us something about it
- I meet people who say I can pray any place, any time, any where
- I agree with that absolutely – it's just that in my experience, I don't

Jesus withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed

- kneeling showed the intensity of prayer, for it would have been normal to stand
- 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.'
- Cup is not only physical death, in the OT the wrath of God against sin was sometimes referred to as cup
- Jesus must face spiritual desolation of bearing our sin and its judgment on the cross
- God made him who had no sin to be sin for us (2 Cor. 5: 21)
- This is a supernatural task for which supernatural grace and strength are required
- Luke often mentions the ministry of angels at decisive points so the angelic appearance here is not strange

What is decisive for us to note it that it seems that the Calvary's cross is the evidence

- but that the decisive battle was won at the place of prayer, as Jesus focused his mind on the will of God
- That looks just about the opposite of the prayers that we so often offer
- the effort of prayer is such that Luke describes Jesus' agony in physical terms, the disciples sleep
- tired from sorrow, it looks as if failure in prayer is the prelude to their other failures

From now Jesus is (in the words of the prophet Isaiah) to be 'numbered with the transgressors'

- this is a time of profound crisis
- it is a battle of the kind where someone would trade even their clothes for a sword
- but this can only be figurative, for his disciples are not those who will rise and fight with swords
- the decisive battle would not be won with two swords
- Jesus was certainly not calling for an armed struggle
- His weapons were spiritual for he went out to the Mount of Olives
- And when he reached the place, probably Gethsemane at the foot of the mount, he said
- 'Pray that you will not fall into temptation.' (time of trial)

It is a difficult passage but it is a passage that contains a prediction

- It is a prediction of failure and denial, a prediction that is often all too true in our lives
- Where we might commend ourselves for not denying Jesus with what we say
- When we constantly deny him by our silence

It is a passage that contains a promise, a promise of restoration for all the people of God

- Despite our failures we do not lose the hope of being in his eternal kingdom
- For it is not about good works, observances, attendances – it is about grace
- our citizenship in the Kingdom of God depends on his grace of God revealed in Jesus

It is a passage that contains a great example of prayer

- it is a prayer of faith and obedience, an example for us all