

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER TWO

THE ANOINTING

SIX DAYS before the Passover, and, consequently, four before the awful day of crucifixion, we find our Lord in the peaceful village of Bethany, on the other side of the Mount of Olives, where He was wont so willingly to stay. We meet with Him this time in the house of a man named Simon, where His followers had prepared Him a feast. He appears before us in the unassuming form of a guest, invited with others; but look a little more narrowly, and you will see Him; even there, as John afterward saw Him in vision, only in a somewhat different sense, as walking **“in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.”**

The Lord Jesus has no need to testify of Himself; for those who are present bear witness of Him in the most eloquent manner.

Look, first, at *Mary and her sister Martha*. They are women possessing true nobility of soul, respected by all, sensible, clear-sighted, and sober-minded. Martha, cheerful, active, and busy; Mary, thoughtful and contemplative. Both, however, rest all their hopes on Jesus. He is, to both, the living pillar which supports their heaven; their prospect of a blissful futurity arises solely from His mediation; and the peace and comfort, which refreshes them in life and death, they derive from Christ alone as the source. What a high idea must this fact alone afford us of the Man of Nazareth.

Look around you further. There are *the disciples*, Peter, Andrew, John, James, Nathanael, Thomas, and the rest. You formerly saw them listening to the Baptist in the wilderness, like a flock of scattered and helpless sheep. You learned to know them as people who were incited to seek for help, by a very different motive than a mere thirst for knowledge. You found them to be men whose hearts were grievously burdened by sin, and by the anticipation of **“the wrath to come,”** and whose inward peace was entirely at an end, after having seen God in the fiery splendor of His law, with its requirements and threatenings.

Neither man nor angel was able to comfort them; but since they had found Jesus, their thoroughly humbled souls were like the sparrow which has found a house, and the swallow, a nest, where they may drop their weary wings. They are now elevated above all anxiety. What bright rays of light does this fact also shed upon Jesus! How highly does it exalt Him above the idea of being a mere mortal!

But alas! among the disciples we still find *Judas*, the child of darkness, the son of perdition. He, indeed, was never, in his own eyes, a helpless sinner; he had never thirsted after God; he was never truly devout; nor had ever set his affections on things above.

It may be asked what induced him to force himself into the immediate vicinity of Jesus?

Assuredly, first, the irresistible and overpowering impression of the superhuman greatness and dignity of the Son of David, and then doubtless, also, an ambitious desire of being called to act some important part in the new kingdom, to establish which Jesus had evidently come. Thus, the presentiment of the traitor aided in glorifying the person of the Lord.

The divine majesty of Immanuel shone so powerfully through His human form that its rays penetrated even into the darkness of Iscariot's soul.

But let us further inspect the circle of guests. Who is the master of the house?

He is called *Simon*, and bears the surname of “**the Leper.**” He bears it to the honor of Jesus; for the name betokens what he was, before the Lord pronounced over him the almighty words, “**Be thou clean!**”

Simon had once been infected with that horrible disease which no earthly physician was able to heal, and which He alone could remove who had inflicted it - the Almighty, He who could testify, saying, “**I and my Father are one.**”

Simon, stand forward, and show thyself to every skeptic as a living monument of the divine fullness which dwelt in Christ!

All Bethany knows that he had prepared this feast for the Lord Jesus, solely from feelings of gratitude for the marvelous cure which he had experienced through Him; and even His enemies cannot deny that, in this man, a monument is erected to the Lord Jesus, which speaks louder and more effectually than any inscription is able to do.

But look! Who is it that sits next to Jesus? - the young man with piercing eye and sunny countenance. Oh, do you not recognize him? Once you saw him lying shrouded on the bier. You were present when his corpse was carried out, followed by his weeping sisters and a mourning crowd. You looked down into the gloomy vault into which it was lowered. But you were equally witnesses of that which took place four days after, when One approached the grave who called Himself “**the Resurrection and the Life,**” and then commanded the stone to be taken away from its mouth.

You heard the words of Martha, “**Lord, by this time he stinketh,**” and the majestic reply, “**Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God?**” and then, after the stone had been removed, how the Lord, lifting up His eyes toward heaven, over the putrifying corpse, exclaimed,

“Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always; but because of the people which stand by, I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me!” and then how, with a loud, commanding, and creating voice, he called down into the sepulcher, **“Lazarus, come forth!”** and you know what followed.

He that was once dead, now sits among the guests, having escaped from the adamantine prison of the tomb. He lives, and is vigorous and happy; and it never occurs, either to friend or foe, to deny that Lazarus once lay as a corpse in the grave, and now lives again at the omnipotent word of Jesus.

We find abundant traces that the Pharisees were beside themselves with rage and envy at this miracle, but not the smallest that anyone ventured to deny or even to doubt the fact itself. There he sits, and completes the row of lights amid which Jesus walks.

Oh, then, go to Jesus, my dear readers, as the Lord from heaven, the Prince of Life, the Conqueror of Death, for such He is, when regarded even in the light that streams upon Him from the circle which surrounds Him at Bethany. And He is still something more than all this.

He is staying at Bethany. He has now accomplished His public ministry. Several times has He given His disciples of late to understand that such is the case. He has told them and revealed to them as much as they were able to bear. The Comforter, who is to succeed Him, will instruct them further.

We do not see Him now retiring into silence, nor returning to His heavenly Father; but saying, on the contrary, **“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it is accomplished!”**

He knows that the principal task assigned Him has still to be performed. He is on the road to Jerusalem, with the full consciousness of all that is passing and concerting there; that His enemies are now in earnest to seize Him, and get rid of Him; that the chief priests and Pharisees have already **“given a commandment, that if any man knew where he were, he should show it, that they might take him.”**

All this was known to Him; but far from seeking to escape the snare which was laid for Him, He goes directly toward it. He was now - according to His own words - to be delivered to the heathen, crucified, and slain; and there was a necessity for it.

“The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,” was not yet sacrificed. His assertion, that **“the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many,”** was not yet fulfilled. The blood, to which the whole of the Old Testament had pointed as the procuring cause of all remission of sin, had not yet stained the fatal tree, but still flowed through His veins.

And for this He prepared Himself on the evening He spent at Bethany.

Above all things, therefore, let us draw nigh to Jesus as our sole and everlasting High Priest, as our Mediator, Surety, and Ransom.

- **“Without shedding of blood there is no remission.”**
- **“The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.”**
- The saints above **“have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”**

O delay no longer, therefore, to follow their example! Jesus, in His crown of thorns and bleeding wounds, must be the object of your love and the ground of your hope, or else He is nothing to you, and you are in danger of eternal perdition.

The Lord has just placed Himself at the table, when Mary approaches, deeply affected by gratitude, veneration, love, and with a foreboding of what is about to befall Him. She feels impelled to display to Him her inmost soul once more, and to manifest her reverential and devout attachment to Him. But how is she to do this? Words seem to her too poor. Presents she has none to make. But what she has that is valuable - possibly a legacy left by her mother - is an alabaster vessel of pure oil of spikenard, much valued in the East, and used only on peculiarly festive occasions. She brings it with her. She does not intend to pour out a few drops only, but that it should be wholly an emblem of her profound devotion to the Lord of Glory.

With the utmost reverence she approaches her divine Friend, breaks unobservedly behind Him the well-closed vessel, sheds the spikenard upon His head and feet, then humbly bends herself down and wipes the latter with her loosened tresses.

“And the whole house was filled with the ointment.”

Yes, we may well believe that this odor ascended up even into the throne-room of heaven, and was inhaled with delight by the holy angel.

In this affectionate and symbolical act, a degree of devotedness was manifested such as is rarely exhibited. Mary desires to belong to Christ for time and eternity; to cleave to Him by faith, like the ivy to the tree, round which it entwines itself. She wishes to live in His light, like a dark planet in the beams of the sun which lends it its radiance. Mary knows no anchor of hope, no ground of consolation, no way to heaven, except through His mediation; and were she to imagine existence without Him, she could only think of herself as in the jaws of despair, and irrecoverably lost.

He is her last resource, but at the same time all-sufficient for her eternal salvation. Hence she cleaves to Him with all her soul, and nothing is able to divide her from Him. He is always in her thoughts her sole delight, and the supreme object of her affections - all which she expresses in the act of anointing.

The whole circle of the guests at Bethany are deeply touched by Mary's significant act. Only in the case of one does its sweet harmony sound as discord; only one of them with repugnance rejects the grateful odor.

Ah, we imagine who it is! No other than the unhappy Judas, the child of darkness. Never, probably, has frigid self-love stood in such horrible contrast with warm and sacred affection, as was the case here, in the cold and really offensive expression, **“Why this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?”**

Alas, how deeply is the miserable man already fallen! **“The poor?”** O thou hypocrite! As if the reason were unknown to his Master why he would rather have the ointment sold. **“For three hundred pence!”** He knows how to value the spikenard, but is unable to appreciate the love that provided it, for he is wholly destitute of such a feeling.

Observe how the Lord Jesus appreciates the act of Mary.

Like a faithful advocate, He immediately enters the lists on her behalf, against Judas and the transient impression made by his dark spirit upon the disciples, and says, while intimating to Judas that He was well aware of the cause of his displeasure, **“Why trouble you the woman? Let her alone; she has wrought a good work on me. The poor ye have always with you, but me ye have not always. Against the day of my burying hath she kept this”** (or, according to another Evangelist, **“She is come aforehand to anoint my body to the burying.”**) **“Verily, I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached throughout the whole world, this also that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.”**

Do but notice how He who was otherwise so spare in commending human works, mentions with a particular emphasis Mary’s work as good. All the world is to know that such devotedness as Mary shows Him is considered valuable, and how highly He estimates this feeling as being the source of Mary’s act. And that every one may know it, He has caused Mary’s deed to be recorded. What He predicted has taken place; wherever this gospel is preached in the world, that which she did is mentioned as a memorial of her, even to this day.

Scarcely had our Lord ended this remarkable speech, when, as Matthew relates, **“One of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time, he sought opportunity to betray him.”**

Where, in all the world, can we meet with a contrast so striking, so appalling, and beyond measure dreadful, as is here presented to us in Mary’s tender and affectionate act, and the horrible procedure of this unhappy son of perdition? He is already so far gone that words of compassion, which might have tended to his eternal salvation, completely pervade the unhappy man as with a mortal poison. **“He went out.”** He turns his back upon the Saviour, because he now feels that He sees through him. He rushes out into the night, to which as a child of darkness, he belongs - nay, he rushes out into a more awful night than the natural one; and the divine **“Woe!”** follows him upon his way.

We shudder. We shrink from the idea of accompanying the wretched man, and return with increased fervor to Jesus.

“Against the day of my burial hath she kept this,” says our Lord.

We understand His meaning. He sees His death and resurrection at one glance. An embalming of His body was to take place while He was still alive, since there was no time afforded for it after His death.

It is not to be supposed that Mary had any idea of this; but a presentiment of His approaching departure certainly affected her heart; and anticipations of its saving significance fanned the holy glow of her love to a brilliant flame, and contributed to impel her to that effusion of affection in Simon’s house which we have been just contemplating. Her Master’s love, which was even unto death, excited hers in the highest degree; even as the love of His people is wont to be enkindled, most of all, by the remembrance of Christ’s sufferings.

But wherever the love of Jesus finds room, there will never be a want of activity in relieving the distress of others. **“The poor,”** says our Lord, while casting the words like an arrow into the soul of Judas, **“the poor ye have always with you,”** by which He means that Mary will not be deficient in her charity to them. **“But me,”** He adds, in conclusion, **“ye have not always,”** and these words are addressed to all my readers, who cannot yet call Jesus their Saviour.

O take them to heart, my friends!

Him you have no longer, when the wings of death suddenly overshadow you, or when your senses depart under the influence of disease, and the message of salvation no longer penetrates through the crowd of unbridled imaginations.

You have Him no longer, when God, the righteous Judge, gives you up at length to **“strong delusions,”** and permits them to take up their permanent abode in your minds, because you have long enough hardened yourselves against His calls to repentance.

You have Him no longer, when the last great **“hour of temptation,”** with its infernal delusions, as well as with its persecuting horrors, shall break in upon you, and when - to use the prophet’s words - **“Your feet (shall) stumble upon the dark mountains.”**

You have Him no longer, if, in the abundance of your prosperity, you are ready to exclaim, with the man in the Gospel, **“Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: eat, drink, and be merry!”** to whom the horrifying announcement was made, **“Thou fool! this night shall thy soul be required of thee.”**

Therefore **“flee from the wrath to come!”** Hasten to save yourselves. Stay not in all the plain.

Let nothing hinder you from immediately repairing to the blessed Saviour, who has so graciously assured us, that whosoever cometh unto Him, He will in no wise cast out since it scatters every cloud of uncertainty, displays a divinely sealed attestation of the Messiahship and kingly dignity of Christ, and again loosens our tongue-tied hearts, reanimates our faith, and causes us joyfully to exclaim, **“Yes, Thou art the Christ! Blessed art Thou who camest in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”**

That He is the Christ, the Son of God, and that we have every reason to trust in Him, is confirmed to us by His own consciousness of being so. We find Him proceeding to Jericho on His last visit to Jerusalem. On arriving at the Mount of Olives, He requests two of His disciples to go into the village over against them, where they would find an ass tied, and a colt with her. These they were to loose and bring to Him.

Observe here that He sees the animals He is in want of at a greater distance than the eye could reach. Even in this circumstance we see something superhuman breaking through the lowliness of the Saviour's form.

He then gives instructions respecting the ass and her colt, with a decision which betrays to us the Governor of all things. He tells them, **“if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, the Lord hath need of them, and straightway he will send them.”** He says, **“the Lord,”** and not “the Master” only, or “Jesus of Nazareth.” This is a title of majesty, a name of dignity, by which He elevates Himself high above every creature, and declares Himself to be Jehovah of the Old Testament.

“The Lord hath need of them.”

As the mere Son of man, He never could have spoken this of Himself without being guilty of blasphemy. But He knows who He is, and how He may call and entitle Himself, and He utters the words with firmness and dignity.

But will the owner feel induced, at the mere expression of the disciples - **“The Lord hath need of them”** - to resign the animals to them? Assuredly he will. The Lord has no doubt of it, but is perfectly confident that, as the Lord from heaven, there was nothing which was not His, that He had power over.

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