

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

F. W. Krummacher

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CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

CHRIST BEFORE ANNAS

THE ARMED BAND have executed their object with regard to Christ, and the Eleven, perceiving it, have fled to the right and left. Surrounded by a bristling forest of swords and spears, the Lord Jesus suffered His hands to be bound, like a captive robber, by a troop of rude mercenaries, in the name of public justice. Think of those hands being bound which were never extended except to heal and aid, to benefit and save, and never to injure, except it be considered as a crime to uncover to mankind their wounds, in order to heal and bind them up; to destroy the Babels of delusion, and in their place to erect the temple of truth; and to pull down the altars of false gods, in order to make room for that of the only true God.

Jesus bound! What a spectacle! How many a prophetic type of the Old Testament finds its fulfillment in this fact! If you inquire for the antitype of Isaac, when bound by his father as a lamb for a burnt offering; or for that of the ram on Mount Moriah, which was caught in the thicket because God had destined it for the sacrifice; or of the sacred ark of the covenant, when it had fallen into the hands of the Philistines, only, however, to cast down the idols of the latter; or of that of Jacob's son arrested and imprisoned in Egypt, whose path lay through the company of criminals, to regal dignity and crowns of honor; or for that of the paschal lambs, which, before being slaughtered for the sins of the people, were wont to be tied up to the threshold of the temple; or finally, for that of the captive Sampson, who came forth victoriously from the conflict with the Philistines - all these types and shadows found their entire fulfillment in Jesus, thus bound, as their embodied Original and Antitype.

Jesus bound! Can we trust our eyes? Omnipotence in fetters, the Creator bound by the creature; the Lord of the world, the captive of His mortal subjects! How much easier would it have been for Him to have burst those bonds than Manoah's son of old! However, He rends them not; but yields Himself up to them as one who is powerless and overcome. This His passive deportment must have for its basis a great and sublime intention. And such is really the case, as we have already seen.

Behold them marching off in triumph with their Captive.

They conduct Him first to Annas, the previous high priest, the father-in-law of Caiaphas, a sinner a hundred years old. But why first to him?

Perhaps out of compliment to the old man, who probably wished to see the fanatic of Nazareth. His being brought before him, however, seems to have been the result of a secret arrangement between him and his son-in-law; and he, the old Sadducee, was perhaps more deeply interested in the whole affair than outwardly appears to be the case. The preliminary hearing, which now commenced, was doubtless instituted by him, and not by Caiaphas. Annas was evidently residing in the high-priestly palace with his son-in-law.

Thus, the Lord stands at the bar of His first judge - one of those miserable men, of whom, alas! not a few are to be found among us, and who, "**twice dead**," estranged from the truth of God, and satisfied with the most common-place occurrences of life, treat the most sublime things only as a spectacle; and visibly bear on their foreheads the brandmark of the curse.

Certainly it was not one of the least of the sufferings of the Holy One of Israel to see Himself delivered into the hands of such a man, so destitute of every noble feeling. And only look how the hoary-headed sinner domineers over and puffs himself up against the Lord of Glory, although he is not even the actual high priest. Jesus, however, endures with resignation all the indignities to which He is subjected, and we know for what reason He does so. We are acquainted with the mysterious position He occupies, in which He not only shows us, by His own example, that His kingdom is not of this world, but also that He fills it as our Surety, whom it became to present to the Eternal Father the sublime virtues of a perfect self-denial and resignation in our stead.

Annas proceeds with the hearing of the case, and interrogates our Lord respecting His disciples and His doctrine. He hopes that the statements of Jesus may enable him to bring an accusation against the former as a politically dangerous association, and against the latter as being wicked and blasphemous heresy.

In his questions, he is presumptuous enough to treat our Lord as the disguised head of a party, and a secret plotter, notwithstanding that He brought forward His cause in the most public manner, and walked everywhere in broad daylight.

The world still acts like Annas. It will not acknowledge that we possess the real and eternal truth of God. The world cannot bear that believers should call themselves "true Christians," and never fails to attach some opprobrious epithet to them.

However boldly we may preach our doctrine, and however completely we may prove that we confess and believe nothing else than what the whole Christian Church has believed and professed before us, and for which the noblest and most excellent of men in every age have lived and died - yet the world persists in maintaining that our faith is only the religion of narrow-minded fanatics. It strives, by these artful suspicions, to keep the truth far from it, and thus to give its ungodly and carnal proceedings at least a semblance of correctness.

The Lord answers the old priest's questions regarding His doctrine; for it was less requisite here to defend the honor Of His person than that of His cause, which was, at the same time, the cause of God, and which He, therefore, felt called upon to vindicate.

He also wished to make it clearly known throughout all ages that He was condemned and crucified solely because of His asserting His divine Sonship.

“I spake,” says He, **“openly to the world”** - that is, “I opened my mouth boldly.” Yes, in all that He spoke, the profound assurance and powerful conviction of being the Lord from heaven was perceptible. He spoke, knowing that he that was of the truth would hear His voice, and acknowledge His word to be the word of the living God. Nor did He deceive Himself with reference to this.

To this day, when anyone is delivered from the snare of the devil, he needs no other proof of the truth of the words of Jesus; since his heart hears them as if spoken direct from heaven, and discovers between the language of Jesus and the most intellectual discourses of mere mortals, a gulf so immense that it is incomprehensible to him that he did not long before perceive it.

The Lord Jesus continues: **“I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort.”**

He had done so, and no one had ever been able to prove that He had taught anything which was not in strict accordance with the Old Testament Scriptures, and did not most beautifully harmonize with the nature and being of a holy God. The masters in Israel were compelled, by His discourses, mutely to lay down their arms.

“In secret have I said nothing,” says the Lord Jesus further.

No, not even that which was enigmatical, obscure, and mysterious, much of which was explained only in the course of centuries, while other things remain, to this hour, partially closed and sealed to us, and await their elucidation. He knew that these things would long be inexplicable to His people; but this did not hinder Him from uttering them.

This is another proof that He was clearly conscious that His doctrine was divine, and would therefore continue to the end of time.

“Why askest thou me?” - says our Lord in conclusion - **“Ask them which heard me what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I have said.”**

How could the Lord testify more strongly to the purity and divinity of His doctrine, than by calling upon His judge to summon before him all those, either friends or foes, who had ever heard Him speak, and ask them if they were able to say anything against Him which might furnish ground for accusation. Nor to the present day does He show any witnesses, but appeals as before, on behalf of His cause, to all who hear and receive His Word; and these unanimously, from their own conviction, confirm it, and will ever do so, that the doctrine of Jesus is of God, and that He has not spoken of Himself.

While the Lord is speaking, one of the servants of the high priest rises up and smites Him on the face, while saying, **“Answerest thou the high priest so?”**

From this circumstance, we may perceive what is intended with respect to Jesus. This first maltreatment gave the signal for all that followed. It did not escape the servant how completely his master was embarrassed by the simple reply of the accused; and this rude blow was the only means which presented itself of rescuing him from his painful and disgraceful dilemma. The fellow well knew that it would be allowed him - nay, that he would only rise by it in the favor of his master.

For this very crime alone, which must not be placed to the account of a single individual, but to our corrupt human nature, to the guilty race of Adam, it was fit that hell should open its mouth and swallow it up, as the pit formerly did Korah and his company. But Jesus came not to hasten our perdition, but to prevent it. We therefore do not behold the wicked man scathed by lightning from heaven, nor his hand withered, like that of Jeroboam, on his stretching it out to smite.

“Answerest thou the high priest so?”

As if the Lord, who knew better than anyone else what was becoming in His converse with mankind, had infringed upon reverence due to the sacerdotal dignity. But how often are we treated in a similar manner when the truth which we proclaim to the men of the world cannot be assailed. We are then called bold, presumptuous, obstinate. What is left for us, in such situations, except to make use of our Master’s own words, **“If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?”**

How overpowering was this speech to both master and servant!

It was like the stroke of a hammer, driving the sting of their evil conscience still deeper into the marrow. The blow on the cheek, with its accompanying brutal language, was only a clear proof that the miserable men felt themselves unable to bring anything of a culpable nature against the Lord. By acting thus, they only smote themselves in the face, since by their conduct they made it evident how deeply and painfully they had felt the truth.

Thus our Lord and Master came forth perfectly justified from this first examination, and the high priest and his satellites were covered with disgrace. In their fate we see reflected that of all those who dare to lift the shield against the Lord’s cause, which, through the power of inward truth, victoriously repels every attack. Whatever may be planned and undertaken against it, it invariably comes forth like the sun shining in the mists of the valley, and calmly looks down on all opposition and gainsaying as upon vanquished enemies.

~ end of chapter 18 ~

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