

# THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### THE END OF THE TRAITOR

HOW MUCH DEPENDED upon our High Priest accomplishing the work of atonement in the robes of purity! If a blemish was found in the lamb, it was deemed unfit for sacrifice.

**“Such a High Priest became us,”** saith the Scripture, **“who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.”**

And such a one do we possess. God has spared nothing in order to dispel every doubt on this subject. To this end He gave up the Surety to the scrutiny of the acutest investigators in the world. But to their no small vexation, they tried in vain to find a single spot in Him and are compelled, either in plain words or by their conduct, to testify concerning Him, We **“find no fault in this man.”**

It was of great importance that the Argus eyes of the scribes and Pharisees discovered nothing culpable in Him. But it adds much to the weight of this fact, that nothing of the kind could be traced in the Lord Jesus by the man whom we shall now see descending into the pit. It was of much greater importance to him than to them, to be able to convict the Lord of a single sin.

Could Judas have been able to say to himself, even with a shadow of truth, “He whom I am betraying deserves being delivered into the hands of justice,” what would he not have given? He was compelled ardently to wish, for the sake of his peace of mind and his present and eternal salvation, that he might discover Jesus to be in some respects a transgressor.

A single sin found in Jesus would have been a great comfort and a sweet solace to him in the torment which he felt within. But however diligently he sought not one dark point could he discover, nor did the slightest spot meet his scrutinizing eye.

Judas finds himself in a dreadful condition. Consoling himself with the wonder-working power of Jesus, the delusive idea that his Master needed only to exert His will in order to escape from the hands of His enemies; when he saw his Master actually condemned, and dragged bound and escorted by the whole Sanhedrin to the residence of the governor, the last anchor breaks which had hitherto held the man secure against the storm of despair.

The incorruptible judge in his breast has now free scope for his accusations, and thunders in his ears, "Thy villainy has succeeded - thy Master is going the way to death, and thou art the means of it. On thy head rests the entire guilt of the bloody end of this Just One. Thou, who didst eat of His bread, art the viper which has given Him the deadly bite. Woe, woe unto thee, traitor, murderer, and accursed!"

O the fearful agony which takes possession of his breast at these arrows of conscience, the boundless distress which falls upon him! It seems to him as if he saw the flaming abyss of hell yawning at his feet. The darkness of despair weighs heavily on his soul.

O how the accursed blood-money sears his conscience! It seems to him as if it were the pay of Satan and the wages of hell that he carries about with him; nay, as if he had bartered for it the salvation of his soul. And this was what he had really done.

See him hurrying along, urged forward by the raven wings of mental agony. God has forsaken him. The pitiable wretch rushes to the Temple. He must rid himself of the accursed wages of sin. He seeks for the chief priests and elders and having found them, he approaches them, pale as a corpse, and filled with rage and hatred against these instruments of his fall, and confesses boldly and openly saying, "**I have sinned, in that I have betrayed innocent blood.**"

Hear these words, they are of great importance. Why?

Has Judas become Jesus' friend? By no means; his heart was still embittered against Him. Was his testimony to the innocence of Jesus of advantage to him? On the contrary, by it he only drew down upon him the displeasure of his superiors, and increased the dreadful nature of his crime.

How strongly and triumphantly must the heavenly radiance of Jesus' innocence have been reflected, even by the darkened mirror of his treacherous soul, that he could not refrain from honoring Jesus by such a confession!

Truly, scarcely ever has a more powerful hymn of praise to the holiness of the lamb of God been heard, than sounds in our ears in the despairing outcry of His betrayer; and where has the innocence of Jesus been more powerfully attested than by the testimony which the unhappy murderer is compelled by conscience to give against himself?

Thus, the Lord Jesus celebrated a brilliant triumph in the midst of the deepest gloom of His humiliation. He triumphs as One whom no one could convince of sin - as the lamb without spot - as the Holy One of Israel.

The Lord celebrates His second triumph in the event we are about to contemplate as the only salvation which is prepared for sinners. Singularly enough He is glorified by His betrayer even in this quality. Judas here performs apostolic service - not intentionally on his part, although on God's part. He serves as a fearful example, how a man may undertake everything, in order to free himself from sin and its attendant curse, and yet not succeed, as long as the Lord Jesus is not his, and as long as he does not belong to the Lord Jesus.

Behold the miserable man! The horrible deed is done, and he already acknowledges it as a crime. In him we have not to do with an entirely hardened villain. He feels the greatness of his guilt, confesses it, and bitterly repents of it. What would he give, could he undo the wicked deed!

He hastily returns to the men in whose service he had sinned, brings them back the accursed bribe; prefers enduring shame, disgrace, and much more besides, rather than let the blood-money remain in his hands; confesses freely and openly the impious act he has committed; does not seek to alleviate it, but directly says, "**I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!**" and shows that the abhorrence he displays at the crime he has committed is earnest and sincere.

When the priests refuse to take back their pieces of silver, and haughtily turn their backs upon him with the cold and cutting words, "**What is that to us? See thou to that!**" he casts the money down in the Temple, and thereby gives them to understand that he destines it for the poor, or other sacred purposes.

In this scene, we perceive something dreadfully retributive, when we call to mind the hypocritical words, "**Why was not this ointment sold, and the money given to the poor?**" with which the unhappy disciple once presumed to deprecate Mary's laudable work of love. He is now compelled although with other money to verify in an awful manner what he then uttered in dissimulation.

But what more could be desired than what the sinner did here? Here was self-condemnation, resolutions of amendment, and even earnest endeavors to repair the evil he had done. And yet of what use was it all? Sin remained and Satan's chain was unbroken. The trembling of the wretched man is in vain, as well as his repentance, confession, and his moral resolutions and vows. All this was insufficient to purge him from his sin. All these laudable acts do not procure him mercy.

Judas perishes horribly. Why? Is it because his sins exceeded the measure of divine forgiveness? O, not so! Is it because he was a thief and a cheat? Such was the thief on the cross in a much higher degree, yet he found the way to paradise. Is it because he betrayed the Holy One of Israel? Thousands did the same and yet were saved. Was it because he laid hands on himself? I tell you, that even if he had not done this, but had lived for years together, and spent them in serious attempts at amendment, he would still have perished for this one single reason - that Jesus was not his; he was not under Jesus' blood. Thus the perdition of Judas must serve, like no other event, to show in striking colors, how impossible it is to do without Jesus; and the latter triumphs in this, as in almost nothing else, as the only and exclusive Saviour of sinners.

Jesus alone enables us to obtain mercy and to reach heaven. If He be not gracious to thee, it is in vain for thee to rise early and to sit up late, in order by such means to work out thy salvation. Thou laborest and accomplishest nothing; thou gatherest and puttest it into a bag with holes, thou weavest spider's webs, which are unfit for clothing. But if Jesus is thine, thou hast already gained thy cause; fruits of peace fall into thy lap from a tree, which is not of thy planting; thou canst boast of thy Saviour's righteousness, while thou art still striving against sin; and art reconciled unto God without an atonement being required at thy hand.

Why then dost thou delay to embrace Him, and make Him thy all in all? Say with the apostle, **“The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me;”** and when these words are verified in thee, thou art safe to all eternity.

Judas is exhibited to us in the history of the Passion in order that sin, with all its horrors, may appear in the full blaze of day, and that redemption may appear in all its splendor, and Jesus be visibly glorified, not only as the Holy One, and the only way of salvation, but also as the Saviour of mankind.

If ever the dreadful nature of sin was manifested in any one, it was so in the traitor. Here, it first of all, presents to us its entire hatefulness and darkness, which appears only the more striking when contrasted with the heavenly light, which beams forth from the person of Christ. Here it makes itself known as the great deceiver, which promises its servants mountains of gold, but rewards them with horror and terror.

Besides, it is here manifestly shown how it scoffs at every human attempt to extract its sting; how no penitence can banish it, no tears wash it away, and no good resolutions annihilate it; but it obstinately remains in defiance of all this; hands over its subjects to Satan, and after embittering their life on this side of the grave, transfers them finally to an eternal night of death, and gives them up to endless perdition.

Look at the traitor in his stage of despair, and behold how sin sits upon his shoulders, like a hideous specter!

Observe how he hurries along, restless and fugitive, but the specter accompanies him and becomes increasingly frightful as he proceeds. He expects to get rid of his horrible burden by returning the thirty pieces of silver; but in vain are the attempts to settle accounts with sin at such a rate. Judas has recourse to the chief priests and elders, but they know of no remedy against sin. Driven at length to desperation, he casts himself into the arms of death; but even the latter does not relieve the soul from the fiend.

- Judas may divest himself of his body, but he does not thereby lay aside his guilt.
- He may part with his life; but sin does not, on this account, depart from him.
- He can leave the world, but his impious act follows him across the boundaries.
- He may strangle himself, but his iniquity is not destroyed by so doing.

On the contrary, greater scope is thus afforded it to unfold its whole power and dominion. It does not prevent his body from bursting asunder, but carries away the soul with it to everlasting fire.

Approach the grave of Judas. No angels are watching there, nor does the guardian eye of God stand open over it. No rose of hope blooms on its grassy mound. Night-shade and thistle alone vegetate there. And what is the inscription on his tombstone? It is short and horrifying - **“And Judas went to his place”** - and indicates in an awful manner how far the desolating, destructive, and fatal power of sin extends.

Who was there that was able to cope with this monster? He who is being dragged yonder in chains before the judgment seat of a heathen, and at the sight of whom Judas despairs, instead of breaking out into exclamations of joy - He it is who enters the lists against it.

Christ, by imputation, was the Lamb which took upon Himself the sin of the world, so that by the representative endurance of the curse due to it, He might deprive it of its sting, in behalf of all those who should believe on Him. Christ is glorified here as the Saviour, since every one must feel convinced that the son of perdition suffers shipwreck solely because he disdains to cast himself patiently and believingly into the arms of Him whom he has betrayed. Had he done so Christ would have infallibly brought him safely into the haven of eternal peace.

But why did Judas not do so? Partly because he was still too proud to honor Him, by suing for His mercy, who had torn away his hypocritical mask, and against whom his soul was still deeply embittered. Partly, also, because he had given way to despair; for Satan did not cease to suggest to him that there was no longer any hope for him.

Could Judas have summoned up sufficient humility and courage to turn his tearful eye to Jesus as did afterward the dying thief, he would have met only the look of forgiving mercy; and O what different sounds would have saluted his ear, than the horrifying language of the chief priests and elders, who said to him, "**What is that to us? See thou to that.**"

There was no want of grace, even for a man in his desperate condition; and although his sin was "**red like crimson,**" yet the blood of atonement would have sufficed to wash it white as snow. But the devil carried him away in the whirlwind, like the vulture the lamb it has seized upon; nor did he rest till he had completed his triumph over him, and had gotten secure possession of the soul of him who had thus become his booty.

The world has never beheld a more tragic spectacle than this.

One who was ordained and fitted to become a distinguished vessel of salvation and blessing to mankind gives himself up to despair in the presence of the world's Deliverer and plunges into the gulf of eternal perdition, instead of laying hold of the hand extended for his rescue.

It would seem as if even death and hell disowned this son of perdition, just as the world had previously done in the person of the chief priests and elders. The rope with which the miserable man had hung himself snaps asunder. The tree which he had selected as the instrument of his death, shakes him off again with horror. The strangled wretch falls down, burst asunder, and his bowels gushing out, lie scattered on the ground.

While these horrible things are enacting, the chief priests and elders are consulting together, what should be done with the thirty pieces of silver, which Judas, in his state of desperation, had thrown back again. "**It is not lawful,**" say the hypocrites, unconsciously stigmatizing themselves, "**to put them into the treasury, for it is the price of blood.**" They say right; for according to Deuteronomy 23:18, the treasury of the Lord was not to be defiled by blood-money or the price of a dog.

Were not these men equally guilty of the heinous crime with the traitor himself, to whom they had paid the thirty pieces of silver? And though they were in equal condemnation with him, yet they assume to themselves not only the place of his judges, but with a haughty mien, contrast themselves with him as keepers of the law and the holy places. Who does not feel almost more sympathy with the despairing disciple than with these proficient in falsehood and dissimulation? Who can say that it may not be more tolerable in the day of judgment for the former, than for these arrogant and heartless hypocrites!

They agree together to purchase, with the wages of iniquity, the potter's field - a piece of ground belonging to a potter; and destine it for the burial place of those pilgrims who might die in Jerusalem without having any tomb or place of sepulture of their own. Thus, even the money, for which our Lord was bartered, must be productive of good. And is there not in this transaction a distinct hint that Christ yielded up Himself that we, poor pilgrims in the vale of death, might rest in peace? The purchased field was thenceforward known by the semi-Syrian name of "**Aceldama**," or "**the field of blood**." A monument was thus erected to the lost disciple and his crime; which still speaks to the traveler and says, "There is no more offering for sin unto him, who treads underfoot the blood of the Son of God."

The evangelist, after narrating the purchase, observes, "**Then was fulfilled, that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.**" Matthew combines here, as respects their chief import, two prophetic passages; the first of which belongs to Jeremiah, but the other to Zechariah, whose name is not mentioned. We read the words of Jeremiah, in chapter 19:11 as follows:

**"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again, and they shall bury them in Tophet, till there shall be no place to bury."** The words of Zechariah we find in the eleventh chapter of his prophecies, where we read in verse 13, "**And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver and cast them to the potter, in the house of the Lord.**"

Tophet, where once the image of Moloch stood, was at the same time, the piece of ground where the potters of Jerusalem procured the clay for their handicraft. This Tophet was the potter's field which was bought by the elders for thirty pieces of silver. But when Matthew says, "**Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet,**" the meaning of the Holy Spirit who guided the evangelist's pen is this - "God so ordered it that the elders of Israel purchase the field on which the curse of Jeremiah rested, thus making it the property of the Jewish State. By so doing they transferred that curse to themselves and the people."

It was not therefore the purchase of the field itself, but rather the symbolic appropriation by it of the divine curse upon Tophet, which received its final accomplishment in the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, that is here described as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

The hour of the threatened judgment was at hand, when He who was the perfection of God's pastoral faithfulness, was valued on the part of Israel, at the trifling price of thirty pieces of silver.

For this small sum, Judas, as representing his nation, disposed of his part in the Saviour, and the children of Israel by their rulers bargained for the Holy One to slay him. But by the fact of the traitor, in despair, hurling the murderer's reward from him, and casting it down in the Temple, the blood money (a bad omen) was returned to the congregation of Israel.

This act, which was not without divine intervention, called fearfully and significantly to mind the thirty pieces of silver mentioned by Zechariah, and could only be explained to mean that the Almighty now renewed, more impressively than before, the threatening He had pronounced against Jerusalem and its sanctuary, in the symbolical act of His prophet. And the circumstance that the Jewish rulers hit upon the idea of purchasing the accursed spot completely impresses the seal of truth on that explanation.

Hence it is evident that the spirit of prophecy uttered the words of Zechariah and Jeremiah with a conscious reference to the event which occurred in Jerusalem after the lapse of centuries; and that God permitted the transaction between Judas and the rulers of Israel to assume, in so striking a manner, a form corresponding with those ancient prophetic sayings, only because He would give the ungrateful flock of His people a new and tangible sign that the time of maturity for destruction, and the long announced and terrible judgments of His hand had now arrived.

Matthew therefore says with perfect justice, "**Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet.**" Actual predictions found their final accomplishment. Even as the Holy Spirit had distinctly pointed, in Zechariah, to the thirty pieces of silver - so in Jeremiah, He had pointed to the purchase of the potter's field by the priests and elders.

Let him who gives himself to Christ do so without reserve; and whoever is desirous of holding communion with Him, let him always walk before Him without disguise. Let him who is overtaken by a fault seek the throne of grace without delay; and he that is conscious of being under the dominion of a single sin, let him not cease to watch and pray, until its power is broken by the mercy of Him who bruised the serpent's head. The germ from which a Judas may spring when fructified by hell, lies concealed in all of us. Let us therefore make room for the Holy Spirit in our hearts, that He may destroy it and make all within us new!

~ end of chapter 25 ~

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