

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER THIRTY

THE LAMB OF GOD

AFTER HIS FIRST CONVERSATION with Jesus, Pilate again comes forward into the open court before the people, bringing the accused with him. The governor's inward state is no longer unknown to us. We are acquainted with him as a man in whom all susceptibility for true greatness of soul was by no means extinguished.

A silent admiration of the extraordinary Personage who stood before him pervaded the whole of the procedure respecting Him. The words He uttered, the silence He observed, His look, and His whole bearing, His humility and then again His sublime composure, His lamb-like patience, and undisturbed self-possession - all this made a powerful impression upon Pilate; and if he had given vent to that which passed fleetingly through his mind, he would, at least momentarily, have expressed something similar to the testimony given by the apostle John, **"We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son of God, full of grace and truth."**

The dignity of Immanuel shone too powerfully into the soul of the Roman to leave him at liberty to act toward Him as he pleased. To a certain extent, he had been inwardly overcome by Him. He is compelled to absolve Him from all criminality. He cannot avoid feeling a secret reverence for Him, and is even constrained to act as the intercessor and advocate of the Just One.

What majesty must have shone around the Lamb of God even while suffering and ignominy rolled over His head and with what wondrous radiance must the Sun of Righteousness have broken through the clouds of deep humiliation, as to be able to constrain even a worldly-minded epicurean to such a feeling of respect!

As was the case with Pilate, so would it be with many of like sentiments in the present day, if they were to come into similar contact with Jesus.

I have those in view who have long forsaken the Word and the Church of God.

They are intoxicated with the inebriating draught of the spirit of the age, and have given up Christianity as no longer tenable, and have renounced Christ Himself without previous examination, as though He were merely a Jewish rabbi, fallible like all other mortals.

O, if they could only once resolve to approach nearer to Him by an impartial study of the Gospel history, I am persuaded that they would soon find it impossible to continue indifferent to Him in future, nay, that before they were aware, they would feel constrained either to do homage to Jesus, and to give themselves up to Him with all their hearts, or else that they would hate Him, as One whose claim to rule over us we cannot gainsay, but to whose scepter we refuse to bow.

Pilate frankly says to the chief priests and all the people, “**I find no fault in this man;**” thereby confirming the words of the apostle Peter, “**a Lamb without blemish and without spot.**”

It certainly manifests great shallowness of thought and deficiency of judgment to say only that he finds no fault in Jesus. When the latter testified that He was the Son of the living God, and the King of the kingdom of heaven, He was guilty of a great crime, if His assertions were false, and these lofty titles only assumed. But if He was correct in uttering such exalted things respecting Himself, how was it that the governor had nothing better to say for Him than the meager testimony that he acknowledged Him only to be guiltless? But even this assurance we gladly receive, and regard with emotion the man who is so favorably inclined toward the Accused, and so powerfully affected by His innocence and moral unblamableness.

Doubtless, after this testimony in His favor, Pilate would gladly have liberated Him; but the Jews, the emperor, his position, and many other causes prevent him from doing so.

When it is only the conviction of the understanding, in place of a heart burdened with the guilt of sin, which connects a man with Jesus, he will never find in Him an advocate or intercessor. Such an one does not count all things loss for Christ. Worldly honor, human favor, domestic and social peace, and the like, exercise over him a much more potent and overpowering influence. Far be it from me to act the part of a judge; but I am seriously afraid that among the number of religious professors in the present day, many will be found whose faith is only like that of Pilate.

Pilate having uttered his inmost conviction of the innocence of Jesus, the chief priests, not a little enraged at their defeat, foam out fresh accusations against the Righteous One. “**They were the more fierce,**” says the narrative. They pour out a flood of rage and fury upon Him, and now the saying of the prophet Isaiah was fulfilled. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet, like a lamb, he opened not his mouth.

The most significant and remarkable type introduced into the divine ordinances, as well as into Israel’s history and ritual, was the lamb. It even meets us at the threshold of paradise in the sacrifice of Abel, as an object peculiarly acceptable in the sight of God. Later on, the lamb with its blood consecrates the commencement of the history of the Israelites. The sprinkling of the door-posts with the blood of lambs was the means of Israel’s preservation in Egypt from the sword of the destroying angel and the departure of the people from Pharaoh’s house of bondage.

From that time, the lamb continued to be the most prominent figure by which God typified the future Messiah to the children of Abraham. Thenceforward it acquired an abiding footing in Israel’s sacrificial rights in general and in the yearly Passover in particular.

In the latter each household was enjoined by the Mosaic law to bring a male lamb without blemish or infirmity to the sanctuary, there solemnly confess their transgressions over it, then bring it, typically burdened with their sins, to the court of the temple to be slain; and after it was roasted, consume it entirely, in festive communion with joy and thanksgiving to The Lord.

That which was prophetically typical in this ceremony was so apparent that even the most simple mind could not mistake it. Everyone who was only partially susceptible of that which was divinely symbolical, felt immediately impressed with the idea that this divine ordinance could have no other aim than to keep alive in Israel, along with the remembrance of the promised Deliverer, the confidence and hope in Him.

John the Baptist appears in the wilderness; and the first greeting with which he welcomes Jesus, which was renewed whenever he saw Him, is, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!**" thereby directing the attention of the whole world to Jesus, as if there were thenceforward nothing else worth seeing in heaven or on earth than this Lamb of God; and by so doing, he certainly directs us to the greatest and most beatifying of all mysteries, and to the pith and marrow of the entire gospel.

For if Christ had been only the "**Lion of the tribe of Judah,**" and not at the same time "**the Lamb,**" what would it have availed us? As "**the Lamb,**" He is the desire of all nations, the Star of hope to the exiles from Eden, the Sun of righteousness in the night of sorrow to those whom the law condemns, and the heavenly Lamp to the wanderer in the gloomy vale of death.

He is all this as "**the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.**"

But this expression implies, not only that the sin of the world grieves His sacred heart, or that He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and that He patiently bore the pain inflicted on Him by their sins, and by His life and doctrine aimed at removing sin.

The words have a meaning which cannot be properly fathomed. Christ bore the sin of the world in a much more peculiar and literal sense than that just mentioned. He bore it by letting it be imputed to Him by His Father, in a manner incomprehensible to us, so that it became no longer ours but His.

"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (II Corinthians 5:19).

What can this mean, but that God did not leave the world to suffer for its trespasses, nor even for its sins. And if it be asked, "Who then did suffer if the world escaped?" We find the answer in the verse where it is said, "**He hath made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.**"

Here we must not pass unnoticed the wonderful union and amalgamation into which Christ entered with the human race, the mysterious depths of which we shall never fathom here below.

Eventually, we shall be astonished in what a profound and comprehensive sense Christ became our Head; and how literally the title belonged to Him of the Representative of Our race. But then we shall also learn to know and comprehend how, without infringing upon the moral order of the world, the guilt of others could be transferred to Him, and how He could thus become **“the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”**

Keeping this position of our Lord in view as Mediator and Surety, the accusations which were heaped upon Christ by the Jews acquire a deep symbolical signification. Although in the abstract, as far as they have reference to our Lord in His moral capacity, they were the most abominable slanders and falsehoods; yet in another respect, they have much of truth at their basis. The world, according to God’s counsel and will, discharges on its Representative, Jesus Christ, the transgressions of which itself is guilty; and the groundless accusations of the Jews serve only to place in the brightest and most brilliant light, the Lamb-like character of our great Redeemer.

Still more clearly does **“the Lamb of God”** manifest itself in Christ, in the conduct which He observes, amid the furious accusations of His adversaries.

Jesus is silent, as if actually guilty of all that they charge upon Him. Pilate, unable to cope with the storm which roars around him from the crowd below, almost entreats the Lord to say something in His own defense. But Jesus is silent. Pilate, occupied solely with Him, says, **“Answerest thou nothing? Behold how many things they witness against Thee?” “But Jesus,”** as the narrative informs us, **“answered nothing, so that Pilate marveled.”**

How could he do otherwise, seeing that he only measured the Lord’s conduct by a human standard?

Everyone else, at a moment when life was at stake, would have hastily brought together everything that could have overthrown the charges brought against him, especially if so much had stood at his command as in the case of Jesus; but He is silent.

Everyone else would at least have demanded proofs of the truth of the shameless denunciations of His opponents; but not a syllable proceeds from Jesus’ lips.

Everyone else in His situation would have appealed from the mendacious priesthood to the consciences of the people, and have roused the feeling of what is just and right in those who were not entirely hardened, but Jesus appealed to no one, either in heaven or on earth.

Ah! had Pilate known who He was that stood thus meekly before him, how would he have marveled! It was He before whose judgment seat all the millions that have ever breathed upon earth will be summoned, that He may pronounce upon them their final and eternal sentence.

It was He before whom the sons of Belial, who now heap their lying accusations upon Him, will at length appear bound in the fetters of His curse, and who, under the thunder of His sentence, will call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them, and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. And He now stands before their bar, and is mute, like one who thinks He must give up all hope of gaining His cause.

But the Lord also observes silence with regard to those who blaspheme Him in the present day. It is a silence of forbearance, but also partly of contempt; for they likewise blaspheme Him against light and knowledge. Eventually He will speak to them, and then they will be constrained tremblingly to acknowledge that they would not have Him to reign over them. Christ is silent when His people murmur against Him and complain of His ways and guidance. He is mute in this case also, from the profoundest feeling of innocence, well knowing that while supplicating His forgiveness, they will kiss His hands for having led them just so and not otherwise.

In other respects Christ is not silent upon earth. He that has an ear for His voice, hears it in a variety of ways in every place. Witnessing for Himself and His cause, He speaks at one time in obvious judgments which He inflicts upon His foes; and at another in tangible blessings and answers to prayer with which He favors His friends.

He speaks by the surprising confirmations which science in its progress is often involuntarily obliged to afford His word; as well as by the manifold signs of the times which manifest nothing but a literal fulfillment of His prophecies. Hence what we read in Psalm 19 literally becomes true: **“There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their sound is gone forth through all the earth, and their words unto the end of the world.”**

But the chief cause of Jesus’ silence amid the stormy accusations of His adversaries, has not yet been touched upon. It lies in His mediatorial position. Our Lord, the Lamb of God, the High Priest, the heavenly Surety, is silent for He takes upon Himself before the face of God all that of which He is accused, because He is willing to suffer and repay, as the mediating and universal debtor, all that we have incurred.

Beholding the Lamb of God harmoniously dissolves all our inward discords, restrains every passion, makes the commandment which is otherwise a heavy chain into a gentle yoke beneath which, led by the paternal hand of Deity, we joyfully pursue our way. In this looking to the Lamb consists **“the victory that overcometh the world.”**

But when our eyes open in the heavenly world, we shall behold the Lamb without a veil. No cloud will then conceal Him from us anymore. We sink low at His feet in humble adoration, and join with the hosts of the just made perfect, in the never-ending hymn, **“Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor, and glory, and blessing, forever and ever.”** Amen.

~ end of chapter 30 ~

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