

# THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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## CHAPTER NINE

### THE WOE DENOUNCED

WERE ANY ONE to ask me what passage in the whole Bible I regarded as the most awful and appalling, I should not require to reflect long before giving him an answer. I should neither refer to the words in Deuteronomy 27:26, "**Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them;**" nor to the assertion in John 3:36, "**He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.**" Nor should I call to mind the overwhelming words of the Apostle Paul to Bar-Jesus, Acts 13:10, "**O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil!**" nor the denunciations of our Lord Himself against the scribes and Pharisees, Matthew 23.

On the contrary, I would refer the inquirer to the dreadful woe pronounced upon Judas, and feel assured that he would confess that nothing more appalling and awful can be found in the sacred volume, than is contained in the woe which Jesus uttered upon His betrayer. Many a one who has passed unscathed by Sinai, has been compelled by it to cry for mercy with a broken heart.

Listen: "**Woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed; it had been good for that man that he had never been born!**"

Who is it that utters these dreadful words? Consider this on the outset, and the words will then begin to unfold their horrors. O that another had uttered them, and not He from whose lips they emanated! O that they had come forth from the mouth of one like ourselves, a mortal, a human prophet, a poor sinner! But it is Jesus from whose lips the denunciation proceeds; it is the King of truth, the Friend of sinners, who utters it; and it is impossible to state what an enormous weight and dreadful emphasis this circumstance alone attaches to the words. For in them we hear not the voice of passion, but the voice of Him who could justly say of Himself, "**I am meek and lowly of heart.**" It is the considerate testimony of One whose own heart bleeds at being obliged to pronounce such a sentence on the man who had been His confidant.

"But," say you, "since the Lord knew that it would have been good for that man had he never been born, why did He not prevent his birth? Why did He not hinder the marriage of his parents? Why did He not smite the mother of Judas with barrenness, as He formerly smote Michal? Or why did He not take the babe to Himself while in the cradle?"

Why did He give him time and space to ripen for such a state of reprobation? Why did God do this, since He is Almighty, and love itself?"

Restrain such inquiries, my readers. Be satisfied to remain in ignorance. No human spirit fathoms the depths of God's government of the world. To us it is a sealed mystery how the all-loving God can suffer men to be born whose course of life He sees, by virtue of His omniscience, will terminate in the abyss of eternal perdition.

We can only infer from hence that the unsearchable God must love in a different manner from men, who have no idea of a love which goes hand in hand with justice. Consider, besides, what would become of liberty, if God were, in a compulsory manner, to hinder anyone from destroying himself and perishing?

What would become of the splendor of His throne, if, in order to avoid punishing, He put aside His justice?

Finally, we have no need to be anxious how the Eternal God will eventually account for every single act of His universal government, but may rest assured that on the great day of revelation, He will constrain all that have breath to join in the words of Moses, "**The Lord is a rock; his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is he.**"

Let us now consider, a little more closely, the woe denounced by our Lord upon His betrayer, and let it unfurl its horrors to our view.

The Lord commences His sentence with a "**Woe!**" and when Christ pronounces a woe, no one in heaven or in earth can any longer say, "Peace be with thee!" "**It would have been good for that man**" - an uncommon mode of expression in the mouth of the Good Shepherd. He does not otherwise call poor sinners thus. That appellation has in it something of a repudiating nature, and a sound of separation pervades it. Jesus dismisses Judas from the circle of His disciples, and regards him henceforth as a stranger. How awful is this, and how overwhelming! What will become of the unhappy man, now that the only One who could have saved him, lets him go?

God grant that the Prince of Peace may call us by another name than the strange and icy appellation, "**That man!**"

I cannot imagine anything more horrible than to be compelled to hear Him say, "I know thee not: I know not whence thou art; I never knew thee, Depart from me!"

**"It had been good for that man had he never been born."**

The Lord could not have expressed Himself in a more appalling manner respecting the desperate condition of the traitor, than He did in these words. A mere denunciation of woe would still have left us some hope for the deeply-fallen being; or, at least, would not have excited in us such dreadful ideas of the misery to which he was hastening as this declaration forces upon us, by which the last prospect of a possible rescue of the disciple is annihilated.

O the heart-rending view, which this assertion affords us into the depths of perdition!

How horrible must the fate of the reprobate be, when the Lord Himself affirms that Judas had cause to curse the day of his birth!

O if the fate of the rejected were partially tolerable, the King of Truth would never have spoken thus. But while giving us most plainly to understand that nothing better could be desired for the son of perdition than a return to nonentity, He thereby gives us an idea of hell, which ought to make all our bones to quake. And can we suppose that there really exists a way of escape from such a state of condemnation?

If such were the case, would our Lord have made use of language such as He here employed concerning Judas? No, never! We should then have heard milder words from His lips. Then indeed, it would have been better to be born, than never to have been.

In this case a man would still have reason to bless God for the hour of his birth, and none to execrate and curse it. But Jesus Himself asserts that it would have been good for Judas had he never been born; and we, therefore, know enough to banish the last hope of his recovery. It is dreadful to face this alternative; but according to our Lord's words, it is unavoidable. The eternity of hell-torments, therefore, is established. Their worm dieth not, neither is the fire quenched in those haunts of woe.

After having considered the dreadful import of these awful words, let us now inquire respecting their application and limitation.

We lament over the unhappy disciple; but let us beware lest the denunciation pronounced against him be uttered respecting us; seeing that it is possible for the same reasons, as with Judas, that it were good for some had they never been born. It is, of course, not in my power to point out with certainty the individual to whom these appalling words are applicable; but I may say that he who finds within him certain characteristics, has reason to fear for his soul. For he that shares them with Judas, shares also in his condemnation.

You anxiously inquire, "What are those characteristics?" I will therefore cursorily bring them before you, that you may examine yourselves by them.

Let me, first of all, point out to you, that a degree of outward propriety affords no reason for the tranquilizing idea that you do not belong to those who had better never been born.

For observe, that Judas:

- Had also outwardly forsaken the world, and had been nourished up with the milk of the divine Word;
- Had lived, subsequently, continually among the children of God, been innocently regarded by them as a brother,
- Had prayed and fasted with them, belonged to the personal retinue of the Prince of Peace,

- Had been His disciple,
- Had assisted in preaching His gospel,
- Had suffered reproach for Christ's sake,
- Had - like the rest - wrought miracles in the name of Jesus.

And yet, notwithstanding all this, **“It had been good for him if he had never been born.”**

O take this to heart and beware of regarding your respectability, your devotions, your religious knowledge, your good name among believers, and the like, as a secure defense, behind which you are safe from the flames of hell!

But now turn your eyes inward, and give an account of yourselves to Him in whose name I address you. There are those in the world who envelop themselves in the mantle of religion, in order, like Judas, to conceal a devil beneath it. Secured from the judicial eye of the world, they would gladly serve the demons of lust, avarice, or pride; and on this very account they put on the mask of religion. *I now ask, are you one of these?*

There are those also, who, though often aroused and awakened, still refuse to give themselves to Christ, because they are held in bondage by some secret sin, which they have not the courage to condemn and renounce. Hence, they indulge in it with a gloomy composure, the result of habit; and in time, their guilt increases to such a degree that they would consent to anything rather than it should be brought to light. *Are there any of this class among my readers?*

Again, there are people who, minutely examined, have only one care, which is, lest it should be discovered that they have never been converted, although they have been for years regarded as being so. Hypocrisy has become instinctive within them, and without being aware of it, they are always occupied in disguising their words, looks, gestures, and actions, in such a manner that their true character and sentiments may not be discovered. *Is this the case with any of you?*

There are likewise individuals, who have so often succeeded in withstanding the thunders of truth directed against their carnal security, that they are become, as it were, bomb-proof against the most appalling horrors of the eternal world, and equally unsusceptible to the sweetest allurements of divine love. *Are any of my readers thus hardened?*

Further, there are those who, at the cost of a little of their money, aid in building the kingdom of God, yet are displeased on hearing that this kingdom flourishes and progresses. Had they been present at Mary's evidence of tender and sacred affection in anointing the Saviour, they would also have been ready to say with Judas, “Why this waste? The money had been better spent for worthier purposes.”

Nay, such people even experience a malicious pleasure; if, for instance, the missionary cause, to which, for the sake of appearances, they may possibly have contributed, seems to retrograde, and when, generally speaking, the zeal for the cause of God appears to abate. I ask, *Are there any of my readers who are the subjects of such feelings?*

Finally, there are individuals, who are so far overcome by the truth of the gospel, as to feel compelled to bear witness to it in their consciences, but do so reluctantly, and against their will. Hence, as often as they hear or read anything that encourages the idea in them that they can obtain admittance into heaven without Christ, from whose method of salvation they would gladly escape, they feel inwardly comfortable. *Are there such among you?*

Examine your inmost motives, and know that whoever belongs to one or the other of these classes, I do not indeed say of him that it would have been good for him had he never been born; but I do say that there is the possibility of this being the case. Such a one has reason to fear that the awful inscription on the tombstone of Judas may at length be transferred to his.

Yes, you tremble; you are horrified. If it were otherwise, and you could yawn amid such startling truths, or even laugh at them in satanic defiance; there would not require much more to authorize me to tell you, in the name of God, that **“it had been good for such a one that he had never been born.”**

But God forbid that I should exceed the limits of my duty. I know there are those to whom the sentence upon Judas does not refer, although they fear lest it should apply to them. Let me characterize, in a few brief traits, these individuals, that no one may despair who is justified in praising God for His mercy.

I make no reference here to those who can exultingly say, with Paul, **“I know whom I have believed;”** for, being firmly rooted in the life of grace, and **“sealed by the spirit of promise,”** they would only smile were I to endeavor to prove to them that the sentence in question did not apply to them.

But I address myself to you, ye troubled ones, who are tossed to and fro on the sea of doubts, and who are still in uncertainty whether you may bless the day of your birth, or have reason to curse it.

I understand the cause of your unhappiness. Neither the fact of your feeling yourselves destitute of faith, love, and strength to lead a holy life, nor that you daily stumble and feel defective, decides anything. Do you desire to be able to say with the bride in the Canticles, **“My beloved is mine, and I am his?”**

And if, as a condition of this happiness, you were compelled to bear the cross, in its most painful form, after the Lord Jesus, would you not resolve to do so without hesitation? Would you sacrifice that which is the dearest to you, in order to be able to assure yourselves that you belong to Christ?

If you reply in the affirmative to these inquiries, I will declare to you, in the name of Him who **“hears the cry of the needy, and will not despise their prayer,”** that the woe pronounced upon Judas has no reference to you, and that the glad tidings that you may bless the hour in which you first saw the light of this world, are for you.

O it is good that you have been born! You are set apart for great things. You are destined to serve the Lord God as vessels of His mercy.

- He intends to adorn His temple with you as the mirrors of His glory.
- He desires to exhibit you in the sight of heaven, earth, and hell, as proofs of what the blood of the cross is able to accomplish.
- He has selected you to join the choir of those who chant the mighty Hallelujah to Himself and the Lamb.

When you were born, angels stood around your cradle. Over your head a sublime voice whispered, "I have loved thee from everlasting!" Your parents pressed an heir of heaven to their bosoms. You entered upon this vale of tears only to pass through it with rapid steps, and then to find your abiding home in "**the Jerusalem that is above.**"

God wrote your names in the book of life. The righteousness of His Son was the first robe He threw around you; and the last with which He will adorn you will be the radiant garment of heavenly glorification. It is well for you, therefore, that you have been born. It would have been grievous if you had been wanting in the rank of beings; for one voice less would then have resounded in the vast jubilee chorus at the throne of God, and one pearl less would have glittered in the diadem of the heavenly Prince of Peace. Therefore, thrice hail that you exist!

In spite of all the wretchedness you may be experiencing, you have infinite reason to bless the Lord. We heartily rejoice at joining with you in praising Him.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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