

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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PART THREE

THE MOST HOLY PLACE

CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

THE CRUCIFIXION

“THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE; let all the earth keep silence before him.” Let these words of the prophet Habakkuk be the language of our hearts on entering into the Most Holy Place of the Gospel history.

The most solemn of all days in Israel was, as we well know, the great day of atonement, the only day in the year on which the high priest entered into the most holy place in the Temple. Before he approached that mysterious sanctuary, the law enjoined that he should divest himself of his costly garments, and clothe himself from head to foot in a plain white linen dress. He then took the vessel with the sacrificial blood in his hand, and, thrilling with sacred awe, drew back the veil, in order, humbly and devoutly, to approach the throne of grace, and sprinkle the atoning blood. He remained no longer in the sacred place than sufficed to perform his priestly office. He then came out again to the people, and, in The Lord’s name, announced grace and forgiveness to every penitent soul.

We shall now see this symbolical and highly significant act realized in its full and actual accomplishment. The immaculate Jesus of whom the whole Old Testament priesthood, according to the divine intention, was only a typical shadow, conceals Himself behind the thick veil of an increasing humiliation and agony; that bearing in His hands His own blood, He may mediate for us with God His Father. He realizes and accomplishes all that Moses included in the figurative service of the tabernacle. The precise manner in which this was accomplished We shall never entirely fathom with our intellectual powers; but it is certain that He then finally procured our eternal redemption.

Once more we return to the road to the cross, and in spirit mingle with the crowd proceeding to the place of execution. They are just passing the rocky sepulchers of the kings of Israel. The ancient monarchs sleep in their cells, but a dawning resurrection gleams upon their withered remains when the Prince of life passes by.

The procession then enters the vale of Gehenna, which once reeked with the blood of the sacrifices to Moloch. But there is another still more dreadful Gehenna; and who among us would have escaped it, had not the Lamb of God submitted to the sufferings, which we now see Him enduring?

We are arrived at the foot of the awful hill, but before ascending it, let us cast a look on the crowd behind us, and see if, amid all the hatred and rancor that rages there like an infernal flame, we can discover any traces of sympathy and heartfelt veneration for the divine Sufferer. And lo! an estimable little group meets our eye, like a benignant constellation in the darkness of the night.

O we know them already, these deeply distressed mourners! We first perceive the pious Salome, the blessed mother of the two "**sons of thunder**." She desires to set her children an example of faithfulness unto death, and we know that both James and John afterward showed themselves perfectly worthy of such a mother. Near Salome walks Mary, the near relative of the blessed virgin. She had also the great privilege of seeing her two sons, James the Less and Joses, received into the immediate fellowship of the great Master. But alas! when the sword came upon the Shepherd, they were also scattered with the rest of the flock; while it seemed to their excellent mother a paramount duty to appear, instead of her children, and by her own fidelity, to cover their flight. And lo! yonder walks Mary Magdalene, sobbing aloud, who had experienced, above others, the delivering power of Him who came to destroy the works of the devil how she appears dissolved in grief and sorrow!

But who is she with tottering step, leaning on the disciple whom Jesus loved, dejected more than all the rest, who covers her grief-worn face? It is the sorely tried mother of our Lord, in whom Simeon's prophecy is now fulfilled, "**A sword shall pierce through thine own soul also.**"

But she had scarcely the smallest presentiment that it would be accomplished in such a manner. But look up, Mary! Cast thyself with all thy grief, into the arms of the eternal Father. Dost thou see thy Son going to be crucified? He also sees His. He who is crowned with thorns is His Son as well as thine.

O look at the dear disciple, who though inconsolable himself, tries to support the deeply grieved mother of his Lord. What a scene! But how gratifying is it to perceive that love for the Man of Sorrows has not wholly become extinct upon earth! Nor shall it ever expire. Be not concerned on that account.

In that mourning group you see only the first divinely quickened germs of the future kingdom of the divine Sufferer. From a few, a multitude that no man can number will ere long proceed.

After this cursory retrospect of the Saviour's attendants, let us again put ourselves in motion with the crowd. Only a few steps upward, and we reach the end of the dreadful pilgrimage. Where are we now? We are standing on the summit of Mount Calvary – Golgotha - horrifying name - the appellation of the most momentous and awful spot upon the whole earth. Behold a naked and barren eminence, enriched only by the blood of criminals, and covered with the bones of executed rebels, incendiaries, poisoners, and other offscourings of the human race.

An accursed spot, where love never rules, but where naked justice alone sits enthroned, with scales and sword, and from which every passer-by turns with abhorrence, a nocturnal rendezvous of jackals and hyenas.

Only think, this place, so full of horrors, becomes transformed into “the hill from whence cometh our help,” whose mysteries many kings and prophets have desired to see, and did not see them. Yes, upon this awful hill our roses shall blossom, and our springs of peace and salvation burst forth. The pillar of our refuge towers upon this height. The Bethany of our repose and eternal refreshment here displays itself to our view. Truly the ancients were in so far correct in their assertion, that Mount Calvary formed the center of the whole earth; for it is the meeting-place where the redeemed, though separated in body by land and sea, daily assemble in spirit, and greet each other with the kiss of love.

Not less correct were they in the legend that father Adam was buried beneath Mount Calvary - this hill being really Adam’s grave, when by the latter we understand the fallen sinful man, whom we all carry about in us, and who was crucified with Christ on Golgotha.

It is strange that to this day the learned dispute the position of this hill, and that there is scarcely a prospect of ascertaining the place with certainty. But it was the divine intention that the material mount should be exalted into the region of that which is spiritual; and such is actually the case. It finds its abiding-place in the believing view of the world.

On that awful mount ends the earthly career of the Lord of Glory.

Behold Him, then, the only green, sound, and fruitful tree upon earth, and at the root of this tree the ax is laid. What a testimony against the world, and what an annihilating contradiction to everything that bears the name of God and divine Providence, if the latter did not find its solution in the mystery of the representative atonement!

Behold Him, then, covered with wounds and ignominy, and scarcely distinguishable from the malefactors among whom He is reckoned. But have patience. In a few years, Jerusalem that rejected Him glorifies Him in the form of a smoking heap of ruins, as the beloved Son of the Most High, whom no one can assail with impunity; and surrounded by the lights of the sanctuary, living monuments arise, in three quarters of the globe, bearing the inscription, “To Christ, the Redeemer of the world.”

But before these things take place, a horrible catastrophe must occur. The life of the world only springs forth from the death of the Just One. The hour of His baptism with blood has arrived.

Alas! alas! what is it that now takes place on that bloody hill?

O heart of stone in our breasts, why dost thou not break? Why, thou cold and obdurate rock, dost thou not dissolve in tears of blood? Four barbarous men, inured to the most dreadful of all employments, approach the Holy One of Israel, and offer Him, first of all, a stupefying potion composed of wine and myrrh, as usual at executions.

The Lord despairs the draught, because He desires to submit to the will of His heavenly Father with full consciousness, and to drink the last drop of the accursed cup.

The executioners then take the Lamb of God between them, and begin their horrid occupation by tearing, with rude hands, the clothes from off His body. There He stands, whose garment once was the light, and the stars of heaven the fringe of His robe, covered only with the crimson of His blood, and divested of all that adorned Him, not only before men, but also in His character as Surety, before God - reminding us of Adam in paradise, only that instead of hiding Himself behind the trees at the voice of God, He cheerfully goes toward it; reminding us also of the Old Testament high priest, His mysterious type, who, before he entered into the most holy place to make atonement, exchanged his rich attire for a simple white robe.

After having unclothed the Lord, and left Him, by divine direction, only His crown of thorns, they lay Him down on the wood on which He is to bleed; and thus, without being aware of it, bring about the moment predicted in Psalm 22, where we hear the Messiah saying, "**Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me about; strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.**"

O what a dying bed for the King of kings! My friends, as often as we repose on the downy cushions of divine peace, or blissfully assemble in social brotherly circles, singing hymns of hope, let us not forget that the cause of the happiness we enjoy is solely to be found in the fact that the Lord of Glory once extended Himself on the fatal tree for us.

O see Him lie! His holy arms forcibly stretched out upon the cross-beam; His feet laid upon each other and bound with cords. Thus Isaac once lay on the wood on Mount Moriah. But the voice that then called out of heaven, saying, "**Lay not thine hand upon the lad!**" is silent on Calvary.

The executioners seize the hammer and nails. But who can bear to look upon what further occurs! The horrible nails from the forge of hell, yet foreseen in the sanctuary of eternity, are placed on the hands and feet of the righteous Jesus, and the heavy strokes of the hammer fall. Dost thou hear the sound? They thunder on thy heart, testifying in horrible language of thy sin, and at the same time of the wrath of Almighty God.

O how many sleepers have awakened from their sleep of death under the echo of those strokes, and have escaped from Satan's snare! Awake also thou that art asleep in sin, and rouse thyself likewise thou who art lulling thyself in carnal security! How many a proud and haughty heart has been broken into salutary repentance by those strokes!

O why does not thy heart also break? For know that thou didst aid in swinging those hammers; and that the most crying and impious act which the world ever committed is charged to thy account.

See, the nails have penetrated through, and from both hands and feet gushes forth the blood of the Holy One. These nails have rent the rock of salvation for us, that it may pour forth the water of life; have reft the heavenly bush of balm that it may send forth its perfume.

Yes, they have pierced the hand-writing that was against us, and have nailed it to the tree; and by wounding the Just One, have penetrated through the head of the old serpent.

O let no one be deceived with respect to Him who was thus nailed to the cross! Those pierced hands bless more powerfully than while they moved freely and unfettered. They are the hands of a wonderful Architect who is building the frame of an eternal Church - yea, they are the hands of a Hero, which take from the strong man all his spoil. And believe me, there is no help or salvation, save in these hands; and these bleeding feet tread more powerfully than when no fetters restrained their steps.

Nothing springs or blooms in the world, except beneath the prints of these feet. The most dreadful deed is done, and the prophetic words of the Psalm, "**They pierced my hands and my feet,**" have received their fulfillment.

The foot of the cross is then brought near to the hole dug for it; powerful men seize the rope attached to the top of it, and begin to draw, and the cross, with its victim, elevates itself and rises to its height. Thus the earth rejects the Prince of Life from its surface, and, as it seems, heaven also refuses Him. But we will let the curtain drop over these horrors. Thank God! in that scene of suffering the Sun of Grace rises over a sinful world, and the Lion of Judah ascends into the region of the spirits that have the power of the air in order, in a mysterious conflict, eternally to disarm them on our behalf.

Look what a spectacle now presents itself!

The moment the cross is elevated to its height, a crimson stream falls from the wounds of the crucified Jesus. This is His legacy to His Church. We render Him thanks for such a bequest. It falls upon spiritual deserts, and they blossom as the rose. We sprinkle it upon the door-posts of our hearts, and are secure against destroyers and avenging angels. Where this rain falls, the gardens of God spring up, lilies bloom, and what was black becomes white in the purifying stream, and what was polluted becomes pure as the light of the sun. There is no possibility of flourishing without it, no growth nor verdure, but every where desolation, barrenness, and death.

There stands the mysterious cross - a rock against which the very waves of the curse break. He who so mercifully engaged to direct this judgment against Himself hangs yonder in profound darkness. Still He remains the Morning Star, announcing an eternal Sabbath to the world.

Though rejected by heaven and earth, yet He forms the connecting link between them both, and the Mediator of their eternal and renewed amity.

Ah see! His bleeding arms are extended wide; He stretches them out to every sinner.

His hands point to the east and west; for He shall gather His children from the ends of the earth.

The top of the cross is directed toward the sky; far above the world will its effects extend.

Its foot is fixed in the earth; the cross becomes a wondrous tree, from which we reap the fruit of an eternal reconciliation.

O, nothing more is requisite, than that God should grant us penitential tears, and then, by means of the Holy Spirit, show us the Saviour suffering on the cross. We then escape from all earthly care and sorrow, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

For our justification in His sight, nothing more is requisite than that, in the consciousness of our utter helplessness, we lay hold on the horns of that altar which is sprinkled with the blood that **“speaketh better things than that of Abel.”**

And the Man of Sorrows displays to us the fullness of His treasures, and bestows upon us, in a superabundant degree, the blessing of the patriarch Jacob on his son Joseph:- **“The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.”**

There stands erected the standard of the new covenant, which, when it is understood, spreads terror around it no less than delight, and produces lamentation no less than joy and rejoicing. It stands to this day, and will stand forever. And wherever it is displayed, it is surrounded by powerful manifestations and miraculous effects. Look how the missionary fields become verdant, and a spring-time of the Spirit extends itself over the heathen deserts! Hark how the harps of peace resound from the isles of the sea; and behold how, between the icebergs of the north, the hearts begin to glow with the fire of divine love! From whence these changes? these resurrection-wonders? From whence this shaking in the valley of dry bones? The cross is carried through the land, and beneath its shade the soil becomes verdant and the dead revive.

“I am crucified with Christ,” exclaims the apostle, and by these words points out the entire fruit which the cross bears for all believers. His meaning is, “They are not His sins, for which the curse is there endured, but mine; for He who thus expires on the cross, dies for me. Christ pays and suffers in my stead.” But that of which Paul boasts is the property of us all, if by the living bond of faith and love we are become one with the crucified Jesus. We are likewise exalted to fellowship with the cross of Christ in the sense also that our corrupt nature is condemned to death, our old man, with his affections and lusts. We see the cross of Calvary unfold its full and peace-bestowing radiance. It arches itself, like a rainbow, over our darkness, and precedes us on our path of sorrow like a pillar of fire. O that its serene light might always shine upon our path through this vale of tears, and as the tree of liberty and of life, strike deep its roots into our souls! Apprehended by faith, may it shed its heavenly fruit into our lap, and warm and expand our hearts and minds beneath its shade!

~ end of chapter 41 ~

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