

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR
Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“PROPHECY UNTO US, THOU CHRIST!”

THE SENTENCE is passed upon Jesus. Its import is nothing less than death to the Accused. The judicial assembly, after its first sitting, which began during the night, has been adjourned for a short time, amid wild and triumphant uproar. Meanwhile the divine Sufferer is given up to the reckless band of officers and spearmen, who shamefully ill-treat Him, and they do so the more boldly, because it is done with the assent of their superiors.

Jesus is now in their power, and He must dearly pay the penalty of His conduct. “But why must He suffer? What has He ever done to offend them?”

O how much, notwithstanding His best intentions! Did He not, in His own sacred Person hold up to them a mirror, which presented to them the dark image of their own ungodliness? - and such treatment did not please them. Was not an evident proof afforded, by His brilliant example, that they were going the wrong road? - and convictions of this kind cut them to the heart. By His calling upon them to be reconciled unto God, had He not plainly told them to their face that they had hitherto lived estranged from God? Did He not repeatedly tell them that a new birth was an indispensable condition attached to the entering into the kingdom of heaven? - and what else were they to understand from this than that in their present state they were in danger of perishing? - but who likes to hear of such things?

It was thus that a mass of rage and vexation had by degrees accumulated within them. A horrible state, it is true, but one which only testifies for Jesus. Believe me, the adversaries of the Lord and His Word among us are, for the most part, like a wounded stag flying from the hunters. They feel that the teachings of Christ destroy their false peace, condemn their carnality, and demand the sacrifice of their idols; and hence they are averse to and incensed against Him even to blasphemy.

They joyfully greet every attempt which tends to degrade Jesus to a mere human Rabbi; for all their efforts are directed solely to escape from the obligations they lie under to Him. Almost in every case where enmity against Christ is manifested, it may be traced to these corrupt motives. The Christian religion disturbs and awakens the conscience; hence their hatred and animosity to it.

Before we approach the revolting scene in the courtyard of the high priest's palace, let us again call to mind who it is we have before us in the individual thus ill-treated. We are about to witness unheard-of outrages, at which the rocks might rend with horror. If the Person to whom our eyes are directed had been only an earthly dignitary, even then the contrast of his dreadful fate with his exalted position would greatly horrify us, and we should be unable to refrain from calling out, "You go too far; cease your ill-treatment; men whom the Lord places in such high positions ought not to be treated in so disgraceful a manner!"

But here, as you know, is a greater than any human potentate.

- It is upon the King of kings and Lord of lords, in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, that the recreants trample with their dirty feet.
- It is in the face of Eternal Love that they spit.
- It is the Source of Life whom they smite with their fists,
- It is He whom the heavens adore that they insult with their venomous tongues, which are set on fire of hell.

Yes, it was upon Him that all this was inflicted, who had just before affirmed on oath, in the full consciousness of His divine dignity, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God and who had afterward added, "**I say unto you that hereafter ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.**"

It is, therefore, a monstrous spectacle which is presented to our view.

The world never afterward beheld anything similar. Everyone must be conscious that Christ freely and voluntarily gave Himself up to the horrible treatment He experienced; and the idea of One who was overcome and yielded to superior power, must be wholly excluded.

He who was thus covered with insult was neither weaker nor less powerful than at the moment when, with a single word, He overthrew the whole company of His adversaries. Though He may seem to be nothing but a broken reed and a worm trodden under foot, yet the sword of Omnipotence is not the less girded upon Him, nor the bow of His strength broken. What but a single word from Him was requisite, and the murderous band would have lain annihilated at His feet? But He did not make use of His power. He suffered voluntarily. It is with His own consent that He is plunged into these depths of horror.

Imagine, therefore, the magnitude of the purposes which lie at the basis of this resignation of the Holy One of Israel. The sufferings of Jesus as such, compel us to admit their atoning signification.

Let us come nearer to the scene.

The Holy One appears in this sinful world. Scarcely does He show Himself than mankind act toward Him as if they were hyenas and devils. To such a degree is heavenly purity become odious to them, and that which is divinely reverent, abominable! Alas! what is done to Thee, Thou who art fairer than the children of men! How is Thy benignant countenance disfigured!

One would gladly close one's eyes to such a spectacle. Hast Thou merited this at our hands, O Eternal Love? Is this the due reward for Thy loving-kindness? And yet, however much Thou art insulted, Thou wilt not forsake us, till Thou has rescued us from the curse, even though it should cost Thee Thy life.

O what is left for us but to sink down in the dust, to cover our faces, and to melt into glowing tears of penitence and thankfulness!

Look what occurs! When sentence is pronounced upon a malefactor, and the judicial decision is read, a solemn silence usually pervades the auditory, and a feeling of solemnity takes possession of them. Everyone feels the majesty of the law, which, whenever transgressed, justly demands satisfaction.

In the condemnation of Jesus, however, no feelings of this nature appear to have been excited in the reprobate host of His adversaries. Scarcely has the word "Guilty" been uttered, when they fall upon Him; and, O, what revolting scenes are now unfolded to our view! Alas! what will become of our Lord and Master!

They have now got Him among them, and they load Him, first of all, with the vilest execrations and insults. But they are not satisfied with thus heaping obloquy upon Him. They smite Him with their hands. But even this does not satisfy their thirst for revenge. He must feel more painfully still how utterly He is despised. They open their mouths against Him, and, horrible to relate! they spit upon His sacred face. Nor is their rage yet cooled, nor their satanic inventions exhausted.

The reprobates seek for some new outrage, and it soon occurs to them. They have heard how the object of their ill-usage had just before solemnly asserted in the council-chamber, that He was Christ, the Son of the living God, and for this He must now be especially punished. The arrows of their bitterest ridicule are therefore directed against His Messiahship, and particularly against His prophetic office. They bind the eyes of the patient Sufferer with a cloth, then smite Him with their fists, and exclaim, amid peals of sneering laughter, "**Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who it he that smote thee!**"

But I will let the curtain drop. Who can longer contemplate such a scene? It is too appalling! What infernal wickedness meets our view! And from whence does it proceed? From the human heart. But how could a race that is capable of such things be received into the favor of God, without an atonement and a Mediator?

What would have become of the glory of His justice and holiness, if He had suffered such degenerate beings to be spared without a Satisfaction? Nor ought you to regard the perpetrators of the outrages we have been describing, as depraved above all others.

According to its inmost being, every natural human heart is alike. Even those who refuse to hear of redemption and atonement, do not fail, unconsciously and involuntarily, to condemn human nature, every moment, in the most grievous manner.

Hear their language,

- "Friendship lasts only during prosperity."

- "Every man has his price."

- "In the misfortunes of our best friends we find something that does not displease us."

Such are the expressions which are constantly flowing from the lips of the men of the world. How completely do they thereby pronounce the human heart to be depraved and corrupt!

But to return to the question - **"Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee?"**

From the lips by which these words were uttered, they were only blasphemous ridicule and a burst of depravity. But in themselves, and apart from the feeling which accompanied them, they appear in the form of a question of the first importance; and he that has found the right answer to it, is acquainted with the groundwork of our salvation and entire redemption. Many have impiously repeated the inquiry of the reprobate troop, and have thought within themselves, "How does He know whether we honor Him, or trample upon Him? Where is He to be found? Eighteen centuries ago, He went the way of all flesh, and the dead rest in their graves."

By acting thus, they have, as far as they are concerned, again bound His eyes, and sneeringly said to Him, "Prophecy, if thou art still alive, and hearest, and seest, who it is that smote thee!"

And how many of those who now say, "Who is Jesus, that I should be afraid of Him, or even humble myself before Him?" when once He replies to them, will call upon the rocks to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them, that they may be hidden from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb!

O let no one suppose that the Judge of the world will suffer Himself to be mocked with impunity. Rather let them **"kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little."**

"Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, who is he that smote thee!"

The mockers received no reply to this question. Jesus was silent. But we may give a different turn to the inquiry, and the answer will prove consolatory. Let those who are earnestly seeking salvation, and the contrite in heart, humbly inquire, "Who it was that smote the Lord?" and they will receive a satisfactory reply. At first, indeed, it will alarm them; for it will be, "not those miscreants; but it is thou who hast made Me to suffer with thy sins, and wearied Me with thy iniquities. For thy transgressions was I smitten."

And when He Himself prophesies this to you by His Spirit - how evident it will then become to you; how will you humble yourselves in the dust before Him; how the wish will then depart to lay the blame upon Caiaphas, Annas, and the spearmen; how vitally are you persuaded that they were only your representatives, and how will you hang down your heads, and learn to smite upon your breasts with the publican! How will you tremble for your souls, and earnestly seek for salvation and a Mediator!

But know that this is only half the answer to your question.

Continue to ask, and it will not be long before a gracious message will be delivered you. This will be its import:

“The hand that smote Me would have crushed you. The curse fell upon Me which was destined for you. I drank the cup of wrath which your sins had filled. I drank it, that it might be replenished for you with everlasting mercy.”

And when this conviction pervades you, do not doubt that it is really from Him. **“God made him to be sin for us;” “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having been made a curse for us.”**

You now know who it is that smote the Saviour, and that it was the sin of each of us.

Does not this clearly appear from the circumstances of our Lord’s passion themselves? Does it not seem strange to you that Jesus acted so patiently, meekly, and resignedly under such barbarous treatment? Is it not wonderful that His tormentors were suffered to go unpunished?

Korah and his company had no sooner rebelliously attacked Aaron’s priestly dignity, than the Lord rent the ground beneath their feet, and sent them down quick into the pit. Uzzah was guilty of a seemingly slight irreverence toward the ark, and the anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and smote him, so that he fell dead on the ground. But how much more is there here than the ark and Aaron the priest! Here they trample the Son of God in the mire, and the Judge of quick and dead is mute. Rightly understood, it is God Himself who smites the Sufferer, on whom the chastisement of our peace was laid; and what He endures are the strokes of that sword, to which The Lord said, **“Awake, against my Shepherd and the man that is my fellow.”** They fall upon Him, that we sinners might be forever exonerated.

Such is the solution of this great mystery, and the complete answer to the question, **“Who is he smote thee, thou Christ?”** No sooner does the light of a Propitiation shine upon the obscurity of the events of the passion than all is cleared up, and the deepest mysteries are unsealed.

~ end of chapter 23 ~

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