

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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PART ONE

THE OUTER COURT

CHAPTER ONE

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

THE HISTORY OF OUR Saviour's passion is about to display before us its bleeding mysteries and its awful vicarious scenes. The "**Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**" approaches the altar of burnt-offering. Bonds, the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, present themselves to our view in the distance; and the "seven words" uttered by JESUS on the cross, sound in our ears, like the funeral knell of the kingdom of Satan, and like intimations of liberty and joy to the sinful race of man.

O what wonders are we about to approach in our meditations! From the most appalling scene the world ever witnessed, a paradise of peace springs forth. From the most ignominious sufferings, we see the most glorious triumph emerge; and from the most dreadful of deaths, a divine and never-fading life arise!

May devotion, humbleness of mind, and child-like faith accompany us in our meditations, and penitential tears become our eye-salve! But do Thou, who hast the key of David, unlock for us the gates to the sanctuary of Thy sacred passion, and in the awful scenes of Thy sufferings, enable us to discover the mystery of our eternal redemption!

Almost immediately after our blessed Lord had performed perhaps the most stupendous of His miracles, in raising Lazarus from the grave, after he had been dead four days, we are informed by the Evangelist that "**the chief priests and the Pharisees took counsel together to put him to death.**"

What a humbling view does this circumstance give us of the depravity of human nature as exemplified in these men, who, while obliged to confess the fact of the miracles which JESUS wrought, not only refused to accept Him as the Messiah, but even conspired together to rid themselves of Him by condemning Him to death! "**Neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.**"

“Jesus therefore,” we are told, **“walked no more openly among the Jews, but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples.”** But **“when the time was come that he should be received up, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.”**

With this object in view, the Lord takes His twelve disciples aside. He has matters of importance to disclose to them. Destined, as they were, to lay the foundations of His Church, they soon perceive His intention, and hang upon His lips with increasing eagerness. They probably reckon on some cheering intelligence, and expect to hear that the triumphant development of His kingdom is at hand. But what short-sightedness and simplicity do they display!

O the mighty chasm which intervenes between their thoughts and God’s thoughts! As though the restoration of fallen man were a thing of such easy accomplishment! As if sin had caused only a transient disturbance in the relations between God and man, and occasioned a breach which could be healed, either by a voluntary declaration of mercy from on high, or by a confession of sin on the part of the fallen!

The Lord opens His mouth, and to the astonishment of the disciples, announces to them in plain terms His approaching sufferings, and at the same time His subsequent victory. **“Behold,”** says He, **“we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.”**

Observe, first of all, how these words convey our Lord’s fixed resolution. His heart, under the impulse of love, is firmly and immutably bent on taking the way to the cross. You well remember with what impressive earnestness He rejected the advice of Simon Peter to spare Himself, and not to go up to Jerusalem. **“Get thee behind me, Satan,”** was His reply; **“thou art an offence unto me; for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of man.”**

So evident was it to Him that the sufferings He was going to meet were the express will and counsel of His heavenly Father, that in the contrary advice of His disciple, He could recognize nothing but a temptation from the bottomless pit, and Simon as the unconscious instrument of it.

No affectionate entreaty restrains Him in His course; no menace dictated by hatred deters Him from it. The bloodthirsty council has already assembled at Jerusalem, and is concocting its plan of treachery and murder. But the watchword of JESUS continues to be - **“Behold we go up!”** and though another Red Sea were foaming at His feet, and though a hundred deaths awaited Him, yet the only sentiment of His heart is - **“We go up.”**

For it is His Father’s will, and the path to the great and ardently longed-for aim of the world’s redemption.

O what resignation, what obedience, what love to sinners is here exemplified by our adorable Immanuel!

“Behold,” says our Lord, **“we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished.”**

Here we are informed what was His staff and His stay on the road to His sufferings. He found it in the **“sure word of prophecy,”** in which He read what was recorded of Himself, and the counsel of God respecting Him. And if anyone still requires a definite authority for the divine inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, it is here presented to him.

Christ, the King of Truth, recognizes in the Scriptures nothing less than the infallible record of the revelation of His heavenly Father; He bears it, day and night, on His heart; He decides according to its statutes, as the Canon Law, which puts an end to all strife respecting the vital questions of human life, and directs His steps whithersoever it points the way. It is to Him the infallible guiding-star of His life.

Whether the voice of His heavenly Father is heard direct from heaven, or sounds to Him from this venerable record: it is the same to Him. The one is as important as the other; and He reverently bows to every tittle and iota of it. It is thus His ways are established; and every moment’s experience seals it to Him, that He is actually obeying a divine command. Everything that the Word enjoins becomes reality.

“Certainly,” someone may say, “it ought to strengthen our determination to proceed upon the path prescribed for us by the Word of God, when, like Christ, we are aware that our way through life is not only divinely ordered and superintended, generally speaking, but also when we can survey it, from step to step, in the light of an infallible and divine revelation, even to its glorious termination.” But is not this really the case, if thou hast believingly and sincerely given thyself up to God?

For can there be any situation in which the divine Word, with its counsel, leaves thee at a loss? Is it not also written respecting thee, **“they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing?”** **“We must through much tribulation thou must enter into the kingdom of God.”** But **“when thou passest through the waters . . . they shall not overflow thee; . . . through the fire, . . . neither shall the flame kindle upon thee”** – **“for the Lord is with thee.”**

It may indeed be the case that men will revile and persecute thee; but if thou faithfully endure, thy reward shall be great. The light shall always rise upon thee after the darkness; and after sorrow, joy shall again visit thy threshold. Nor shall anyone be able to snatch thee out of the Lord’s hands; but after having fought the good fight, thou shalt finally receive the crown of righteousness, shalt not see death, but pass from death unto life, and triumph eternally.

Does not all this, and manifold more stand written of thee; and is not therefore thy path pointed out? Mayest thou not also say, in thy measure, with the Lord JESUS, **“Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all shall be accomplished, that stands written by the finger of God, respecting me, a poor sinner, since I am no longer my own, but belong to Christ?”**

O certainly thou mayest say this! How ought we not, therefore, with such a consciousness, to put on a cheerful courage, during our pilgrimage, and feel as if heavenly triumphal music preceded us on our path through life!

My dear readers, let us place a firm reliance on the Word of truth and, in its light, ascend the precipitous road; according to its instructions, proceed forward with firm and steady steps, unmindful of the tumult of the world, and not deviating a hand-breadth from the way prescribed.

Let us meet him who would direct us otherwise, with a voice of thunder, and exclaim, "**Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of man!**" The Almighty will then be favorable to us; we shall then carry the peace of God in our bosoms; and literal accomplishments of the divine promises, which we have taken for our compass, and for a lamp unto our feet, will daily fall upon our path, like lights from heaven.

The Lord's face is toward Jerusalem; and we have already seen for what purpose. His intention is to suffer and to die. O there must be something of immense importance connected with His passion! It appears as the crisis of the work for the accomplishment of which He left His Father's bosom, and came down to earth!

Were this not the case, it would have been tempting God, thus to rush to meet death after having completed His prophetic office in Jerusalem; and the overruling Majesty on high would have exposed His justice to well-founded reproach, in giving up the Holy One, who had fulfilled His commands, to the horrible fate of a malefactor and reprobate. But the Eternal Father had included in His counsels the scourge, the crown of thorns, and the cross, long before the sons of Belial thought of having recourse to these instruments of torture; and all His prophets, however reluctantly, were compelled in spirit to interweave these horrid emblems along with the majestic image of the Messiah, which they portrayed. Thus the Lord could say with profound truth, "**All things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of man shall be accomplished; for he shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on, and they shall scourge him and put him to death.**"

Such were the ingredients which filled the cup that Satan, in accordance with the counsels of eternal wisdom, was to present to the Son of the Most High. These counsels went far, very far beyond all that we understand by martyrdom, chastisement, purification, or trial. The immaculate and righteous Saviour did not require correction as for Himself; and if a purification had been salutary for Him, it needed not to have come upon the Holy One of Israel in the form of such degrading infamy, unheard-of reproach and humiliation, and such unparalleled suffering.

The passion of our Lord has an infinitely more profound significancy; and it requires only a cursory glance at the narrative to discover that this was the case.

Observe what the Evangelist informs us respecting the way and manner in which the twelve received their Master's communication, He states that "**they understood none of these things, and this saying was hidden from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken.**"

How striking is this circumstance! Who can resist inquiring what it was they did not understand? They could not possibly have mistaken what their Master said respecting His suffering and dying at Jerusalem. Yet Luke assures us that “**they understood none of those things, and knew not what it was that was spoken.**”

Is it not obvious that the Evangelist’s meaning is that he who would only apprehend the history of Christ’s sufferings, and regard His passion as a martyrdom, not essentially different from the bloody testimony borne by other saints, does not understand its true signification? We have here an evident reference to an infinitely deeper cause of the tragical termination of our Saviour’s life before us.

It is confessedly true that the eternal Father, by an almighty decree, might have annihilated the fallen race, in which sin had taken root, and thus have put an end to evil. But we were to live and not die. And thus He has not only caused the sin of man to act as a foil for the display of the full radiance of His attributes, and especially of His love, but has also, by the offering up of His Son, provided a means of salvation by which we might attain to a much higher stage of glory and relationship to God than we once possessed in our progenitor, or than we should ever have attained if we had not fallen.

Our fall afforded Him the opportunity of showing that in the destruction of sin He could not only manifest His justice, but also glorify His mercy in remitting and forgiving sin, without infringing upon His righteousness.

We sinned, and were exposed to the curse. The Word that was with God, and was God, then was made flesh. The eternal Son became our brother; took upon Himself our sin, in the way of a mysterious imputation; paid our debt to the majesty of the inviolable law; covered our nakedness with His righteousness; presented us, as those in whose stead He appeared, unblamable and acceptable to the Father; excited the hallelujahs of angels at our exaltation; elevated us to a participation of His own riches, blessedness, and privileges; pitched tents of peace for us around the throne of God; and connected us with Himself by the bonds of eternal gratitude and affection. Such is the edifice which the Almighty reared upon the ruins of sin; and of which the disciples, at that time, had not the remotest idea. In the sequel, they recognized the divine method of salvation and of peace; and how happy were they, subsequently, in the knowledge of this great “**mystery of godliness!**”

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