

# THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### CHRIST BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

THE MORNING BREAKS, and announces the dawn of the most important and momentous of all earthly days. It is Good Friday, that most dreadful accuser of the sinful world, but at the same time, the birthday of its salvation and the dawn of its eternal redemption. It is the day typified by the deliverance of the chosen race out of Egypt, and annually announced to the believing Israelites for upward of a thousand years in the great day of atonement, which was the chief object of their hopes and desires. All the radiations of grace which had ever beamed upon them were only preliminary emanations of this day, which still slept in the lap of a far distant future; and whenever God favorably regarded a sinner, it was solely on the ground of the propitiation by the blood of Christ, which was actually made upon this day.

Notwithstanding the very early hour, the members of the council at Jerusalem are up and in full activity. They are preparing a second examination of Jesus, **“that they might put him to death.”** But have they not already established His guilt, and pronounced sentence against Him? Certainly they have. But yet they are not satisfied, and would gladly find out other and more decisive proofs against Him, than those on which their judgment was founded.

They now meet in their hall of session, which was in one of the buildings of the Temple, in the character of a regular plenary assembly, because their first meeting in the high priest's palace - apart from the absence of several of its members - bore the aspect of being accidental and tumultuous.

The councilor Sanhedrin, was the supreme court of judicature of the later Jews, and consisted of seventy-one members, including the chief priests, elders, and doctors of the law, or scribes, under the presidency of the high priest, which, formed on the model of the seventy elders whom Moses joined with him for the administration of justice during the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, had to judge and decide in all national Jewish, and particularly in ecclesiastical affairs.

Christ, according to Matthew 23:2, regarded this authority as being divinely sanctioned, and submitted without objection to its citation. Before this tribunal Peter subsequently stood as a pretended wonder-worker, and again in company with John, as a deceiver of the people; further, Stephen, as a blasphemer, and Paul, accused of being a false prophet.

We now see our Lord brought a second time before this court.

He is conducted up the hill on which the Temple stands by an armed escort. It is His last passage along that road, and by a remarkable coincidence, it occurs at the same time with the paschal lambs, which are on that day brought to the priests for sacrifice.

What may have been His feelings on this occasion! He certainly thought of the typical journey of Abraham to Mount Moriah, which was now so visibly fulfilled in Him. For Christ, as the anti-type of Isaac, is now proceeding to the altar of God upon the same path which once His human type, led by his father, had trodden for the same purpose.

Christ, indeed, does not say like Abraham's son, "**My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?**" He knows who the Lamb is whom God has provided, and willingly bows to the divine decree. He has to recognize His type not only in Isaac, but also in the ram whose horns were caught in the thicket, and which Abraham, at The Lord's command, took, in order to slay it in the place of his son.

The sitting of the Sanhedrin commences. The accused stands at the bar. He is again asked by the judge, "**Art thou the Christ? tell us!**" as if He had not already plainly told them that He was. But it would seem as if they hesitated to deliver Him up to death, as a deceiver and a blasphemer, on this account, without anything further - nay, as if they involuntarily sought to prolong the affair, because a slight echo of the voice of conscience told them - not, indeed, that He really was what He gave Himself out to be - but that it possibly might be the case.

The Lord opens His mouth; and now mark how the tables are turned, and the accused becomes judge, and His judges the delinquents. "**If I tell you,**" says He, "**ye will not believe; and if I also ask you** (that is, if I were to attempt to convince you by proofs), **ye will not answer me, nor let me go.**"

O how many there are in the present day, to whom these words are applicable!

I do not now refer to people who are entirely indifferent to religion. I mean such as are continually inquiring who Christ is, and would seem to have no rest until they were convinced. But although He is brought before them, first in one form and then in another, still they do not believe.

The Church tells them, but they say, "The Church may err."

What do the contemporaries of Jesus say?

The apostles tell them, as with one voice, "He is the Word that was with God from the beginning, and was God; the brightness of the Father's glory, in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." But to this they reply, "Love is blind, and enthusiasm is visionary."

They will only receive what Jesus says of Himself. And Jesus comes forward and announces Himself, not only as the light of the world, the truth and the life, but as greater than all this - as one with the Father, as being before Abraham, and to whom all power in heaven and earth is given. Do they now believe? They start; but before we are aware, they again slip out by means of a variety of questions, such as, "Did the historians rightly understand Jesus? Are His expressions to be taken literally? Is it possible for Deity to become incarnate?"

They will not believe. This is the solution of the problem.

They are horrified at the thought of being obliged to crucify the idols of their own wisdom and righteousness, as well as the honors and pleasures of the world for the sake of Christ. They see an abyss open between them and the Lord, which threatens to swallow up nothing less than their entire glory and self-sufficiency, and they start back from such a death.

They are still too conscientious to part with Him decidedly, like the Gadarenes, and to say, "**What have we to do with thee?**" but not conscientious enough to give admission to the truth. They rather let the matter rest and come to no decision.

The Lord renews His declaration. The constituted authorities demand it, and He obeys. Besides, it is of importance to Him that the world should know, with certainty, who He was, and whom they crucified. From the summit of the eminence on which the Temple stood, He surveys in spirit the human race and the ages to come. He once more raises the veil from His humble guise, and baring the regal star upon His breast, He says, "**Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.**" A sublime expression, evidently having reference to the remarkable passage in Daniel 7:13: "**One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven.**"

The priests and scribes could not for a moment doubt that by this He declared Himself to be the Messiah promised by the inspired seer, and thus claim divine nature and essentiality.

His prediction concerning His approaching sitting at the right hand of power, or of the Divine Majesty, is nothing less than a decided declaration that He would divide the throne of glory with His heavenly Father, and with Him rule the world in equal perfection of power.

The Sanhedrin, conversant with the language of the prophets, understood the words in this sense. "**Art thou then the Son of God?**" cried they all, as with one voice. "**Ye say that I am,**" replied He, with majestic firmness and composure.

The Lord has repeated His great confession.

The whole assembly rise in indignation and astonishment. One exclaims louder than the other, "**What need we any further witness; for we ourselves have heard it from his own lips?**"

True, they have heard it from His own mouth. This their confession has been recorded in heaven and will, without fail, be brought against them at the day of judgment. Wherewith, then, will they justify their refusing to pay homage to the Lord, seeing that in reality they needed no further witness?

On account of this testimony they condemned Jesus to death, and by so doing, for the confirmation of our faith, only established the fact of the testimony having proceeded from His own lips.

After sentence of death on the divine sufferer has thus been confirmed, the officers approach, in order again to put on His fetters, which had been for the time removed. He willingly offers His hand, that the words of Isaiah might be fulfilled, **“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.”**

He who had just before solemnly asserted His equality with God, with the consent of the whole heavenly world, appears now in fetters like a rebel. How monstrous the contrast, how great the contradiction! But how obvious it is that it is a voluntary act on the Lord’s part; and how clearly do we again read in the soul of the holy Sufferer the words, **“Then I restored that which I took not away!”**

His fetters have contributed to procure our redemption; for Satan would have held us eternally captive had Jesus preferred liberty to bonds. Heart-affecting it is to see that those hands which were only employed in offices of mercy are bound with cords like the hands of a felon, by the very world to which they were extended only in blessing. But God be thanked that He restrained the lightning of His wrath from destroying the rebels when they thus laid hands upon His Holy One! For in those cords which bound the limbs of Jesus, were hidden the fetters which would have forever bound sinners in hell.

The officers have done their task. The whole assembly then breaks up, in order, contrary to custom and etiquette, personally to bring the accused before the governor, and by their appearing in a body, to force from him the confirmation of their sentence of death. Herein was fulfilled the Saviour’s prediction, that He should be delivered unto the Gentiles. This feature in the proceedings belonged to that which was symbolical in the history of His passion. The whole world was to have occasion, in its representatives, to manifest its real position with reference to the Holy One of Israel, and its participation in the guilt and the need of redemption. As regards sin and the curse, we have all fellowship with Israel; as well as in the vocation of grace.

He whom we have seen proceeding bound to the second court of justice, sits now, having long since accomplished His work, at the right hand of the Majesty on high, as keeper of the heavenly blessings which He purchased for us. Let us bow, in humble adoration before Him and not let Him go till He has granted us all the blessed results of His passion.

~ end of chapter 24 ~

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