

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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CHAPTER FIFTY

“FATHER, INTO THY HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT”

WE ARE ENTERING A SANCTUARY. Is there, generally speaking, anything on earth more solemn and affecting than dying moments, in which time and eternity meet each other, and in the silence of which we seem to hear the striking of the hours of another world? What ought we then to feel at a deathbed, such as that we are now to contemplate, in which the Redeemer bows His head and expires! Lift up your eyes.

O what a dying bed has been prepared yonder for the Father's beloved Son! No one wipes the perspiration from His brow. No one cheers Him with the words of life. Whoever left the world more forsaken and involved in deeper shades than He? Yet do not mistake Him. It is not a conflict in which we see Him engaged, but a sacrificial act. He does not yield to death like us, but devotes Himself to it after having previously invested it with the power over His life.

What is death?

For thousands of years, as you know, has the gloomy and universally dreaded thing been in the world and carried on its dreadful work of destruction. It is the fate and destiny of our race. The young creation, as it came forth from the hand of the Almighty, knew not this monster. In consequence of the fall, it entered upon the stage of reality, in order thenceforward, as the king of terrors, to subject everything that breathed to its awful scepter. Our first parents were the first who beheld it display its power and majesty on their beloved Abel. From that moment, death continued its dreadful sway over the earth, dropped its gall into every cup of joy, surrounded every loving bond with the certain prospect that sooner or later the hour of separation and dissolution would arrive.

The payment of the wages of sin is due only from sinners.

The Holy One of Israel had nothing in common with death. What is it, then, that we witness on Calvary? Look up! After having uttered the great and triumphant shout, “**It is finished!**” He again moves His lips to speak. What will follow? A mournful farewell? A painfully faltering out of the words, “My senses forsake me. I succumb, and am going the way of all flesh?”

O not so, Listen! With a loud voice, and the strength and emphasis of One who does not die from weakness, nor dying pays a forced tribute to a mournful necessity; but as One who is Lord over death, and voluntarily yields Himself up to it, He exclaims, "**Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit!**" and after these words, like one whose labor is finished, He bows His bleeding head upon His breast, and resigns His spirit. But before we treat of the mighty results which proceed from His death, let us for a moment immerse ourselves in the consideration of the parting words of the divine Sufferer.

"**Father!**" He begins. He is therefore again conscious of His Father. The first word we hear from His lips on earth was His Father's name, and it is also the last. All His thoughts and deeds, desires and efforts, tended toward His Father and the glorifying of His Name. To accomplish His Father's will was His meat and drink; the love of His Father His delight and bliss; and union with Him the summit of all His hopes and desires. With the heraldic and conquering cry, "**It is finished!**" He turned once more to the world. It was His farewell to earth - a farewell such as beseeemed the Conqueror of death, the Prince of life, the Governor of all things. He then withdrew Himself entirely into connection with His God, and turned His face to Him alone.

"**Father!**" This sound was the utterance of regained and strong filial confidence, but not the exclamation of One who had fully attained to rest in His Father's bosom. We must still regard the words, "**Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit,**" as the war-cry of a Warrior engaged in battle. Hell, which raged around Him, did not give up its cause as lost, but continued to assault Him in every way, and to distress Him; and the act of death cost Him, who was Life, no small effort.

We must, therefore, imagine to ourselves the Saviour's dying exclamation as that of one sorely oppressed, who is struggling to place His soul in a secure asylum, and flees from a horrid pressure into the hands of the Almighty; and that this taking refuge occurs with the peace and assurance of complete victory. The idea does not even remotely present itself to Him, that death could be anything more than a transfer of the spirit into a different sphere of existence. He is exalted, high as heaven, above the miserable human inquiry, "To be or not to be?" He knows that He falls asleep only to awake on the bosom of God; and in this consciousness, in which He already sees the arms of His Father lovingly extended to receive Him, He exclaims, "**Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit!**"

He takes these words from Psalm 31, except that He prefaces them with the word "**Father,**" which gives the appropriate form to His position and dignity, and leaves out the words of the Psalmist which immediately follow, for "**Thou hast redeemed me,**" as not belonging to Him who, as the Redeemer of the world, hung upon the cross. But still how significant it is, that He left the world with a passage of Scripture on His lips! He was completely imbued with the Word of God, and even dying, gives us a hint respecting what ought to be the nourishment of our inner man.

His last cry is uttered. He then inclines His head, after His well and fully-accomplished work, and the most unheard-of event takes place - the Son of the living God becomes a corpse! We stand affected, astonished, and sink in adoration.

Where was the Lord Jesus after His departure from the body? Where else than whither His desires and longing carried Him - in the hands of His Father.

Heaven celebrated His triumph; the music of angelic harps saluted His ears; the just made perfect before the throne shouted their adoring and rejoicing welcome.

But it is undeniable that mysterious passages of Scripture intimate that the Prince of Peace, after having laid aside His earthly body, had by no means concluded His mission. For the Apostle Peter says that Christ went in the Spirit - that is, divested of His bodily personality - **“and preached unto the spirits in person, which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited, in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing”** (I Peter 3:19, 20). And supported by this passage especially, the apostle Paul asserts a descent into hell, **“Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things)”** (Ephesians 4:8-10) immediately after the death of Christ.

But the explanation of this passage requires great caution. If Christ entered the habitations of departed spirits, it was in order to announce His victory to them, as the words in their language expressly intimate. In every case we must be content with not having reached the conclusion of the exposition of these passages; and hence a veil of mystery continues to rest upon the sojourn of Christ during the interval between the moment of His death and that of His reunion with the body, as well as upon the correct and full meaning of the words, **“He descended into the lower parts of the earth.”**

But the reason of Christ's death stands, on the contrary, fully unveiled before us.

Even a superficial consideration suffices to give us at least an idea of the cause of it. It must, first of all, appear extremely striking that an Individual dies who could testify respecting Himself that He was the Resurrection and the Life; who, at the grave of Lazarus, at the bier of the young man of Nain, and at the deathbed of the daughter of Jairus, manifested that He was Lord over death, and who had never committed a single sin by which He had forfeited His life.

Still more does it surprise us that He becomes a prey to death, because according to His own assertion, no one took away His life from Him, and that this Man expires under circumstances which would lead one to suppose that He was a malefactor and a rebel, rejected both by God and the world, rather than a righteous Man, and even a universal Benefactor of mankind.

That He died voluntarily is evident to everyone at first sight.

But for what end did He die this voluntary death?

Was it to give us the example of a heroic departure from the world? By no means. How do the words He spake correspond with such an object? **“I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened until it is accomplished!”**

Was it in order to show us that dying is an easy thing? Stephen has certainly given us an instance of this in his exit from the world, but not the Man whom we hear in the dark valley, exclaiming, **“My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?”**

Many, again, suppose that He died to confirm His doctrine.

But which doctrine did He seal on the cross?

Was it this, that God is with the righteous? or this, that **“the angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him, and delivereth them?”** or this, that **“godliness . . . having promise of the life that now is?”**

I know not what fresh support these truths have found in the circumstances of His death; sooner should we think we found proof in them to the contrary. Besides, no one doubted these truths, so as to require a renewed practical confirmation of them.

If Christ confirmed anything by His death, it was His assertion on oath, with which He answered the high priest’s question, **“Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”** On account of this affirmation, they nailed Him to the cross. But that He continued firmly to abide by it, He testified by His sanguinary death.

The fact that He died as such certainly makes the mystery of His death complete; but the seals of this mystery are opened, and its depths revealed.

Men enlightened from above stand ready to afford us every wished-for elucidation. They draw near to us at the cross, from the times of both the old and new covenant, and their statements illumine, like the candlestick in the temple, the darkness of Calvary. One of the divine heralds heads the phalanx with testifying that Christ **“restored what he took not away.”**

Another exclaims, **“He was wounded for our transgressions, the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.”**

A third, **“Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!”**

A fourth, **“God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin.”**

And again, **“Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us;”** and again, **“Christ hath reconciled us by the body of his flesh, through death;”** and again, **“With one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.”**

And with the testimonies of these messengers of God are combined these of the Lord Himself. For instance, **“The Son of man came to give his life a ransom for many;”** and again, **“Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”** And more especially, the words of the institution of the sacrament of His body and blood, broken and shed for the forgiveness of sins.

But it may be said, "We hear these words, but are they not themselves hieroglyphics which require deciphering?" They are so; and in order to understand them it requires a previous consecration, which however is not imparted by anointing or laying on of hands in temples of human erection, but in the privacy of the closet, amid grief and tears. Rouse yourselves, therefore, from your delusions, become conscious of your need of reconciliation and redemption, and in a short time, the words you have just read will burn like flaming torches before you. You will then behold in the Man of Sorrows, the Mediator between God and you, and rejoicingly embrace in His death, the Sacrifice that outweighed all your guilt and justified you forever in the sight of God.

"Father, into thy hands I commit my Spirit!" O what did He not commit to His Father's hands when uttering these words! **"And being made perfect,"** writes the apostle, **"he became the author of salvation to all them that obey him"** (Hebrews 5:9). It was therefore necessary that He Himself should be perfected as righteous, by fulfilling the whole law; as holy, by victoriously overcoming every temptation; as Surety, by the payment of all our debts; and as Mediator and Reconciler, by emptying the whole of the cup of curse allotted to us. In all these respects He was perfected the moment He expired, and thus He deposited in His Father's hands, along with His spiritual personality, the basis of the new world, yea, His redeemed Church itself, as purified in His blood, arrayed in His righteousness, a pleasing and acceptable offering in the sight of God.

Now, if we are obedient to the Son of His love, we know that there is a city of refuge for us in every supposable case. Into whatever distress we may fall, we need not be anxious as to its termination. If the world persecutes, or Satan tempts us, if death alarms us, or anything else excites apprehension, we courageously exclaim, while relying on the merits of Immanuel, **"Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee."** And we are sure that this high and lofty asylum is every moment open to receive and shelter us.

O the incomparable privileges which are granted us in Christ!

Let us make good use of them, and cover the feet of Him, who acquired them for us, with reverential kisses. Let us peacefully go on our way, in the rainbow light which beams upon us from Calvary, and tune the strings of our hearts to gratitude and devoted love.

~ end of chapter 50 ~

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