

[R2473 : page 125]

## "HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS."

– JUNE 4. – JOHN 19:17-30. –

"The Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

– Gal. 2:20.

CRUCIFIXION was the horrible method of execution in olden times for the vilest of criminals – its severity being intended to intimidate and deter evil-doers, rather than as a gratification of cruel sentiments. Farrar says of it: –

"Death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death *can* have of the horrible and ghastly – dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds – all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. Such was the death to which Christ was doomed."

As already noted, the envious and murderous chief priests and doctors of Judaism desired just such a public denunciation of the great Teacher who so fearlessly had exposed their hypocrisies and inconsistencies, and who was fast making an impression upon the common people. For them to have stoned him to death as a blasphemer they probably feared would leave him a martyr in the eyes of many, while to have him publicly executed as a criminal, sentenced by the Sanhedrin and executed by the highest civil power in the world, would, they hoped, brand Jesus, his teachings and his followers, forever with infamy. We may imagine, therefore, how their evil hearts exulted, when finally they had coerced Pilate into signing the warrant for the execution of Jesus.

According to Mark's account (15:25) the death-warrant was signed by Pilate about nine o'clock in the morning – the trial of Jesus, and Pilate's various attempts to secure his release from his enemies, having occupied three hours. At once they started, the two robbers bearing their crosses, and Jesus bearing his cross, taking the place of Barrabas, who was to have been executed, but who was released. It was the custom in olden times to compel the convicts to bear the instruments of their own torture. Nor were the crosses so large and heavy as they are generally illustrated in modern paintings. On the contrary, the evidence is that the feet of the crucified were usually only twelve to eighteen inches from the ground. Altho small, these crosses constituted a good burden for a reasonably strong man; but our Lord, after passing through his Gethsemane experiences and the night of buffeting and scourging, and his further scourging by Pilate's orders, was sick, exhausted, weak, sore. Apparently even the hardened soldiers took pity upon him, and meeting Simon the Cyrenian on the way, they compelled him to relieve Jesus.

We know nothing respecting Simon, except that Mark relates that he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, which gives the suggestion that these, his two sons, may subsequently have become the followers of Jesus and well known amongst the disciples. In any event Simon himself enjoyed a great privilege which thousands since have almost envied. How the apostles, Peter, James and John and others, must have regretted the fearfulness of heart which kept them all at a distance, and hindered them from proffering their aid to the Master in his trying hour! John, we know, was not far off; probably the others were near also; but what an opportunity they missed!

And very similar opportunities are still with us all – opportunities to serve the Christ – opportunities for serving the members of the body of Christ. As everyone who follows the Master's footsteps must needs have some Gethsemane experiences, so also each must have a taste at least of all the Master's experiences. Let us not forget, then, to look about us for opportunities for serving the "brethren," the "little

ones," the [R2473 : page 126] members of the body of Christ. Let each be careful not to add to the reproaches that must fall upon all the followers of the Lamb, but on the contrary to offer words of sympathy, and to help bear each other's crosses, difficulties and trials by the way. Thus can we best show to our Lord and Head how we would have appreciated the opportunity of helping him bear his cross on the way to Calvary.

The place of crucifixion was called Golgotha, the Hebrew word signifying a skull, the Latin name for a skull being Calvary. This name was given to the locality probably because the general contour of the hill, which was just outside of Jerusalem, closely resembles a skull when viewed at a distance. It was on the way to this place, Golgotha, Calvary, that some of the charitable women of Jerusalem, according to their general custom, offered the condemned ones sour wine mixed with bitter myrrh – a draught which had a tendency to stupefy the nerves, thus rendering the execution the less agonizing. The two robbers quite probably drank of the potion, but Mark (15:23) declares that our Lord refused it – having learned that his experiences were the Father's will, he would do nothing whatever to hinder himself from receiving them to the full.

Probably Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, the mother of James and John, and Salome, the wife of Cleophas (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40) and others of the friends of Jesus, by this time gained courage and mingled with the women who offered the wine and myrrh, so that Luke says, "There followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him. But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children." – Luke 23:27,28.

Thus, and with other words recorded, our Lord foreshadowed the great time of trouble coming upon the Jewish nation. By the expression, "If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done

in the dry?" he implies that, altho the nation of Israel had been given up only five days previously, when he exclaimed, "Your house is left unto you desolate," if their rulers could sanction such injustice and lawlessness while their greenness, freshness and religious vitality remained, what might be expected in the future, after the religious vitality had dried out and the nation as a whole had become ready for the great "burning" of their day of trouble, which was designed to, and had been prophesied should, utterly consume their polity. And how literally our Lord's prophecy was fulfilled: Josephus, without a thought of corroborating this testimony, tells us with explicitness of detail of the terrible sufferings which came upon the women and children during the great time of trouble which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem, A.D. 70.

When we reflect upon the prophecy, "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12), and then consider the terrible persistency with which the leading Jews pursued the dear Redeemer to secure his execution, it furnishes us fresh evidence of divine foreknowledge which, without interfering with the free moral agency of any man, is nevertheless working all things according to the counsel of God's will. We see afresh how God causes the wrath of man to praise him, and to testify to his wisdom and foreknowledge.

It was customary to have four soldiers attend each prisoner to execution; foremost went one who bore a white board on which was written the crime for which the prisoner was to be executed, and which was fastened above his head on the cross; then followed three soldiers with the hammer and nails, etc., and these all were under the command of a captain or centurion. The board placed above Jesus, on the cross, declared him to be the King of the Jews, and was written in three languages – in Hebrew, the language of the country, in Greek, because it was the language of the visitors and of the educated from all quarters, and in Latin, because it was the language of the empire and of the soldiers. There is a slight difference in the statements of the different Evangelists respecting the words used on this tablet,

which may be accounted for by supposing that the words differed slightly in the different languages, and that the Evangelists quoted from the different originals.

Little did Pilate comprehend the great truth which he set before the world in the words, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Few yet realize the truth of this statement that Jesus is a King; comparatively few have yet rendered him allegiance, bowing the knee of their hearts in sincerity and truth: and yet so surely as the Lord has spoken it, the time is coming when every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess him Lord, Master, King, to the glory of God the Father. And to this end it shall come to pass that after full knowledge of the matter has been given to all, he that will not obey this Prophet shall be cut off from among the people in the Second Death. (Acts 3:23.) He was indeed rejected of the Jews, but nevertheless the full elect number for the twelve tribes of Israelites indeed shall yet be found, who, as the Seed of Abraham, shall accept Messiah as King and, faithfully serving him in the present life, and laying down their lives in his service and for the brethren, shall be accepted of him as joint-heirs in his Kingdom. Since there were not enough of the natural Israelites to complete these twelve tribes of Israelites indeed, God is completing the number by adoptions from amongst the Gentiles during the past **[R2473 : page 127]** eighteen centuries. Ultimately the entire number shall be completed. – Rev. 7:4-8.

The Jewish Doctors of Divinity were willing enough to have Jesus condemned as the King of the Jews, but were quite unwilling to have this sentence publicly recorded, and thus to imply that they had so feared his claim and influence as to seek his death. Pilate's refusal **[R2474 : page 127]** to amend the charge was a just one; if there was no merit in the claim, why should they have feared him, and why should he have been crucified? If there was enough merit in the claim to lead to his crucifixion, the matter should be plainly stated.

The division of the spoil was customary at every crucifixion, and gave evidence of the indifference and hard-heartedness of the soldiers in the presence of suffering. The raiment divided consisted of headdress, outer robe, girdle and sandals; the garment here called a "coat" and "vesture" was an undergarment which reached from the neck to the feet. It was evidently of fine quality and texture, as indicated by the fact that it was woven throughout, seamless. The casting of lots for this robe marked the fulfilment of a prophecy to which John calls attention. (Psa. 22:18.) The seamless robe appears to symbolize the righteousness of Christ, which can be appropriated only as a whole; it is of one piece, and may not be marred. Whoever may get it, gets a most valuable robe, and whoever may fail to get it, fails to obtain the righteousness which is of God in Christ. But not by lot or accident or chance does this robe come to the Lord's people. As the scriptures clearly point out, it is obtained only through the exercise of faith, and held only by the obedience of faith. We might perhaps consider it a symbol of the wedding-garment which falls to the lot of one class only, a little flock, who through faith and perseverance shall inherit the Kingdom as members of the body of Christ, covered by his seamless and spotless robe of righteousness.

The Apostle John had grown bolder as the day advanced, and while our Lord was crucified he drew near and was within speaking distance – quite possibly encouraged by seeing "the wife of Cleophas," who is supposed to have been a relative. It was a sorrowful gathering for these whose hearts went out with sympathy for the Master whom they loved but were powerless to comfort or relieve. They were weeping and sorrowing while others jeered and taunted, saying, "If thou be Messiah, come down from the cross" – thinking doubtless that our Lord's crucifixion by his enemies was the best possible proof that his claim to Messiahship was a fraudulent one, – proving that he was an impostor.

With the members of the body of Christ it has been true at times also that the Father has permitted experiences to come to them in such

manner as might imply that they did not have his favor, and were really impostors. But as the true disciples had a heart-union with the Lord, which outward circumstances and misfortunes could not break, a love which adversity could not chill, so with all his "brethren," those who are in heart-harmony, in oneness of spirit, will be found faithful under the most trying circumstances and adversities, because they have one spirit, a spirit of love for the brethren, by which they are enabled to identify one another as members of the one body.

How it gives us an insight into our Lord's sympathetic nature, to find him thinking in the interest of others at the very time when he himself is overwhelmed in trouble! His own agony did not hinder him from thinking of his mother, and making provision for her comfort, commending her to the care of the loving disciple John. We thus see exemplified in the Master the teaching of the Scriptures that each should seek to make provision for his own dependent ones and, as the Apostle says, "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." (1 Tim. 5:8.) "*The faith*" includes thoughts of love, sympathy, interest and care for others, especially for them of the household of faith. We note the choice of John: it was doubtless because, first of all, of his loving tender disposition; secondly, his zeal for the Lord and the truth, and thirdly, his courage in pressing near to be with his dying Master in his closing hours, at the risk of his own life. Let us note these characteristics, as being those which the Lord approves, that noting them we may cultivate them in ourselves, and be granted special opportunities for service by this same Master.

It was about the close of our Lord's agony that he said, "I thirst," and this gave opportunity for the fulfilment of the prophecy which declared, "They gave me vinegar to drink." (Psa. 69:21.) This was not the ordinary vinegar, but more properly sour wine, the common, cheap drink of the soldiers. The sponge filled with the sour wine, and reached up to our Lord's mouth on a hyssop branch, served to moisten

his lips and tongue, and was evidently intended as an act of kindness, mercy.

The different accounts give altogether what are known as "The seven words on the cross."

The first word from the cross: "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34.) While these words undoubtedly represent truly our Lord's sentiments as respected his enemies, nevertheless it is proper here to remark that the oldest Greek MSS. do not contain these words.

The second word from the cross: Our Lord's message to the robber, "Verily I say to thee to-day, – Thou shalt be with me in Paradise." – Luke 23:43. [**R2474 : page 128**]

The third word from the cross: "Woman, behold thy son!...Behold thy mother!"

The fourth word from the cross: "My God! my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34.) Of this expression a noted theologian has said, "In the entire Bible there is no other sentence so difficult to explain." Yet the meaning of this, and the reason for it, are very easily seen when once we have the correct view of the ransom. From this standpoint we see that the Logos became a man, "was made flesh," in order that he by the grace of God might taste death for every man. (Heb. 2:9.) We see also that the death penalty upon father Adam was the one which Jesus must experience in order to the satisfaction of Justice and the release of Adam and those who came under condemnation in and through Adam. As the penalty against Adam was death in the fullest and most complete sense, so Christ died for our sins, suffering the Just for the unjust, that he might release us from the death penalty and make possible a resurrection of the dead. As the penalty against Adam included his isolation from the Father as a condemned rebel, so it was necessary that our Lord Jesus, in taking



Adam's place, should experience (if only for a short time) the full meaning of a sinner's *separation from God*.

Very mercifully, the Father did not permit this feature of Adam's penalty to rest upon our Redeemer throughout the entire period of his sacrificial ministry, but only at its very close. It was the fact of his communion with the Father that permitted Jesus to pass through all the trying experiences of that day and the preceding night with such great courage, but now, when the Father's sustaining grace and fellowship and communion of spirit with him were withdrawn, and our Redeemer, with all his fine sensibilities, was utterly bereft of solace from his dearest friend, it led his breaking heart to cry out these words of anguish. Evidently it had been hidden from him up to this time that he must suffer this phase of the punishment of Adam's transgression.

The fifth word from the cross: "I thirst," we have already considered.

The sixth word from the cross: "It is finished," suggests to us that our Lord's earthly mission had been accomplished. He came to die, to redeem the death-condemned race of Adam, to purchase it with his own precious blood, his life. He had consecrated himself to this work in harmony with the Father's plan, and with his dying breath, expiring, he could say that he had finished the work which the Father had given him to do. How it rejoices us to know that our dear Redeemer did complete the work, that he did not resent the taunts of those who said, "If thou be Messiah, come down from the cross;" "Save thyself!" We rejoice to think that since the great sacrifice has been *finished* (and especially in view of the fact that the Heavenly Father subsequently declared that it was finished acceptably), we may realize that there is now, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. – Rom. 8:1.

But altho the sin-offering was finished eighteen hundred years ago by the sacrifice of our Lord, the Lamb of God, there is another

part that is not yet finished; but in harmony with the divine plan our Lord is waiting for the Church, which is his body, to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." (Col. 1:24.) And looking all about us, in the light of the Lord's Word, we may say that this work is almost finished too. Very soon the last member of the body of Christ will have suffered with the Head for righteousness' sake: then the entire work of sacrifice apportioned for this Gospel age, or Day of Atonement, will be ended, and the Millennial age of glory and blessing, ruling and uplifting, will begin; ushering in for the world of mankind the great blessing, the ***purchase-price of which was finished at Calvary.*** Let each dear follower in the Master's footsteps keep patiently and perseveringly on in the way of self-denial until his course shall be finished – until the Master shall say, It is enough; "Well done, good and faithful servant. Thou has been faithful over a few things; I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." – Matt. 25:21.

The seventh word from the cross: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." (Luke 23:46.) These our Lord's last words were a quotation from the Scriptures. (Psa. 31:5.) In other words, it had already been declared of him that thus he would commend himself to the Father's grace and truth. Our Lord was finishing laying down his human life a ransom **[R2475 : page 128]** for many sinners, but the Father had promised him a new life on a higher plane, as a reward for his faith, obedience and sacrifice. This new life, or life as a "new creature" was reckoned as begun at the time of our Lord's baptism when he received the holy Spirit; this new life was reckoned as continuing and growing during the years of his ministry while he was daily dying according to the flesh; the outward man was perishing, but the inward new creature was being renewed day by day. Now the outward man was about to cease entirely – fully surrendered, the sacrifice finished.

Our Lord's interest in and hope for a future life looked forward, in harmony with the Father's promise, to the new or resurrection life;

the new mind or spirit reckoned as begun at the moment of his baptism and consecration, having the divine promise of being perfected in a resurrection, in a spirit-body suitable for and in harmony with the new mind, the new will. But this change could not take place instantly: the divine law had arranged that not until the third day could he be quickened as the new creature of spiritual body. He must take this by faith; no one had ever passed this way before: yet with full confidence our dear Redeemer looked up to the Father, and full of faith declared that he committed all of life and all of these blessed hopes for the future to the Father's love and to the Father's power, – to be provided in harmony with the Father's plan and Word. And so must we, as followers in our Master's footsteps, look forward with faith, and in our dying hour commit all our interests to the keeping of him who has manifested his love for us, not only in the gift of his Son as our Redeemer, but all our journey through, – in his providential care, as well as in the exceeding great and precious promises which go before us and surround us and give us strength, comfort and assurance.

-----