

## THE GREATEST EVENT OF HISTORY

– JOHN 19:17-30. – MAY 28. –

**Golden Text:** – "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." – 1 Cor. 15:3.

CALVARY was the scene of the most wonderful event of history, the fulcrum as it were upon which divine Love and Justice operated for the rolling away of the curse resting upon humanity. Its site is not definitely known, yet the Latin word Calvary furnishes a clue, being an equivalent to the Hebrew word golgotha and signifying "the place of the skull." There is a bare knoll of a hill, with two caves in the front, which, looked at from a distance has rather the appearance of a skull, the caves and the brush growing therein representing the eye sockets. It is presumed that this was the place of the crucifixion. The same custom of describing rocks and hills by things which they somewhat resemble still prevails. Thus we have Sentinel Dome and Bridal Vail Falls in the Yosemite, Pulpit Rock and Teakettle Rock in the Rocky Mountains, the Owl's Head in the White Mountains and Caesar's Head in the Blue Ridge.

Crucifixion is a most horrible and torturous form of death, yet it was not the torture of death which our Redeemer suffered on our behalf which so much gives us a feeling of sympathy and sorrow as our minds go back to Calvary and the scenes preceding it. Two others were crucified with Jesus; many others had suffered a similar death before and since, and some, we may presume, suffered as much or more agony through longer-drawn-out torture, gradual burning at the stake, lacerations, etc. The thought which impresses our hearts most deeply is that our dear Savior's experiences not only were undeserved, unmerited by the one "who went about doing good," but that his experiences were in connection with the payment of our penalty, so that "by his stripes we are healed." – Isa. 53:5.

## "THE LOVE OF CHRIST CONSTRAINETH US"

The thought that Christ died for our sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God – that we might be restored to divine favor, released from the just curse or sentence of death which was upon us – this thought moves our hearts to loving sympathy. "The love of Christ constraineth us; and we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead [under just sentence of death]: and that we who live should henceforth not live unto ourselves but unto him who died for us." – 2 Cor. 5:14,15.

"In the cross of Christ we glory,  
Towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story  
Gathers round its head sublime."

Proportionately as in our day the D.D.'s and college professors and the "wise of this world" are denying the necessity for our Lord's death and the value of the precious blood as an atonement for the sins of mankind, in that same proportion must those whose eyes have been opened by the grace of God to see the divine plan emphasize more and more the value of the cross as the basis of reconciliation between God and man. There is a great falling away in our day from this foundation **[R3561 : page 152]** feature of the Gospel. Jesus is presented as good, noble, a wonderful and wise teacher, whose words are suitable for texts and comments; but the sin of the world is denied when it is claimed that man is by an evolutionary process rising from the monkey condition to the divine likeness, and if there is no sin of the world to be atoned for, of course, the Scriptural record that Jesus made atonement for the sins of the world is in error, and this is the view that is rapidly spreading throughout Christendom and destroying all true Christian faith.

Any other faith is not the true Christian faith, not the faith once delivered to the saints, not the faith that is pleasing to God, not the faith that is the basis for justification and forgiveness of sins, not the

faith that is to be respected and honored, blessed and rewarded by the Lord in due time. We cannot enunciate this matter [R3561 : page 153] too distinctly, even though it may offend some to be told that they are not Christians in the Scriptural sense of the word when they no longer hold the doctrine of the atonement through the blood of the cross – through the death of Jesus. Ultimately this doctrine will be seen to be the touchstone which will clearly show who are the Lord's and who are not. Those who lose this hub or center of faith, lose all part and lot in Christ so far, at least, as the present age is concerned. They are no more Christians than are Mohammedans or Jews or Confucians or Brahmins. Jews, Mohammedans and infidels believe that Jesus lived and that he died and that he was a great teacher, but this does not make them Christians and does not justify them. We are justified, as the Apostle points out, "Through faith in his blood." – Rom. 3:25.

### **"VIA DOLOROSA" – THE WAY OF THE CROSS**

The way from Pilate's judgment hall to Calvary was indeed a sorrowful way, a doleful way. Pilate felt uncomfortable in having done the only thing he could reasonably have been expected to do under all the circumstances. The chief priests and doctors of divinity had scored a victory, and might be expected to exult as they saw their victim led as a lamb to the slaughter. Yet we must give them credit for some conscience and must suppose that they were far from happy; that although they had said to Pilate, "His blood be upon us and upon our children" they felt a mysterious dread of this wonderful person against whom they were prevailing. To suppose that their hearts were not troubled would be to discredit them everyway. On the way tender women, not disciples of Jesus, wept as Jesus passed by. Pilate had endeavored to appeal to the accusers of Jesus by having him scourged and then presenting him before them, crying, *Ecce Homo* – Behold the man! Look at the man whom you are asking me to crucify: no man in all your nation has such a face and form as his; not one of you for a moment considers that he is a wicked man; his face shows to

the contrary. Will you not be satisfied? Will not your anger against him be appeased by the scourging which he has received? Will you not consent that I should let him go? But all these appeals were futile. His enemies were so filled with bitterness and envy that they were blind to his personal attractions. These, however, appealed to the women as he passed; they wept. Jesus was the most composed of all in that scene, because he had the assurance that he was doing the Father's will. This assurance had kept him calm and unmoved from the moment the angel appeared in Gethsemane to give him the word of divine favor and thus strengthen him. He was ready to endure anything that would be the Father's will, that would carry out the Father's plan, he had such confidence in the wisdom, the love, the justice and the power of God. To the weeping women he said, "Weep not for me, weep for yourselves" – doubtless having in mind the awful trouble which thirty-seven years after came upon that city.

### **"LET HIM TAKE UP HIS CROSS AND FOLLOW ME"**

Jesus, bearing his cross, headed the procession, accompanied by four Roman soldiers; following came the two thieves with their crosses and four soldiers guarding each, the whole under the charge of a Centurion. Our Redeemer, less coarse by nature, less animal, more intelligent than the thieves, was probably less able naturally than they to carry the heavy timber of the cross – besides, he had been under a nervous strain and without food for about twelve hours. Evidently he was scarcely able to carry his load, and the Centurion compelled Simon of Cyrene, a countryman, to bear the cross after Jesus. Whether this means that he walked behind Jesus in the procession, carrying the cross, or that he carried the hinder part of the cross with Jesus, is uncertain; but in any event he had a most glorious opportunity, even though it was compulsory.

Many of the Lord's dear people, reading the account, have wished that they could have had a share in the carrying of that cross. Where were Peter, James and John and the others? Alas, they allowed

fear to hinder them, to deprive them of a most glorious service. While thinking of this it is well to remember that our Lord has graciously provided that all of his followers may share in the carrying of his cross. The offense of the cross, the weight of the cross, has not ceased; the cross of Christ is still in the world; the privilege is still with us to bear it with him, following after him. Although the apostles lost the privilege of bearing the literal cross for Jesus, they gloriously recovered from their fear, and we have the record of their noble service, bearing the cross of Christ for all the years of their lives afterwards.

Let us love much, and let us show our love by our zeal in cross-bearing; and if at any time that zeal grows cold, let us remember the axiom, "No cross, no crown;" let us remember the Apostle's words, "If we suffer with him we shall also reign with him; if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." Yet neither the fear of death nor the appreciation of the crown must be the controlling motive. The mainspring of our devotion to the Lord must be an appreciation of what he has done for us, our love to him, and our desire to do what would please him, and thus show a responsive love. Let us remember that while the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, was glorified long ago, there are still about us in the world those whom he recognizes as his brethren, as "members of his body," and that whatsoever we do to one of the least of these, whatever assistance we render to these in the bearing of their crosses, is so much that he will appreciate as manifesting our love for him, as so much that is done unto him.

### **"HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE TRANSGRESSORS"**

Our Lord's crucifixion between two thieves may be viewed from various standpoints. To himself it would mean the depths of humiliation. Every noble and pure man or woman prizing purity in his own heart [R3561 : page 154] would find it specially detestable to be so misunderstood as to be numbered with transgressors, murderers, thieves – accounted one of them. And if this is true with

us in our imperfect condition of mind and heart, and our imperfect appreciation of justice and of sin, how much more intense must this feeling have been in the perfect one, our Lord. How he must have loathed sin, how utterly opposed to it in every sense of the word he must have been, and how much more shame he must have felt than we could possibly have felt in his position. From the heavenly Father's standpoint this permission that his Son be numbered with the transgressors was evidently to be a demonstration to angels and to men of the Son's loyalty of heart to the utmost extreme, as we read, "He humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross."

Thus the Lord demonstrated, not only by his willingness to die, but his willingness to die in the most despicable manner, his full self-renunciation, the complete deadness of his own will and the thorough aliveness of his own heart and mind to the Father's will. In all this he became an illustration to his followers, as the Apostle suggests, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God [no matter how deep the humiliation which obedience to God may bring] that he may exalt you in due time." From the standpoint of the priests and Pharisees the Lord's crucifixion with the two thieves was specially desirable; it would help to keep the people from thinking of him as a martyr, it would demean and [R3562 : page 154] degrade him before the people, and make any ashamed to acknowledge themselves the followers of a religious teacher who was publicly executed as a malefactor, as an enemy of God and man. How could it be expected that any could ever glory in the cross of Christ? But how wonderfully God's plans overrule all human arrangements, and make even the wrath and envy and villainy of the human heart work out to his praise and in accord with his plan?

### **KILLING THE PRINCE OF LIFE**

The distance from Pilate's palace to the Place of the Skull is not great, though the latter is outside the city wall. The spot was soon reached, the crosses were laid upon the ground, and the soldiers

quickly stripped the prisoners and nailed them, probably with wooden spikes, to the crosses which they then lifted and dropped into the holes previously prepared for them, the feet of the crucified coming within about two feet of the ground. The agony incident to such a proceeding can be better imagined than described, especially at the moment when the cross dropped into the socket, and when the weight of the body together with the swinging and surging and jolting of the cross would make the pain terrible in the extreme, more to one of refined temperament and nervous system than to the coarser and more brutal – severer, therefore, to our Lord than to his two companions. Well may the devoted disciples of Jesus say to themselves, "My Lord bore this for me," and we may ask ourselves in turn what have we borne for him of shame or ignominy or pain? The very thought of this should make us ashamed to mention boastfully any trials we may have endured, and also make us more courageous to be patient and to endure all things which divine providence may permit to come to our cup because of our discipleship.

### **THE KING OF THE JEWS**

It was Pilate's turn to get even with the envious and malicious Jewish rulers who had forced him, contrary to his will as well as contrary to justice, to crucify Jesus. It was customary to publish the crime for which the execution took place by a printed notice over the head of the victim. In Jesus' case he wrote, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews," Mark gives the inscription, "The King of the Jews," and Luke, "This is the King of the Jews." All three may be correct, for the notice was written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

In his trial before the High Priest he was sentenced to death as a blasphemer in calling himself the Son of God; but, as we have seen, this charge would not stand before Pilate, since the Roman government cared nothing whether a man blasphemed one god or

another. To secure his execution by the Romans he was charged with rebellion against Rome, claiming that he was the King of the Jews. Pilate's decision not to alter the writing was correct, and ultimately all the blind eyes of the world shall be opened to this great fact that Jesus was indeed divinely anointed to be the King of earth. But as he said, "My Kingdom is not from hence" – not yet. As he represents elsewhere, the time is coming when "he shall take unto himself his great power and reign." Those who acknowledge him as King now are a very small and very insignificant people in the world – "not many great, not many wise, not many learned" – "chiefly the poor of this world, rich in faith."

To some it seems to be a pleasing fiction to say that Jesus is now the King of the world and is reigning, that Christendom is his Kingdom, and that the 400,000,000 of nominal professors are his loyal subjects. Those who thus conclude are nearly as blind and prejudiced as were the doctors of divinity who secured our Lord's death. It would be as truthful to call black white as to call "Christendom" the empire of Christ and its people the servants of Christ. "His servants ye are to whom ye render service," was our Lord's standpoint, and accordingly the Lord has few real servants in the world to-day – the great majority are serving sin in some of its numerous forms of selfishness, and are glad to think that the day of Christ, the day of the Anointed, when he shall take to himself his great power and reign under the whole heaven, is far distant.

Those who "love his appearing," whose souls long for the presence of the King and the inauguration of his **[R3562 : page 155]** reign of righteousness in the earth are a woefully small number. But all who are of the "little flock," soldiers of the cross, should specially appreciate one another's fellowship and should be ready, as the Scriptures exhort, to "lay down their lives for the brethren." And he who would lay down his life for a brother will surely be careful in all his dealings to do nothing against the Truth but for the Truth,



nothing to stumble any, but everything possible to assist the members of the body of Christ, "The feet of Him."

## **"SITTING DOWN THEY WATCHED HIM THERE"**

– MATT. 27:36. –

The Roman soldiers, ignorant of God and the principles of righteousness – their highest conception of responsibility being to obey orders – seemed to have no heart whatever; the quivering flesh of their victims seemed to have touched no tender spot. They sat down and looked at him, and straightway began to divide his garments amongst them. "The usual dress of a Jew consisted of five parts: the head dress, the shoes, the outer garment or toga, the girdle (one part for each of the soldiers) and the chiton" – the tunic, in our text called a coat – a kind of shirt fitting somewhat closely and reaching from the neck to the ankles, for which they cast lots.

As those soldiers coldly looked at the Lamb of God, who was suffering the Just for the unjust as their redemption price, and as they were dividing his raiment as their perquisites, they resembled to a considerable degree the whole of "Christendom" from that time to the present. Millions in all parts of the civilized world have heard of Jesus and his love and his sacrifice and that it was on our behalf, and are still totally unmoved, unconcerned, without thankfulness or appreciation. They are willing, indeed, to receive and divide amongst themselves day by day the various blessings and advantages which have come to them through his death, yet even these are received without appreciation or thankfulness or gratitude. The most kindly view of such an attitude of heart is that which the Apostle has expressed, saying, "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the glorious light of God's goodness shining in the face of Jesus Christ should shine into their hearts."

## WITH HIM IN HIS DYING HOUR

With the Lord in his dying hour were four of his very special friends: his mother, her cousin the wife of Cleopas, Mary Magdalene and John. We are not to think too severely of the apparent lack of courage on the part of the others of Jesus' friends. The popular bitterness which had led to the crucifixion of Jesus had extended in considerable measure to his followers. It was natural that they should be afraid; it had even been hinted that Lazarus would be put to death also. The three women with him might reasonably feel themselves free from danger of molestation notwithstanding their manifestation of interest in the suffering one; and as for John, we remember that he had a friend in the High Priest's household, who permitted him to be present when Jesus was first brought before the High Priest and when Peter was afraid to be known even in the outer apartments. Quite probably the High Priest's servant was present at the time of the crucifixion to give a report of the whole proceedings. John's courage to be present may have been influenced by these circumstances. It was at this time that Jesus, although in great pain, commended his mother to his disciple's care – "Woman, behold thy Son;" and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother." We cannot show our sympathy at Jesus' cross, but we can lend our presence and aid to dear "members of his body" in their dark hours; and he will count it as done to himself.

Another Scripture remained to be fulfilled. The prophet had declared of him, "They gave me gall and vinegar to drink." This would be another mark or identification of him, and is given as the reason why Jesus mentioned this thirst. Doubtless, with a fever raging such as would be induced by the crucifixion, he had been thirsting for quite a while, but now the time was come to express the matter, to give occasion for the fulfilment of the Scripture respecting him. Gall and vinegar was given him, not as an injury but as a kindness. It was supposed that the mixture would assuage thirst to some degree.

Having thus fulfilled the various Scriptures relating to his career, our Lord realized that the end of his course had come. It was probably at this juncture that the Father's fellowship was withdrawn from him for a moment; that for a little space at least he should experience all that the sinner could ever experience of the withdrawal of divine favor; for he was being treated as the sinner for us that we on his account might be treated of God as righteous. Of all our Lord's experiences we believe that this moment, in which the Father completely hid his face from him, was the most trying moment, the severest ordeal, and the one apparently which our Lord had not foreseen. Bereft of every earthly comfort and favor, privilege and blessing, up to this moment he possessed a realization of fellowship and communion with the Father; but now for that to be taken away, that upon which his whole life had depended, that was the severest trial.

In agony he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me! What have I done to cause a cloud **[R3563 : page 155]** to come between thee and me? Have I not been faithful even unto death?" He probably soon realized the meaning of this experience, that it was necessary for him thus to fill up the cup of suffering and to demonstrate to the very limit his loyalty and obedience and to thus fully and completely meet the penalty against our race. Probably still under this cloud but with this realization he cried, "It is finished!" and died. We often speak of people dying of broken hearts, and use the term figuratively, but so far as can be known our Lord experienced this very matter actually. Apparently he died by the actual bursting of his heart. It is the tendency of deep grief to interfere with the circulation of the blood and to cause a pressure upon the heart. We have all felt this at times – a weight and heaviness of heart under certain peculiar nervous strains. This in our Lord's case seems to have been so intense that the heart was literally ruptured. He died of a broken heart. **[R3556 : page 156]**

## **A LITTLE TALK WITH JESUS.**

A little talk with Jesus  
At the closing of the day, –  
How it quiets every anxious fear,  
And drives our doubts away.

A little talk with Jesus, –  
How it soothes the aching brain,  
How it rests the weary, fainting heart,  
And makes us strong again.

A little talk with Jesus, –  
How it lights the darkest hour,  
How it keeps us "watching unto prayer,"  
And foils the Tempter's power.

A little talk with Jesus, –  
There can nothing take its place, –  
How we long to reach our heavenly home,  
And see him face to face!

– *G. W. Seibert*

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