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IN THE CROSS OF CHRIST I GLORY.

– LUKE 23:33-46. – DECEMBER 9 –

Golden Text: – "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

THE Gospel of salvation by the blood of the cross is becoming more and more unpopular. That divine justice required a "life for a life," and accepted the life of Jesus as the ransom price for the life of Adam and that of the race which lost life through him, seems to be repugnant to the natural mind, and, alas! the number of those begotten of the Spirit and able to appreciate spiritual things from the spiritual standpoint seems to be remarkably small. Worldly wisdom rejects the entire story of redemption when it rejects the Bible record of the fall and substitutes the theory of evolution, which assumes that man is gradually raising himself from bestial to more and more rational conditions. Of course, it must be logically true that if there was no fall from perfection there was no original sin and condemnation, and if Adam and his race were not cursed, condemned, sentenced to death, redemption from such a sentence would be impossible. From this standpoint of worldly wisdom (which is taught in all the colleges, seminaries and high schools) the entire Bible story of redemption through the blood of the cross is foolishness.

"Christian Science," falsely so-called, is aiding also in the undermining of faith in the Bible testimony respecting redemption through the blood. Its theory is that there is no sin, never was any sin nor evil of any kind, but all such matters are purely mental hallucinations and deceptions; – that there was therefore no divine sentence against Adam and his race as sinners, and that there is no such thing as death. They thus contradict the Apostle who declares, "By one man's

disobedience sin entered into the world and death as the result of sin; and so death passed upon all men for all are sinners." (Rom. 5:12.) This delusion, which seems so weak and nonsensical to those who have learned to rightly divide the Word of Truth, is, as the Scriptures declare, a "strong delusion" upon many who have only a superficial knowledge of the divine Word. These, after learning to deny the facts in their own experiences, after practising the denial of all pain, gradually so pervert their minds that they cannot reason properly and truthfully on any subject. These, being mentally blindfolded, the Scriptures are twisted for them into such shapes as to bind them hand and foot and render them thoroughly impervious to the Truth.

ERRORS BEGET ERRORS

The third view of the cross is the offspring of the two delusions foregoing: it seeks to hold to the Scriptures and to the cross of Christ, and to some kind of a work there accomplished for mankind, but is confused and blinded, and sees not clearly just what was accomplished. In its blindness it grasps the statement that Christ set an example to us his followers, but that his sufferings were in no sense of the word redemptive, but merely educational, instructive to his followers. They claim that Jesus suffered to show us how to suffer, that he died to show us how to die, to show us his resignation to the Father's will. They totally overlook and ignore the true view of our Lord's death set forth in many Scriptural, positive statements, some of them in this lesson: that Christ died for our sins, that he gave himself a ransom for all, that he bought us with his precious blood, that we are redeemed by the blood of Christ. **[R3900 : page 376]**

The true view of the cross recognizes that while Jesus is indeed the Teacher of the Church, the Head of the Church, the Bridegroom for the Bride, the Church, it is the Lord who obtained not only the rightful authority to be our Teacher and by

and by to be King of the world, but also by the same sacrifice, by the same ransom price, he bought the Church and the world, securing for all mankind release from the original sentence of death, release from the "curse," thus making it possible for God to be just and at the same time the justifier of him that believeth on Jesus. It is when the death of Christ is recognized as the ransom price for Adam, and incidentally for all of his family who lost through his disobedience, that we see its real signification, and how it was impossible under the divine arrangement for the baptism into death to be omitted by our Lord. At the same time we see how all who will be members of his glorious Bride class must also share with him in this baptism into death, and that without the shedding of his blood there could be no remission of sins, no reconciliation to the Father, no resurrection out of death, no reattainment of everlasting life. With the true view before us we have not only feelings of sympathy for our dear Redeemer's sufferings at Calvary, portrayed in this lesson, but we have joy also in his faithfulness, which means our redemption and ultimately through him, in the resurrection, our deliverance from the power of sin and death.

EN ROUTE TO CALVARY

Our last lesson showed us Pilate signing the death-warrant of Jesus under protest, washing his hands as indicating that he considered the matter an outrage of justice, but was helpless as respects further protestation against the will of the people who cried out, "Crucify him!" The scourged Jesus, who knew in advance the result, was the most calm and collected one of the company, fully prepared to drink to its dregs the cup which the Father had allowed to be prepared for him – conscious that the Father's love and care would do nothing amiss and would cause ultimately all things to work together for his good. Soon all was in readiness, and the little procession was formed and wended its way from Pilate's castle along the narrow streets of Jerusalem to

the Damascus gate. First went a soldier with a white wooden board, on which was written the nature of the crime of the convict; next followed four soldiers under the command of a centurion, with hammer and nails, guarding Jesus, who bore his own cross; then followed the two robbers, each bearing his own cross and guarded by four soldiers. A multitude thronged the way, the curious throng, the exultant enemies, and some of the Lord's friends, "Mary with other women weeping" (vs. 27). The entire distance from castle Antonio to the hill-top called Calvary is about three-fourths of a mile. Calvary is the Latin name, signifying the skull; Golgotha, the word used by Matthew, also signifies a skull, being the Aramaic, the original language of the Jews in Palestine. The name was probably applied because, looked upon at a little distance, it much resembled a skull. A recent writer thus describes it: –

"Two hundred yards outside the Damascus gate of Jerusalem there is an isolated white limestone knoll, in contour like the crown of the head and about 60 feet high. It contains in its perpendicular face the most remarkable likeness to a skull. The two eyeless sockets, the overhanging forehead, the lines of the nose, the mouth and chin will be plainly seen. It is also concave, and the same color as a skull. On the summit of Golgotha there is a great pit heaped over with stones. . . . This pit is filled with the skeletons and bones of criminals, who, from time immemorial, have been crucified and stoned. The bodies of criminals are still hurled into that same pit. A mighty earthquake upheaved this solid earth and split this very rock asunder. To the right of the skull the face of the cliff is oddly riven. . . . At the bottom of the western cliff there is a large garden with a very ancient well. Where it touches the foot of the cliff, six feet below the surface, the rock-hewn sepulcher of our Lord has been discovered. There is now a general concensus of agreement that this is the true Calvary." **[R3901 : page 376]**

En route, and probably near the Damascus gate, a women's society for the mitigation of the sufferings of those executed met the procession and tendered refreshments in the form of a narcotic drink of wine and myrrh, intended to relieve the pains of the crucified by benumbing their sensibilities. Their sympathy was also expressed by their tears. The account gives us to understand that Jesus courteously tasted of the beverage to show his appreciation of the kindness, but declined to drink the potion. He was willing to endure to the end all that the Father might be pleased to permit to come upon him. "More than conqueror" we behold him – we glory in the principles which actuated the Captain of our Salvation in his every act, and we are inspired by his example to press with vigor on, assured by him that "Greater is he that is for us than all that be against us," and that he will not permit any experience to happen to us that he is not able to overrule for our best interests.

BEARING THE CROSS AFTER HIM

Another incident occurred about this time: Simon, a countryman, a Cyrenian, met the procession at a time when, according to tradition, Jesus – weakened through the experiences of the night and through his previous experiences, in which virtue went out of him when he healed the multitudes – was about to faint under the weight of the cross. Simon was compelled to bear the cross after Jesus, but whether this means that Jesus walked before and that Simon carried the cross behind him, or whether it means that Simon walked back of Jesus carrying the end which otherwise was dragging on the ground, we cannot surely know. If, however, it was the latter, the figure becomes all the more striking as an illustration of how the Lord's true followers today are to walk in his footsteps and to join with him in the carrying of the cross – not the literal, but the symbolical. **[R3901 : page 377]**

If we are inclined to wonder where were Peter, John and James and the others of the apostles that they proffered the Master no helping hand, we are to remember that they were "common people" and rather despised as Galileans, and that they had reason to fear that the wrath of the chief priests and rulers against Jesus might also attach more or less to them, and no doubt these considerations had something to do with their backwardness. Besides, they were in a great maze of perplexity at the experiences through which their Master was passing – they understood not until after our Lord's resurrection and his explanation of the Scriptures bearing upon the subject. We are not, therefore, to plume ourselves upon superior courage when thinking how we would delight ourselves in such an opportunity. We are to remember that we have the light and the knowledge and the holy Spirit, which they did not then have, and that thus we have much advantage over them every way.

When we think, however, how nobly Peter, James and John and the others carried on the work of the Lord – how they took up the cross of Christ in the highest sense as his apostles and servants – we have every reason to rejoice and to do them honor. And now the cross is with us. The truths represented in our Lord, in his teachings, in his sacrifice, are still despised and rejected of men – not only by the world, but also by the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees of nominal Christendom. The members of the body of Christ, their hope of glory, honor and immortality, and the blessing of all the families of the earth, are still laughed to scorn, and there is still room for bearing the cross and experiencing crucifixion of the flesh as the representatives of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. How faithful have we been in the past? how faithful will we be in the future? Here is our opportunity also for coming off conquerors through faithfulness in walking in his steps.

"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM"

Arrived at Calvary, Golgotha, the wooden crosses were laid upon the ground, the victims stretched thereon, and nailed by hands and feet; then the soldiers lifted the crosses and set them into already prepared holes or sockets. The torture of these experiences can better be imagined than described. It was a most cruel death, though perhaps not more cruel than some other forms by which the Lord's followers and others have died. It was not the pain, not the suffering that was our ransom price – it was the death. The penalty upon father Adam was not the amount of pain he should suffer, but the fact that he must lose life. And so some of Adam's children have lost their lives with great pain, others with little suffering, but over all the sentence reigns, "Dying thou shalt die." It was sufficient in some respects that the Lord should have died, no matter how, but in other respects this was not sufficient. Under the Mosaic law it was decreed, "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree." (Gal. 3:13.) That vilest sentence or curse against sinners under the Law Jesus bore, that he might not only be the Redeemer of the world in general but also the Redeemer of the Jew, as it is written, "He was made a curse for us" – experienced the sentence of the accursed ones under the Law.

It was supposed that it was just about the time that the cross was dropped into the sockets, which would be one of the most agonizing moments of the entire experience, that our Lord in the midst of his agony prayed for his enemies, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." It certainly would be just like our dear Master to utter such a prayer, and we feel very sure that it was the sentiment of his heart, as it was also that of the first martyr, Stephen, who cried in dying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." It is but truthful, however, for us to note the fact that these words credited to our Lord are omitted from the Vatican MS., which is one of the very oldest; and although they

appeared in the Sinaitic, they were subsequently stricken out of the latter as though their authenticity were doubted. We cannot, however, have any doubt that the words represented our Master's sentiments toward his enemies, for they are in full accord with his instructions to his followers, Love your enemies, do good to them that persecute you, and pray for them.

"THEY PARTED HIS RAIMENT"

The four soldiers who had Jesus in charge, after they had set the cross in place, began to look after his personal effects, his clothing, which became their portion according to usage. Little did they think as they divided his garments, and then cast lots for his seamless tunic, which was the most valuable article, that they were thus fulfilling prophecy. (Psa. 22:18.) Just so it is with the whole world; matters are moving on from day to day, prophecies are being fulfilled, many of us have part in them, but few can see and understand, because only a few have the guidance of the holy Spirit. As an illustration of prophecy being fulfilled in our day, note the statement in Daniel about many running to and fro and knowledge being increased, and the approach of a time of trouble such as was not since there was a nation – all declared to be indications of the time of the end of this age. (Dan. 12:1-4.) Yet how few of those who see and acknowledge that we are living in peculiar and wonderful times realize that these are fulfilments of prophecy.

DECEPTIVE OUTWARD EVIDENCES

The crowd stood around gaping, and the rulers joined with them in deriding the one who so recently had ridden upon the ass as the King of the Jews. They made light also of his miracles of healing, of awaking the dead, saying, "He saved others, let him save himself." Let him save himself if he be the Messiah of God, his elect one. How deceived they were, and what a lesson it should teach us of the fallibility of human judgment and the

necessity for looking deeply, especially in matters pertaining to God and his Word. If the rulers had any compunctions of conscience respecting their course previously, they did not now manifest it, since they were fully convinced that our Lord was a **[R3901 : page 378]** deceiver, a fraud. This was implied in their willingness to say, "His blood be upon us and upon our children." If they had any qualms of conscience these apparently were satisfied as they beheld Jesus on the cross, helpless and dying. Here was certainly a test, they said. If he were the Messiah undoubtedly he would not thus suffer ignominiously, but would come down from the cross; hence they said, We have proof that our course has been a wise and proper one in ridding our nation of a disturber of its peace, whose teaching would ultimately have overthrown our priestly authority and control of the people.

Similarly in the harvest of this age, with antitypical nominal spiritual Israel, the Truth is stranger than any fiction, and the masses, in a wrong condition of heart, not guided by the Spirit of the Lord, are blind to it, and also the rulers, the Doctors of Divinity. Doubtless the hour will come when measures of force will be used against all who stand faithful to the Lord and his Truth; and they, too, will suffer under the claim that their death will be for the good of the cause, that it is expedient that injustice in some measure be done to a few rather than that their influence should prevail to any further extent against the systems in power.

Spurred on by the influence of the Jewish rulers, the Roman soldiers also derided the one just crucified as the King of the Jews; and the whole multitude, as they read over his head in Greek, the language of literature – in Latin, the language of the Romans, their rulers – in Hebrew, the language of their own nation, the words, "This is the King of the Jews," were struck with the absurdity of the situation – its impossibility, so to speak, – that a king of the nation should be thus completely denounced and rejected by the people of his realm! Alas, how little they

understood his power! He could indeed have come down from the cross, could [R3902 : page 378] have refused to die, could have resisted their insults, could have had "more than twelve legion of angels" for his defence. But this would not have been in accord with his consecration, nor in accord with the Father's will, and would have left us as the race of Adam under the sentence of death, without hope of a future life – dead as brute beasts.

How we may rejoice that the dear Redeemer did not when he was reviled revile again, when he was maltreated resent it and do injury to his executioners. How we may rejoice in his faithfulness and love, which enabled him to present the acceptable sacrifice on our behalf. How we can exult also in the great glory, honor, dominion and power everlasting which have come to him as a reward and as a token of the Father's approval, and what a hope it gives us that we also by his grace and assistance may attain to joint-heirship with him in his Kingdom.

"WITH ME IN PARADISE"

As the multitude of onlookers were divided, some sympathizing and some deriding, it is not surprising that similar emotions were awakened in the minds of the two robbers crucified with Jesus. In his company, following him, they had been witnesses of his meekness, gentleness, patience and evident faith in God, yet but one of them had the eyes of understanding to appreciate this in any measure. The other, blind as the rulers and the populace, joined with them in reviling the Lord as an impostor, a hypocrite. The first – manifesting a faith which, under all the circumstances, was a remarkable one – reproved his fellow saying, "Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss." Our Lord's light indeed shined in darkness and the children of

darkness comprehended it not, but his disciples at least sympathized. And so also this poor thief perceived that our Lord was suffering injustice, being buffeted, yet taking it patiently.

Doubtless the thief had heard of Jesus, that he was reputed by some to be the Messiah, and, notwithstanding the incongruous condition of things, the thief realized that with our Redeemer there was a kingly demeanor, and the thought had doubtless been growing in his mind, What if this is some great one from the spirit world, who, as he claims, will by and by in another age establish his Kingdom! What if these rulers are moved by envy and selfishness, and are blind to his teachings! The raillery of his companion only opened his mouth in defense of the Savior. Confessing his own unworthiness, he nevertheless pled for justice, suggesting that both he and his companion thief had reason to be fearful in their dying hour as respects what might be their future in the hands of the Almighty; but here was one traduced, buffeted, crucified, of whom they were witnesses that "This man hath done nothing amiss."

"LORD, REMEMBER ME"

Having administered the rebuke he appealed to our Lord, saying, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom" – when you receive your kingdom, wherever it may be and under whatever conditions, if it is in your power remember me. I look to you as vastly my superior and the superior of all of us. It seems to me not at all improbable that you are indeed a mighty king, misunderstood by some of your subjects. I venture this appeal to you, even though in the eyes of others it may seem foolish. "Remember me" when you become a king, for I verily believe somehow, sometime, somewhere, you shall have a kingdom, for you certainly would be worthy of it.

Our Lord's recorded answer has caused much debate amongst Christian people. As it appears in the English it seems

to give the thought that the Lord himself expected to be in Paradise that same day, and that the thief would be there and receive blessing and favor at his hand. If by Paradise heaven be understood, we know that there must be some mistake, because our Lord certainly did not go to heaven that day. The Apostle quotes the Prophet David's words, which imply that he was in sheol (Greek hades) until his resurrection on the third day. (Acts 2:31; Psa. 16:10.) Our Lord himself on the morning of his resurrection [**R3902 : page 379**] told Mary to tell the disciples that he had not yet ascended to his Father and their Father, to his God and their God. Paul's declaration is that he was dead during the interim – that "he rose from the dead on the third day." – I Cor. 15:4.

PARADISE LOST TO BE RESTORED

The word Paradise, elsewhere mentioned in the Scriptures, refers to the Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve were cast out, and to the Paradise restored – the entire earth turned into a Paradise at the second coming of our Lord and the establishment of his Kingdom. The Garden of Eden had long been destroyed at the time of this conversation; the Paradise of the Kingdom is therefore the only one to which the Lord could have referred. The whole question hinges upon the word today, which is not generally used now as in this text, where it is used to express emphasis, and is better appreciated when we transpose the comma and place it after today instead of before it. Then the passage would read, "Verily I say unto thee today [when everything seems unfavorable, when I appear as an impostor, subject to the insults and taunts of my enemies – notwithstanding all this, I tell you] thou shalt be with me in Paradise." But the Lord and the thief went to hades, the tomb, the state of death, that very day. The Lord arose on the third day, but the thief remained a prisoner in the great prison-house of death, with the remainder of the world, unconscious.

When the Lord at his second coming, in due time, shall call forth the thief from the tomb he will come forth to Paradise, for the whole earth at that time shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, the Sun of Righteousness shall fill the earth with the light of divine truth. Then that thief of remarkable faith will be remembered and receive blessing proportionate to his faith and to the blessing which he ministered to his dying Redeemer. Furthermore, the thief's request was to be remembered when Messiah would come in his Kingdom, and we still pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." There can be no Paradise until his Kingdom shall come. Our Lord's answer, as expressed in the words "Verily, verily," signifies, "Amen, so be it," – Be it as you have suggested, thou shalt be with me in Paradise, I declare this today amidst all this contradiction of sinners and exhibition of the powers of darkness.

MANY OR FEW STRIPES IN PARADISE

But will not all mankind, except those who have now seen and tasted and wilfully rejected the grace of God – will not all others have some blessed opportunity in Paradise, too, under the ministration of the Millennial Kingdom? We answer, Yes. The blinded thief will be there, and all those blind spectators who railed upon the Lord and those who cried, "Crucify him," and pierced him, and who said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children" – they will all be there, as it is written, "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth." (Jno. 5:28,29.) What advantage then will the friends of the Lord have over the others? We answer they have much advantage every way: first they have the blessing and peace which come in believing even in the present life. All the Lord's disciples know this, and the believing thief assuredly realized a blessing from it, too, and died the happier. As for the future life we may readily see that the blinded ones, while not to be held

entirely responsible for their blindness, which the Scriptures declare comes from the god of this world, who blinds the minds of them that believe not, are nevertheless to some extent responsible, and will be handicapped in the future in proportion to their degree of present wilfulness in sin.

The believing thief was certainly not prepared for heaven. He was not begotten of the Spirit, and hence could not be born of the Spirit in the resurrection. He had not cultivated the fruits and graces of the Spirit and therefore would not be acceptable as an overcomer and joint-heir with the saints. But we may be sure that the faith developed and acted upon to the extent of defending the Lord in such an emergency implies a considerable degree of principle and love of righteousness at heart, and that under the Millennial Kingdom conditions the believing thief would undoubtedly have made rapid progress under the blessing of the Lord up to full perfection of all that was lost in Adam and redeemed by the precious blood.

Dr. Alford has well said, "What is really astonishing is the power and strength of that faith which, amid shame and pain and mockery, could lift itself to the apprehension of the Crucified as his King. The thief would fill a conspicuous place in the list of triumphs of faith supplementary to Hebrews 11."

"DARKNESS OVER THE LAND"

It was about noon that Jesus, seeing his mother and John standing near, said, "Woman, behold thy son," and to John, "Behold thy mother." We thus see that, in the extremity of his pain even, our Lord was thinking less of himself than of his disciples and of his dear ones. It was about this time that darkness began to settle, beclouding the scene for about three hours. Undoubtedly the shade was more comfortable for the crucified ones than the sunlight of that bright land. And surely it was appropriate that nature should be draped, the shadowy veil

drawn over such a scene. Well did it picture the temporary triumph of the power of darkness over him who is the Light of the world. Thanks be to God and to our Lord that through his blessed sacrifice for sins very soon all the shadows will be past, for the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his beams for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

"GAVE UP THE GHOST"

The last verse of our lesson tells of our Lord's last agonizing cry with a loud voice – consuming the remainder of his strength. His words elsewhere recorded were, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" We have already noticed the serene calmness of our dear Master from the time in Gethsemane when the angel strengthened him with the assurance **[R3903 : page 380]** that his course had thus far been pleasing and acceptable in the Father's sight. But it was necessary that he should have the sinner's bitter experience, even to the extent of being entirely cut off from fellowship with the Father. In God's providence, however, this was not prolonged, but merely "for a moment." The Father hid his face from his beloved Son in the sense of withdrawing all spiritual fellowship and communion: for a moment, therefore, our Redeemer was left in a depth of darkness, and his agonizing cry pictures the loneliness of his heart. It was not enough that of the people there were none with him – it must come to this, that the Father should temporarily withdraw sustaining strength and assistance.

Yet our Lord triumphed, and his final words as he breathed his last were, "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit," and having said this "he gave up the ghost." The word ghost was at one time used as a synonym for spirit, and the meaning of this statement is that our Lord gave up his spirit, his breath of life. In other words, he breathed out his last breath, he let go his hold upon life.

But what was meant by the words, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit" – my breath, my life? We answer that when God created Adam he first formed him and then gave him the gift of life. The right to this gift Adam forfeited by disobedience. He was able to transmit to his posterity a spark of vitality, but not perfection of life, because he had lost all right to that. Hence Adam and each member of his race in dying surrenders his life to God under the divine edict that they were unworthy of life, that they could not have it nor claim it either soon or ever. But with our Lord Jesus it was different: he had a life that was not derived from Adam, but, transferred from a heavenly condition, he had a right to life, and it was this life to which he had a right that he was now laying down on behalf of, and as a redemption price for, Adam and his race. In letting go his hold on life he surrendered it to the Father, who had already promised that his life being thus surrendered should entitle him to a higher life under still greater favor, and this he received when he arose from the dead on the "third day," for, as the Apostle declared, "He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] in the Spirit" – a spirit being. – I Pet. 3:18.
