

WHAT OUR LORD FEARED AND FROM WHAT HE WAS SAVED

"Christ...was heard in that he feared." – Heb. 5:7.

THAT which the Lord feared was not that the love or promises of God would fail. He knew that God was faithful who had promised; that God is a covenant-keeping God, and that all his conduct and dealings are founded upon the eternal principles of truth and righteousness, from which to vary in the least iota would be a moral impossibility. But the Lord also knew that the plan of human salvation was made dependent upon the obedience of the Anointed High Priest to every jot and tittle of the Law concerning him, as shown in the typical service of the Tabernacle. Not only must the sacrifice be made, but it must be offered exactly as prescribed.

If the typical high priest, Aaron, had at any time failed to conform to the directions given for the offering (see Lev. 9:16); if he had forgotten or ignored any part of the directions; or if he had substituted some of his own ideas, he would not have been allowed to sprinkle the blood of such imperfect sacrifice upon the mercy-seat; his offering would not have been accepted; he would have died, and so could never have come out and blessed the people. – Lev. 16:2,3.

Thus we see that when undertaking the great work of redemption our Lord bore in himself the issues of life and death, not only for the whole human race, but for himself as well. Figuratively speaking, he took his life into his own hands. No wonder, then, if under the weight of his responsibility, the Lord feared! The tension of the trials to which he was subjected was too great for even the perfect human nature, unaided by Divine grace. Therefore he frequently sought the place of prayer for grace to help in every time of need.

Consider the great fight of afflictions through which he passed; the subtle and deceptive temptations in the wilderness (SCRIPTURE STUDIES, Vol. 5, pp. 110-117); the contradiction of sinners against himself, and the base ingratitude of those he came to save; consider also his poverty, his loss of friends, his labors and weariness, his homelessness, his bitter and relentless persecutions and, finally, his betrayal and dying agony! Surely the tests of endurance and of obedience to the exact requirements of the Law of sacrifice, under these circumstances, were most crucial. What carefulness it wrought in the Lord; for he feared, lest the promise having been left him of entering into the rest that remaineth and the glory to follow the Day of Atonement, he should come short of the full requirements of his Office as Priest, to render acceptable service. So also, says the Apostle (Heb. 4:1), should *we* fear lest a promise being left us of entering into *his rest*, any of us should seem to come short of it.

**"THE CUP WHICH MY FATHER HATH POURED FOR
ME SHALL I NOT DRINK IT?"**

When the Lord came to the last night of his earthly life, then the question came to his mind with increased force, "Have I thus far done everything in *exact accordance* with the will of God? And now, in full view of the agony which it will cost, am I able to drink the bitter cup to its very dregs? Can I endure, not only the physical agony, but also the ignominy and shame and cruel mockings? And can I do it so perfectly as to be entirely acceptable to God in my own righteousness? Can I endure to see my disciples scattered and dismayed and my lifework apparently destroyed, my name and the cause of God covered with infamy, and my enemies triumphant and boastful? Can I do this so as to hear the 'well done?'"

Such was our Lord's last conflict. Doubtless the powers of darkness were busy in that awful hour, taking advantage of the circumstances and of his weakness and weariness to discourage his hope and to fill his mind with fears that, after all, he would fail,

or *had* failed to do the work acceptably; and that a resurrection, therefore, was uncertain. No wonder that the perfect human heart sank before such considerations and that an agony of emotion brought great drops of bloody sweat! But did he *yield* to the discouragement and give up the struggle when the crucial test was thus upon him? No! he took those human fears to the Heavenly Father, "to him who was able to deliver him out of death," in order that his [R4804 : page 125] human will might be reinforced by Divine grace to go forward and complete his sacrifice acceptably to God; to freely submit to be led away as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so to open not his mouth in self-defense. – Isa. 53:7.

His prayers to the Father were not in vain: "He was heard in that he feared." Though his words were few (because no words could express the emotions of his soul) his chastened spirit was all the while making intercession for him with groanings which could not be uttered. (Rom. 8:28.) Then God sent an angel to comfort and minister unto him; to assure him still of the Divine favor, and thus to give him fresh courage, strength of mind and steadiness of nerve to endure all that was before him, *even unto death*.

With this assistance of Divine grace our dear Lord went forth from that moment with undaunted courage to finish the work which was given him to do. Calmly he could come now and say to his beloved, but weary and bewildered disciples, "Sleep on, now, and take your rest." The bitterness of the mental conflict was over, and the light of heaven shining into his soul had chased away the deep gloom that hung over him like a funeral pall, making him "exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." Yes, "he was heard in that he feared"; and the fear was all taken away; and, strong in the strength which God supplied, he felt that he was able to offer the acceptable sacrifice, to meet every jot and tittle of the requirement of the Law in doing so; and hence, that his salvation *out of death*, his *resurrection*, was assured.

"LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH THE THINGS WHICH HE SUFFERED"

The fear on the Lord's part was not a sinful fear. It was a fear such as we, also, are exhorted to have – we who are striving to walk in his footsteps – lest we fail to realize the precious promises vouchsafed to us upon conditions that are positive and unalterable. (Heb. 4:1.) It was a fear begotten, not of doubt of the Father's ability and willingness to fulfil all his promises, but of a knowledge of the righteous principles which must in every case govern the Father's course of action; a fear of the inflexible Law which righteously affixed the reward of eternal life and glory to his fulfilling of his Covenant of sacrifice, or of eternal death should he fail. At the same time he began to realize that, though perfect as a human being, his heart and his flesh would fail unless reinforced by Divine grace. The Psalmist expressed this fear of the Lord and the source from which his help came, when he said, "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psa. 73:26.) It was a filial fear entirely compatible with his relationship to God as a recognized Son; for "though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience through the things which he suffered." – Heb. 5:8.

We are glad that Jesus was not cold and stoical, but that he was full of warm, loving, tender feelings and sensibilities; and that we, consequently, can realize his ability to sympathize with the most tender, the most delicate, the most refined, the most sensitive, more than could any other human being. He must have felt keenly the conditions under which he had placed himself, in laying down his life on our behalf; for the more perfect the organism, the more sensitive and high-strung are the feelings; the greater the capacity for joy, the greater the capacity for sorrow. Being absolutely perfect, our Lord must have been immeasurably more susceptible to the influence of pain than are others.

"OFFERED UP STRONG CRYINGS AND TEARS TO HIM WHO WAS ABLE TO SAVE HIM"

Besides this, he knew that he had a perfect life, *unforfeited*, and realized that he was about to part with it. Others of the human family possess only a forfeited or condemned existence, and realize that they *must* part with this some time. It would, therefore, be a very different matter for our Lord to lay down his life from that of any of his followers laying down theirs. If we let one hundred per cent. represent perfect life, our Lord had the full one hundred per cent. to lay down, while we, being more than ninety-nine one-hundredths dead through trespasses and sins and condemnation could, at most, have had but one hundredth part to lay down. A cold, stoical indifference to the loss of life, based upon knowledge that it could last but a short time longer at best, would, therefore, be a very different thing from the clear knowledge which our Lord had of the experience which he had with the Father "before the world was"; and the realization that the life he was about to lay down was *not forfeited* through sin, but was his own voluntary sacrifice.

There can be no doubt that this thought of the extinguishment of life was an important factor in our Lord's sorrow. The Apostle clearly intimates it in the words (Heb. 5:7), "Who in the days of his flesh... offered up prayers and supplication, with strong cryings and tears, unto him who was able to save him from [out of] death, and was heard in [respect to] that he feared" – *extinction*. This thought brought with it another, viz., Had he done the Father's will perfectly? Could he claim, and would he receive the reward promised him – *a resurrection from the dead?*

Had he failed in any particular to come to the exact standard of perfection his death would have meant extinction; and although all men fear extinction, none could know the full depth and force of its meaning as could he who not only had the perfection of life, but had recollection of his previous glory with his Father before the world was.

For him the very thought of extinction would bring anguish, terror of soul. This thought seems not to have come to our Lord with the same force previously. It was this, therefore, that bore down upon him now so heavily as an exceeding sorrow unto death. He saw himself about to suffer according to the Law as an evil-doer, and the question naturally arose, was he *entirely* blameless, and would the Heavenly Judge *thoroughly* acquit him whom so many were disposed to condemn?

"COULD YE NOT WATCH WITH ME ONE HOUR?"

After praying he went to his three disciples, but found them asleep. Gently he reproved them asking, "Could ye not watch with me *one hour*? Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation." Then our Lord went away and used the same words in prayer; and again he prayed a third time, similarly. The matter was weighing upon his heart. Could he rely upon it now, that having sought to do the Father's will, having finished his course, he had done it acceptably? Could he have full assurance of faith that God would save him out of death by a resurrection?

In answer to his petition a heavenly messenger was sent to comfort him, to reassure him, to strengthen him. We are not informed what message the angel brought, but we can see that it was a message of peace; that he brought assurance, not only that the Lord's course had the Father's approval, but that he would be brought again from the dead by a resurrection. These were quite sufficient to give our Lord all the strength and courage necessary for the ordeal before him; and from that moment **[R4804 : page 126]** onward we find him the coolest and calmest of the notable figures brought to our attention. When approached by Judas and his band, he was the most calm and self-possessed of all; when before the chief-priest, Caiaphas, he was the same; when before Pilate, the same; when crucified, the same. He had found peace in the message that he was approved of the Father, and that all the gracious promises of glory, honor and immortality were

his; and now he could pass through any ordeal, he could submit himself perfectly to his enemies.

