

SMITTEN OF GOD, AFFLICTED

– *NOVEMBER 29. – MARK 15:22-37. –*

**"Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows;
yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."**

– **Isaiah 53:4.**

THERE is no room for dispute respecting the facts associated with the crucifixion of Jesus. The only room for contention is in respect to the Divine limitation and reason for the crucifixion. The Prophet Isaiah gives the Divine explanation to us.

SORROWFUL WAY!

The Savior was greatly weakened by His three years of ministry, in which He had given forth His vitality freely to the people in the healing of their diseases. Besides this, He had been on a constant strain, without sleep, from the time He had sent His disciples to prepare the Passover. This period had included the trying experiences connected with the Passover and the institution of the Memorial Supper, the journey to Gethsemane, the hours of agony and weakness there, the experiences following, the trial of the Sanhedrin by the high priests, the trial before Herod and before Pilate, the scourging, etc. – all had been a constant strain on Him. Now, condemned to crucifixion by those for whom He had sacrificed His Heavenly home and glory, He was additionally required to carry His own cross. He did so until finally His weakness under its weight hindered, and a passing farmer was compelled to assist – whether by carrying the cross entirely or by walking behind Jesus and carrying a portion of the weight is not made very clear by the original text.

Where were Peter, John, James, Thomas and the other Apostles, that they did not volunteer assistance? Doubtless they

were deterred by fear. But oh, what a blessing they missed! Tradition has it that the Cyrenean farmer who bore the cross by compulsion afterward became one of the followers of the Nazarene, through having the Truth of the Savior's Message borne in upon his heart by the experiences of that hour.

Crowding around were weeping women, and we wonder that none of them lent a helping hand. Turning to them, Jesus said, "Weep not for Me. Weep for yourselves and for your children." The Master's words in this connection, respecting their seeking the mountains and hills for covering and protection, are assumed by some Bible students to belong in part to the great trouble which came upon the Jewish people thirty-seven years later in the destruction of Jerusalem. And it is assumed that that destruction of Jerusalem and this trouble were types which foreshadowed the greater distress which will occur in the closing time of this Age.

Certain it is that the same expressions in respect to the mountains and hills is used in respect to the end of this Gospel Age. When at His Second Advent Christ shall be revealed in flaming fire of judgments, it will consume the present order of things and prepare the way for the new King. We are not to assume that any one would pray for mountains to fall upon him when he could take his own life in a much easier way. Rather, the thought seems to be that many will seek and desire and pray for hiding, for protection against the raging troubles. The rocks of society are its social organizations, each of which seeks to protect its own membership.

"If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" said Jesus. He here seems to liken the Jewish nation to the fig-tree which quickly withered away under His curse, or sentence. So, five days before His crucifixion, Jesus, riding upon the ass to Jerusalem and weeping over it, had said, "Your house is left unto you desolate." Now, in so short a time, while the fig-tree was still green, its rulers had reached a desperate place, so that they were

willing to violate all law and set aside all conscience in His crucifixion.

If so quickly the evil worked to such a horrible outrage of justice, what might not be expected later on, when that Jewish fig-tree had thoroughly dried and all the sap (spirituality) had gone out of it? Similarly, in the end of this Age we may expect that the Church, the Body of Christ, the saints, will suffer violence, that thus the salt of the earth will be removed, and that quickly thereafter a general putrefaction will set in – anarchy.

THE SON OF MAN LIFTED UP

Jesus had foretold His crucifixion, saying that "as Moses lifted up the brazen serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up" – be crucified. The brazen serpent was thus used as a type of Jesus. He was actually holy, harmless, undefiled; but He took the sinner's place – He was treated as the sinner. The severest penalty under the Law was crucifixion – "Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree." And so, says the Apostle, Jesus was made a curse for us. (Galatians 3:13.) Although He knew no sin, He took the place of the sinner. Jesus died for our sins, according to the Scriptures.

The words of our text that say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," are not to be taken into account, because they are not found in the oldest Greek manuscripts. Besides, Jesus must have known that the sin of the Jews would bring a penalty. He had foretold in His parable that God would punish them and burn up their city. (Luke 20:14-16.) In the context the statement, "Weep for yourselves," implied a punishment upon the Jews for their sins, and that this sin would not be wholly forgiven them. As a matter of fact, we know that the Jews have been cut off from Divine favor for now eighteen centuries. It is proper for us to assume that Jesus was in full harmony with the Father in respect to all this Divine arrangement, and that He did not ask something contrary to the Divine will.

St. Paul refers to this matter also, saying respecting the trouble which came upon the Jews at the time of the rejection of Jesus, "Wrath is come upon them to the uttermost, that all things written concerning them should have fulfilment." – 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16.

On the other hand, we may well be assured that Jesus, who was giving His life for the Jews, would not wish that they should not have punishment that would be due to them for the great sin of destroying the One whom Jehovah had especially sent to them, as His representative, His Son. A just penalty for such wilful sin would undoubtedly be utter destruction. But the Apostle points out that "the blood of Jesus speaketh better things" – not justice. (Hebrews 12:24.) His blood speaks forgiveness of sins, not only for the remainder of the world, but also for the Jews. It speaks a full opportunity for reconciliation with God during the Messianic Kingdom.

St. Peter corroborates the thought that the Jews were not wholly responsible for their course because of (at least) a partial ignorance. Addressing some of them afterwards he said: "I wot that in ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers"; for if they had known they would not have crucified "the Prince of Life." (Acts 3:15-17.) The Prophet Zechariah shows us that in God's due time the eyes of understanding of the whole world will be **[R5578 : page 345]** opened. All will see things differently enough, and the Jews are especially mentioned – "They that pierced Him." Then the Lord will pour upon them the spirit of prayer and supplication, and they shall look upon Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him (Zechariah 12:10), realizing that they maltreated their best Friend, their Redeemer.

THEY PARTED MY GARMENTS

The stony-heartedness of the Roman soldiers is indicated by the fact that while Jesus was dying they cast lots for His seamless robe,

dividing His other garments amongst them. We have God's promise that the result of the Millennial Kingdom will be to take away the stony heart out of the flesh and to give instead tender hearts. Oh, how much all mankind need full restitution to the image and likeness of God, originally represented in Adam and subsequently represented in the Man Jesus!

The attitude of the world is further represented in the two culprits who were executed at the same time, one on each side of Jesus, who by the inscription over His cross was styled King of the Jews. One of these companions in tribulation railed at Jesus as a fraud, bantering Him to manifest any power He had by saving Himself and His associates. Little did he realize that if Jesus had saved Himself He could not have been the Savior of the world!

The other thief befriended Jesus, declaring that He had done nothing amiss and was unjustly accused. Then, turning to Jesus, he expressed his faith in Him by asking a reward for his kind words. He said, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." The poor thief knew that Jesus claimed to be a King. He was standing near when Jesus was asked the question, "Art Thou a King," and heard the answer, "My Kingdom is not of this Age." The thief recognized that Jesus was worthy to be a King, so noble of character and of appearance was He. What if He were really what He claimed to be? What if finally, in the great Beyond, this One should prove to be the Messiah? He would at least tell the truth and declare a word in His defense, and he would at least ask kind remembrance if this One ever reached His Kingly Power.

The answer of Jesus seems to have been very generally misunderstood by us all in the past. We thought that He promised the thief to be with Him that same day in the Kingdom. Yet we knew that, according to other Scriptures, Jesus Himself was not in the Kingdom that day, but in Joseph's new tomb; that He did not rise from the dead, from Sheol, from Hades, the tomb, until the third day;

and that even then He said to Mary after His resurrection, "I have not yet ascended to My Father and your Father, My God and your God." Evidently, then, Jesus could not have said that He and the thief would be together in Paradise that same day.

The true explanation is at hand. Paradise, lost through the fall six thousand years ago, is about to be restored by Messiah in His glorious Kingdom. It was then that the thief asked to be remembered – "when Thou comest into Thy Kingdom." The thief has been sleeping in death since, waiting for the time for Messiah's Kingdom to come. The answer of Jesus was in full accord with this: Amen. So be it. "Verily, I say unto thee, this day [this day when I seem not to have a friend, and when nothing seems more unlikely than that I would ever have a Kingdom, I tell you today], thou shalt be with Me in Paradise."

Jesus' Kingdom will quickly begin the work of turning the world into a Paradise. And, in the resurrection of the hosts who have fallen asleep in death, that thief will be remembered by the Master. Undoubtedly a great blessing will be his in Paradise, because of his comforting words spoken on the cross, and especially because those words indicated that he had a tender and contrite heart, such as will be the first to have blessings in the Kingdom.

Jesus commended His mother to His disciple John, which implies that the husband, Joseph, was no longer living. It shows us, too, the Master's careful thoughtfulness of the interests of His loved ones in His own hour of extreme suffering.

The Master's dying cry, "My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?" attests to us the fact that He did not claim to be the Heavenly Father, but the Son of God. It also shows us how the Master endured to the very limit the penalty of the sinner. The penalty of sin was not merely to die, but also to be cut off from fellowship with God. Jesus, in taking the sinner's place, must for a moment at least have the full experience of the sinner's alienation.

The Master's cry, "It is finished," reminds us of His statement of the day previous, "I have a baptism [into death] to be accomplished, and how am I straitened [in difficulty] until it be accomplished" – until it be finished.

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit," reminds us of the fact that Jesus was laying down His life, that the spirit of life which He possessed was that which had been transferred from a previous condition. He had not forfeited His right to life, as had Adam. He might therefore still speak of it as His own spirit, His own right to life – merely surrendered for the time, merely laid down under the Divine promise that it should be given to Him again in the resurrection.

