



A Memorial Vesper

Eventide Reflections on Jesus' Last Week

Jesus the Very Thought of Thee

Jesus! the very thought of Thee.
With sweetness fills my breast;
But sweeter far Thy face to see,
And in Thy presence rest.

No voice can sing, no heart can frame,
Nor can the memory find
A sweeter sound than Thy blest name,
O Savior of mankind!

O Hope of every contrite heart,
O Joy of all the meek,
To those who ask, how kind Thou art!
How good to those who seek!

But what to those who find?
Ah! this. Nor tongue nor pen can show,
The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.

During Jesus' last week he passed through a series of events that must have been a roller coaster ride of emotional ups and downs, highs and lows. In one week's time he went from exaltation to crucifixion; from shouts of hosannas to shouts of "crucify him;" from being hailed to being jeered; from being rallied around to being abandoned; from being anointed in loving sympathy, to being betrayed with kisses; from being a teacher in the temple, to being interrogated by the Sanhedrin; from casting the thieves out of the temple precincts to being crucified between two thieves; from the quiet of Gethsemane's shade to the hysteria of the frenzied mob at the Pavement; from the sweet fellowship of Simon the Leper's home to the brutal mockings and physical abuse by vicious guards; from the solemnity of the Lord's supper to the ignominy of the cruel mockings upon the cross; from being comforted of God by an angel, to being forsaken by God at the end.



Does Jesus have emotions? Does he have feelings?

Oh, yes! Our high priest is not, was not, a cold, stoical robot merely passing through these events without being affected by them.

More than this, they were permitted by the heavenly Father for the very purpose of developing Jesus as a new creature, to perfect through suffering and hardship a sympathetic high priest.



“And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. And he said unto them, with desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded....So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” Luke 22:14, 15; John 13:4, 5, 12-17



Jesus had noticed among his disciples a spirit of selfishness; he had overheard them disputing which of them should be greatest in the kingdom. So after the Passover supper was over, he arose from the table and performed for his disciples the most menial service of washing their feet. They probably had not even thought of performing such a service for each other or for Him, and even had consideration enough to object to his thus serving them in so humble a manner. At this moment Jesus might have thought back to the contrast of Mary's act of anointing his feet and wiping them with her hair — what selfless humility! Surely she had imbibed the Master's spirit of serving others. Yet even now as his trial was unfolding Jesus thought about the need of a lasting character lesson for his disciples. Even though he girded himself to be their servant, he was indeed their Master. The mere act of service not only did not detract from, but rather it enhanced, the servant's greatness, when one views it from the divine perspective.



“When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and said, verily I say unto you, one of you which eateth with me shall betray me. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto him one by one, is it I? And another said, is it I? And he answered and said unto them, it is one of the twelve, that dippeth with me in the dish.”
John 13:21; Mark 14:18-20



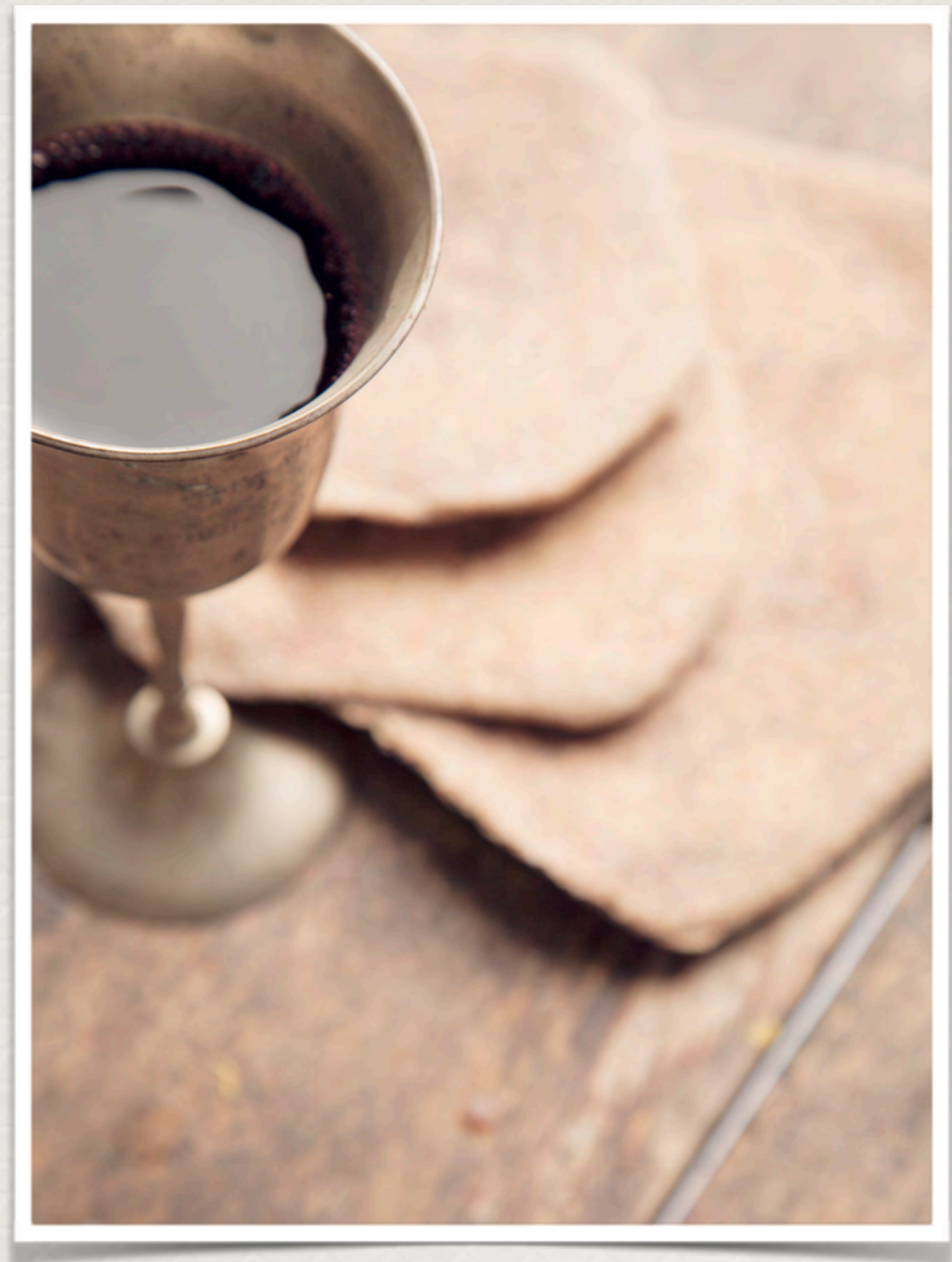
Jesus announces that even one of them was to betray him! Even one who would dip into the dish with him. In the east, the custom of eating together pledged friendship. As the disciples each exclaimed "*Lord, is it I?*" a means of attesting to their innocence before each other, even Judas Iscariot felt a need to join in so as not to stand out from the others. Jesus refrained himself from lashing out, *You hypocrite, liar!* No, Jesus knew what the Father's plan was, and he simply acknowledged Judas with, "*Thou hast said. That thou doest, do quickly,*" dismissing Judas from the supper. We marvel at such self-control possessed by the Master. Jesus never threatened Judas. In fact he was gentle to him till the end.



“And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” Matthew 26:26-28



Judas being already dismissed to perform his nefarious deed, our Lord took several items from the paschal meal to institute a new thing, that is, the memorial emblems. They were to be a yearly reminder of his ransom sacrifice, our antitypical paschal Lamb slain for us, for our justification, and furthermore, it would also represent the privilege of being united to him as members of his mystical body by our consecration vows, to suffer with him even as he did, even unto death.



The Sacrificial Loaf and Cup

*A broken loaf, a cup of crimson wine,
On snowy table laid,
Ah! Emblems these of wondrous sacrifice
The costly price he paid!
That precious body, broken once for me,
That precious blood once spilt
For me, that I through him might be made free,
Aye, free from death and guilt!*

*And has this broken loaf, this crimson wine,
A further meaning still?
Ah, yes! Thro' grace I am a part of him,
His sufferings to fulfil.
My body to be broken with my Lord,
My blood with his be shed,
And as I die with him, with him I live,
My ever glorious Head!*

Remember Me

*According to thy gracious word, In meek humility,
This will I do, my dying Lord, I will remember thee.*

*Thy body, broken for my sake, My bread from heav'n shall be;
Thy testamental cup I take, And thus remember thee*

*When to the cross I turn mine eyes, And rest on Calvary,
O Lamb of God, my Sacrifice, I must remember thee.*

*Remember thee and all thy pains, And all thy love to me;
Yea, while a breath, a pulse remains, I will remember thee.*

*Then of thy grace I'll know the sum, And in thy likeness be,
When thou hast in Thy kingdom come, And dost remember me.*

Gethsemane



“And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.” Matthew 26:30, 36

Leaving the comfort of the upper room they went out into the night. We can imagine the quiet walk through the city to the outer walls, then down the path that crossed over the wade Kidron, then up the side of mount Olivet they went, to the seclusion of an olive tree orchard owned by a friend. Jesus might have designed it so that the disciples would not have been trapped in the upper room, or it might have been the refuge of a quiet place of prayer he sought, and possibly both. Hence Jesus left eight of his disciples as a sort of outer guard while he took the three most zealous deeper into the shade, asking them to watch and pray with him for he was “exceedingly sorrowful even unto death.” The Greek has the thought of a severe sense of loneliness, homesickness, and grief. He desired their companionship in sharing the burden, but alas they could not bare it themselves. They lacked spirit-begettal, and as yet could not understand. Luke tells us they fell asleep for sorrow. It had been prophesied in the Psalms (69:20), that *“Reproach has broken my heart, and I am so sick, and I looked for sympathy, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.”*





As we consider the solemn scenes of this lesson, let it be with reverence and deep gratitude, remembering it was our load the Master bore, that it was the chastisement of our peace that was upon him, and that with his stripes we are healed. Isa. 53:5, 6

Could ye not watch with Me one hour?

Gethsemane! Gethsemane! The Savior's last dark hours!

In agony of soul he sought to know his Father's will;

*Three times he prayed, and thrice he came
unto his chosen three*

*For some sweet word of comfort from
the lips of those he loved.*

Alas! With weariness their eyes were heavy and they slept.

*Ah, me! Did e'er the Man of Sorrows
utter sadder words than these:*

"Could ye not watch with me one hour?"

And then in tones of tenderest sympathetic love,

"Sleep on and take your rest."

*He knew their frame, remembered they were dust,
and hushed the cry,*

Of longing in his breaking heart.

But he who never sleeps nor slumbers

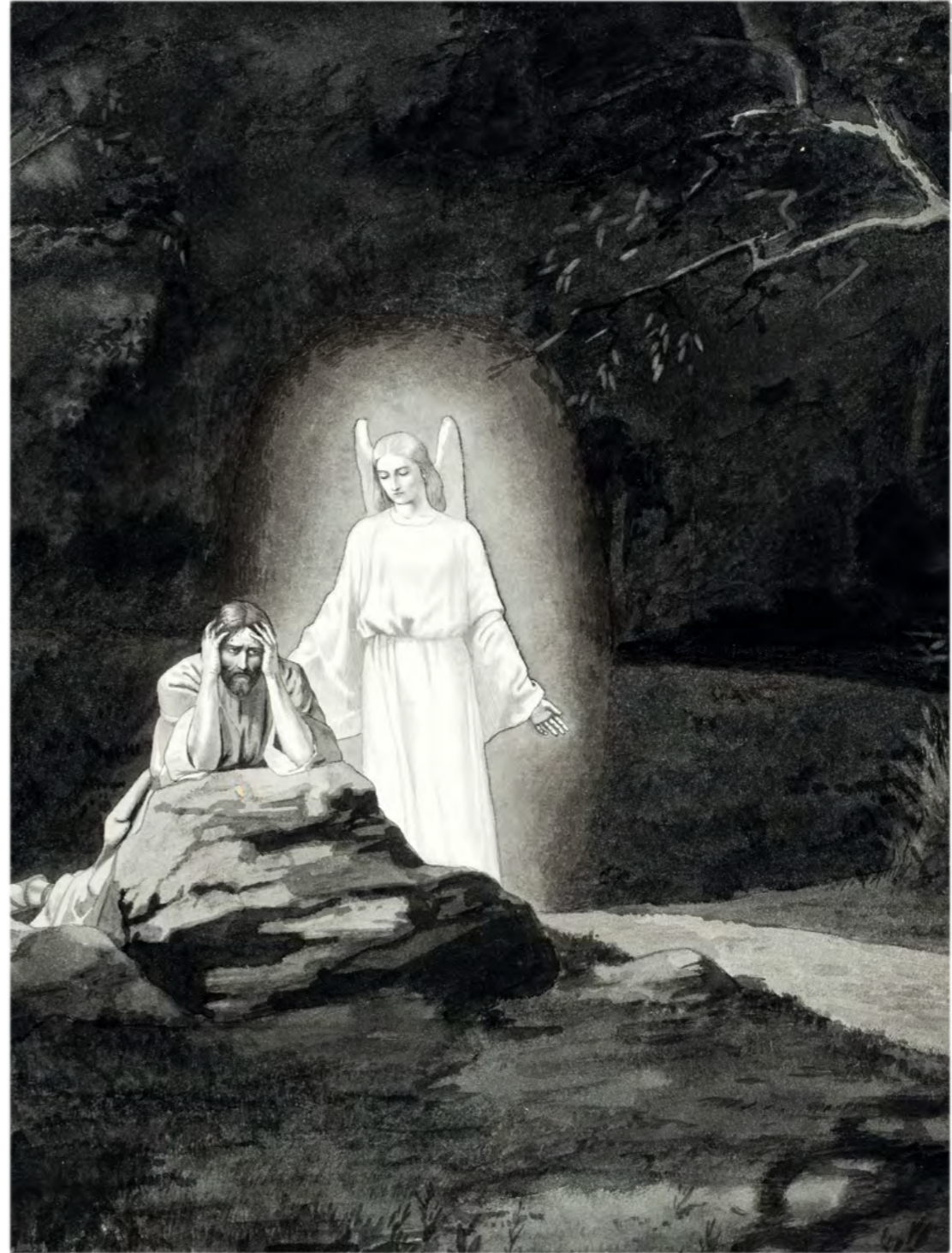
heard his well-beloved Son in that he feared,

And sent his holy angel to assure him all was well.

It was no sign of weakness in the Master that he thus craved human sympathy. His was no coarse, stoical nature, insensible to pain and shame and loss; nor was it a proud, self-centered nature which stood aloof from human fellowship, although those with whom he associated were so far beneath his glorious perfection. Into this one hour were crowded, not only the mental cruelty and torture of a horrible death, but also the sense of desolation to be experienced when even his beloved disciples, overcome by fear and dismay, should forsake him; and the sorrowful reflections upon the irretrievable loss of Judas, and upon the course of the Jewish nation, his own people, who despised him and were about to call down upon their own heads the vengeance of his blood, saying, *"his blood be upon us and on our children."* He foresaw the terrible calamities that in consequence must soon overwhelm them. The degradation of a whole guilty world, which must continue to groan and travail in pain until by his sacrifice he should gain deliverance for them from sin and death, caused him to feel the burden of responsibility to an extent which we can only approximate, but cannot fully comprehend. And in addition to all this was his knowledge of the fact that every jot and tittle of the Law with reference to the sacrifice must be perfectly fulfilled according to the pattern in the typical sacrifice of the Day of Atonement. If he should fail in any part of the work, all would be lost, both for himself and for the entire human family.



When the fearful ordeal in Gethsemane strained the powers of endurance almost to their utmost tension his prayer was only, *“if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”* Then, though the cup might not pass from him, an angel came and ministered to him. Just how, we know not, but probably by refreshing his mind with the precious promises and prophetic pictures of the coming glory, which none of his disciples had sufficiently comprehended to thus comfort him in this hour when the gloom of thick darkness settled down upon his soul, crowding out hope and bringing a sorrow exceeding great. Ah, it was Jehovah’s hand upholding him, blessed be his holy name, according to his promise that he might not fail nor be discouraged.





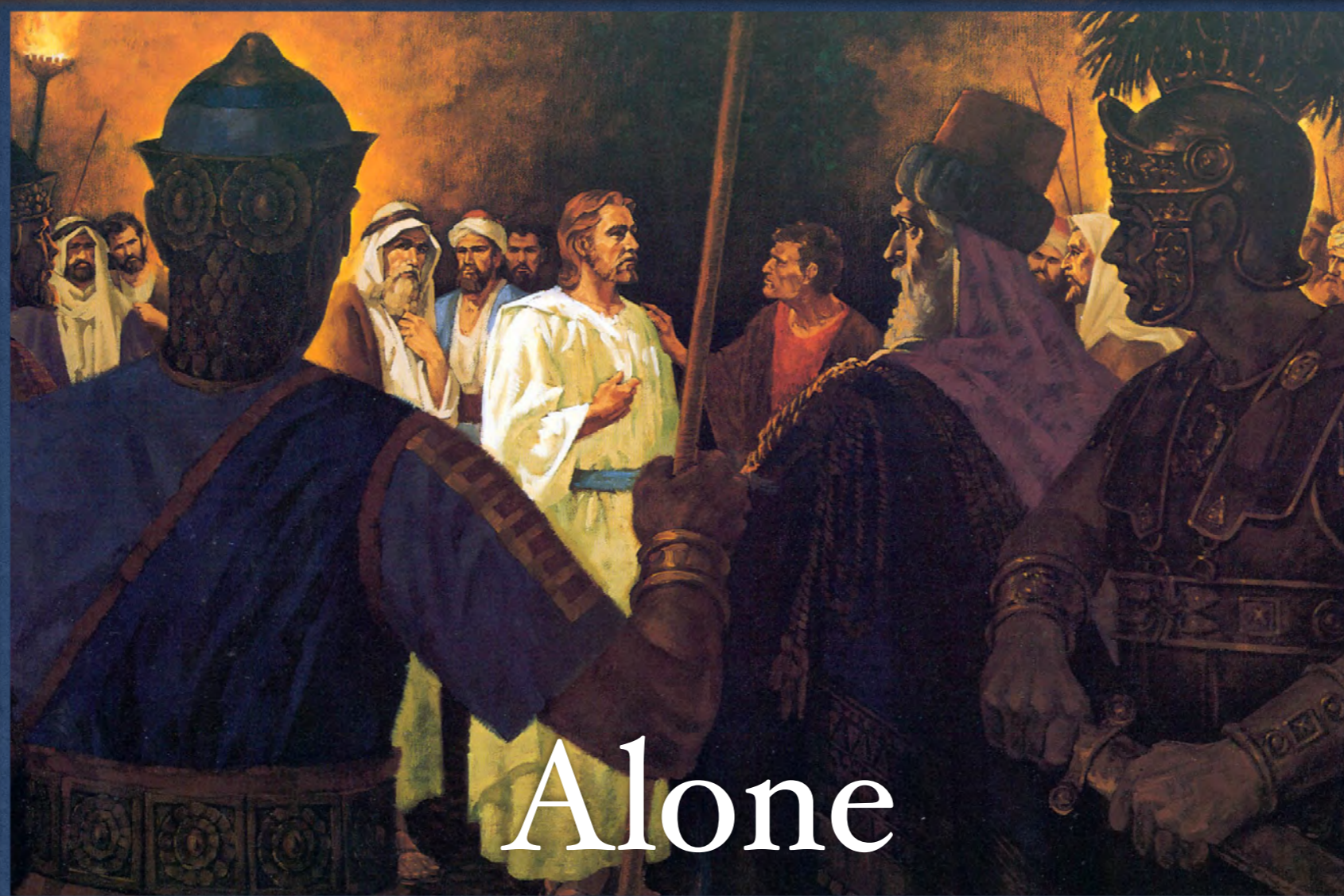
His Betrayal and Arrest

“Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus, and said, Hail, master, and kissed him. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

Matthew 26:48, 49; Luke 22:48

Now commenced the realization of the dreadful forebodings of Gethsemane. Mark his calm, dignified fortitude as he addresses Judas and the soldiers, and its effect upon them. they were so overpowered with the grandeur and nobility of this wonderful man that they could not have taken him had he not voluntarily placed himself in their hand. And how does Judas betray him? With a kiss! In fact, the Greek denotes with kisses, plural. Imagine having someone who had lived with you for three years, whom you had fed, and provided for, and who you had educated, come to arrest you — an arrest which would lead to your torture and death. Judas was cold and calculating, and now it had led to bribery, betrayal, and to being an accomplice to murder. Such cruelty! And how did Jesus react? In full control of his emotions he inquired of Judas, "*Friend, (comrade, not philo) betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?*" Of all that Jesus could have said he drew attention to the hypocrisy in his manner of betrayal. And note that Judas could approach that close to Jesus without fear of personal injury, for he knew the master's gentleness.





Alone

“Then saith Jesus unto them, all ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.” Matthew 26:31

Notice our Lord's kind consideration for the bewildered and weary disciples, and his loving excuse for them, "*The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak.*" Note his request to the soldiers at the time of his arrest that they might be permitted to go their way (*John 18:8*), that so they might escape sharing in his persecutions. So through all the trial and mocking, and finally the crucifixion, his courage and solicitude for the welfare of others never failed. They would have stayed to fight, but being told to put up their swords confused them. They understood not what momentous events were unfolding, but Jesus knew that now his hour had come to be led sheep-like to the slaughter. *Isaiah 53:7*





A Multitude of Trials

The Just One is tried by the Unjust

During the various trials we read that Jesus spoke or held his peace as he deemed it appropriate. The Apostle Peter tells us (*I Pet. 2:23*), “*When he was reviled, he reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not, but he committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*” The prophet Isaiah had said before, “*By judicial oppression he was taken away.*” (*Isa. 53:8*) And so it was: there were three different trials before the religious leaders, and three more before Pilate and Herod.



“And the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. And the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, answerest thou nothing? What is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we of any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy, what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.” Mark 14:55-65.





What an astonishing fact is here revealed, that the great men of the most favored nation on earth, the learned men, the wise men, the rulers, the men of years and experience, the religious teachers, should thus deliberately, and of long premeditation, wickedly conspire against the purest and most noble character that had ever graced the earth.

Not only had they frequently deputed emissaries to catch him in his words as he taught in public, but finally they had bribed an apostate disciple to betray him and a band of soldiers to arrest him, although there was no charge against him. And then this august, learned and dignified assembly, having secured their hated prisoner, busied themselves to find some two witnesses whose testimony should agree together in order to condemn him. Failing in their effort to satisfy this requirement of the Law, the high priest then endeavored to force Jesus to incriminate himself, saying, "*Answerest thou nothing?*" But when further urged to express himself by the inquiry, "*Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?*" – knowing that his reply would be like the signing of his own death warrant, he deliberately answered, "*I am,*" and added this prophecy, "*And ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*"



This frank and fearless acknowledgment of his divine origin and appointment as the long predicted Messiah, the Saviour of Israel and the world, was taken as blasphemy, and the hypocritical high priest, whose very robes were symbolic of the blessed one who stood in their midst fulfilling to the letter the predictions of the prophets, rent his clothes in token of astonishment and horror at such blasphemy, saying, *“What need we of any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death.”*



“Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, and said, hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, crucify him, crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, take ye him, and crucify him for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him, we have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour; and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, away with him, away with him, crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, we have no king but Caesar. When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, his blood be on us, and on our children.” Matt. 27:24, 25; John 19:1-3, 5-7, 14, 15



The several efforts of Pilate to release his innocent prisoner, who, he discovered, had been delivered to him for envy, were unavailing before the boisterous mob who, instigated by their rulers, loudly clamored for his death, and that by the most ignominious and cruel method, crucifixion, so that his memory should ever be covered with infamy. Then Pilate, who was influenced more by considerations of policy than of principle, willing to satisfy the people, delivered Jesus to be scourged and crucified, yet at the same time protesting the innocence of his prisoner and his own innocence in the sentence.



Jesus of Nazareth

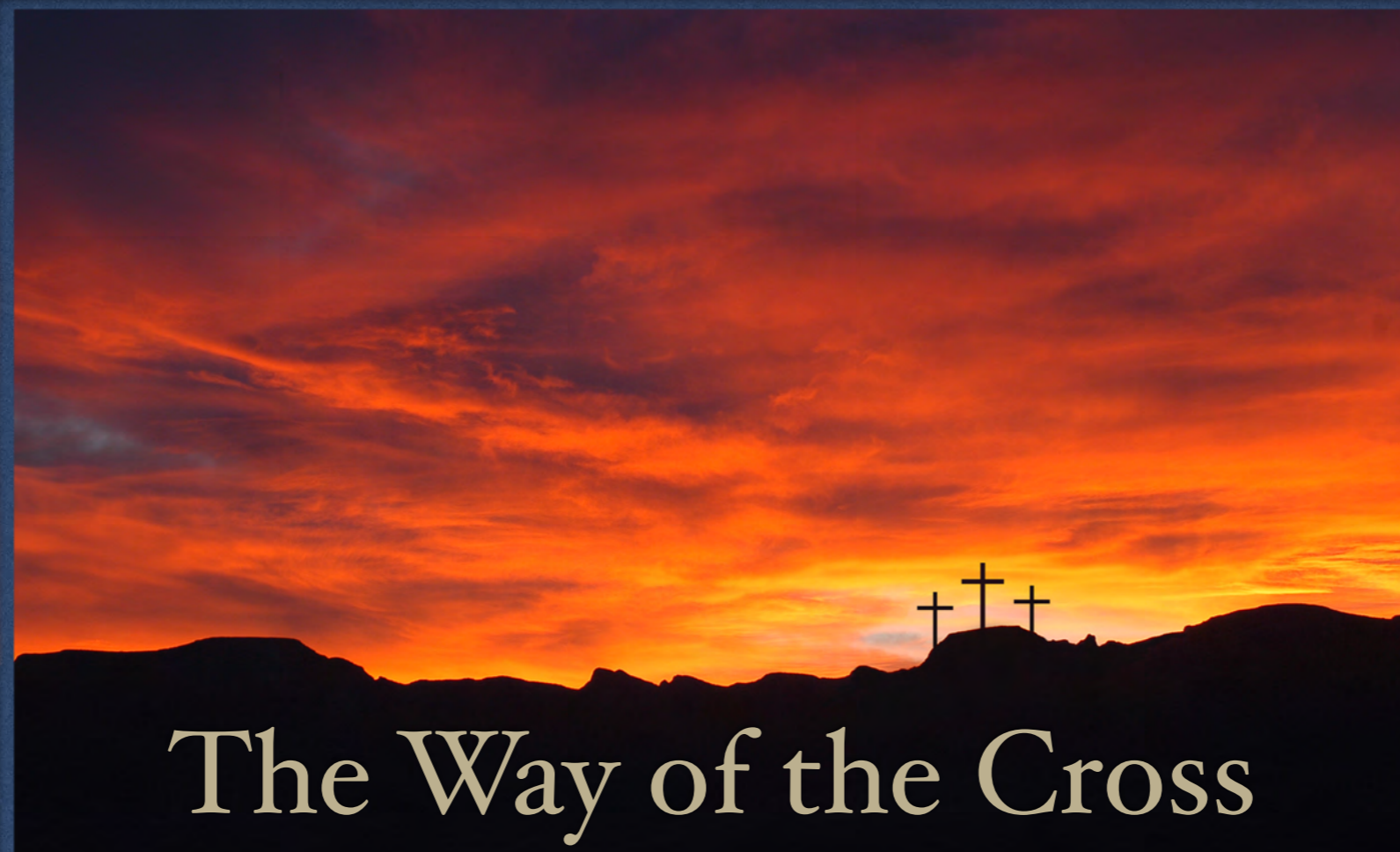
*In the gray twilight of a dreary morn,
A prisoner stood, defenseless and forlorn,
While, to a Roman judge, with boisterous breath,
His fierce accusers clamored for his death.*

*It was the Christ, rejected and abused;
The King of Kings, His sovereign claim refused;
The Son of God, abandoned and betrayed,
An outcast, in the world which he had made.*

*It was his chosen people whose demand
That timid judge was powerless to withstand;
And, while their baseless charges he denied,
He gave their victim to be crucified.*

*His chosen people! Those he loved and blest;
Whose little ones he folded to his breast;
Who cried more fiercely, as unmoved he stood,
“On us, and on our children, be his blood!”*

*Oh, Holy Savior, may thy grace reverse
The dreadful import of that reckless curse;
“And, on their children, thy atonement prove
“The blood of sprinkling,” through Redeeming Love!*

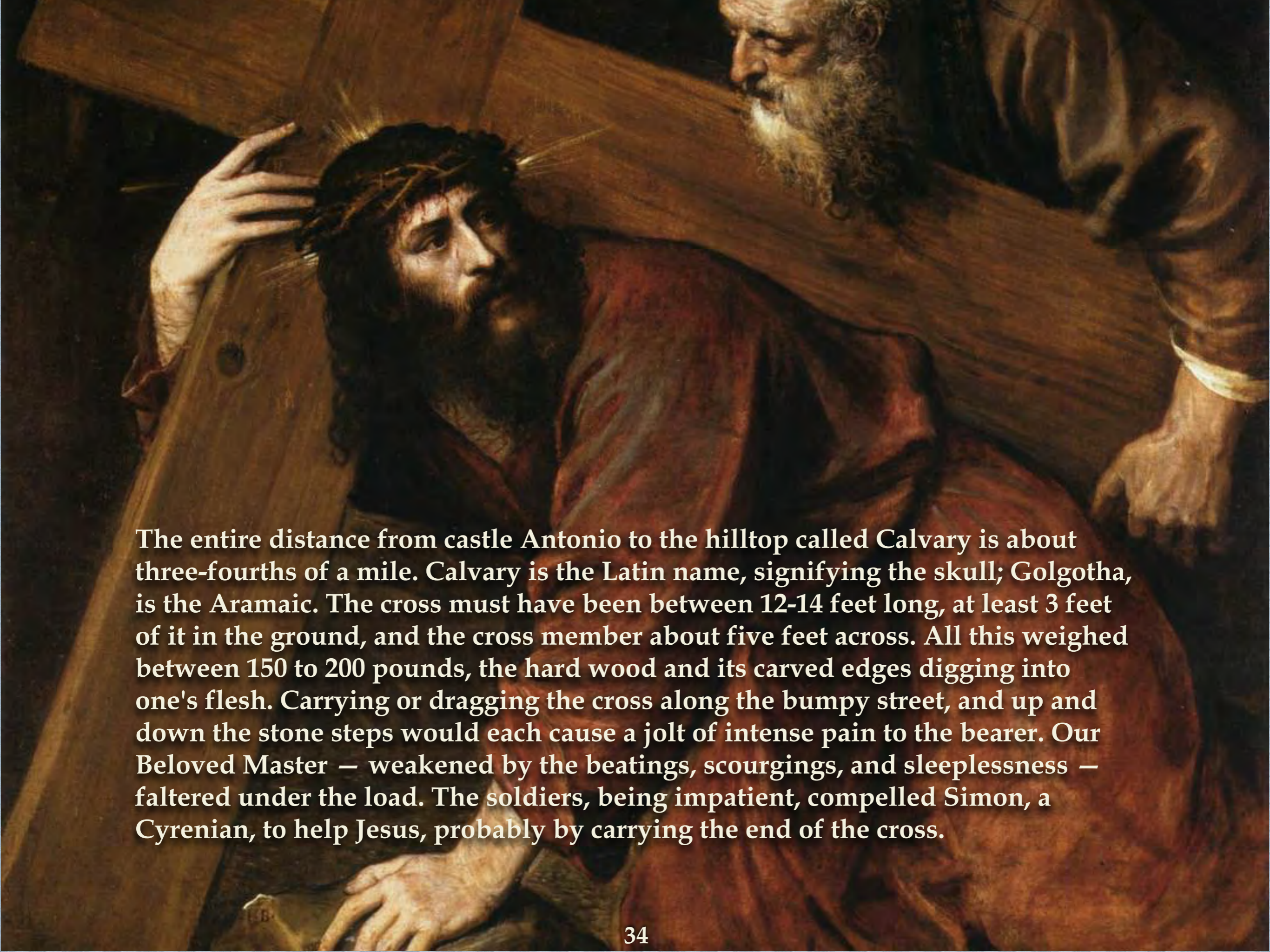


The Way of the Cross

“Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus and led him away. And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.” Luke 23:26, John 19:16

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 mixed multitude thronged the way — the curious throng, the exultant enemies, and some of the Lord's friends, "Mary with other women weeping."





The entire distance from castle Antonio to the hilltop called Calvary is about three-fourths of a mile. Calvary is the Latin name, signifying the skull; Golgotha, is the Aramaic. The cross must have been between 12-14 feet long, at least 3 feet of it in the ground, and the cross member about five feet across. All this weighed between 150 to 200 pounds, the hard wood and its carved edges digging into one's flesh. Carrying or dragging the cross along the bumpy street, and up and down the stone steps would each cause a jolt of intense pain to the bearer. Our Beloved Master — weakened by the beatings, scourgings, and sleeplessness — faltered under the load. The soldiers, being impatient, compelled Simon, a Cyrenian, to help Jesus, probably by carrying the end of the cross.

Via Dolorosa

*Down the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem that day,
The soldiers tried to clear the narrow street,
But the crowd pressed in to see
The man condemned to die on Calvary.*

*He was bleeding from a beating,
There were stripes upon his back,
And he wore a crown of thorns upon his head,
And he bore with every step
The scorn of those who cried out for his death.*

*Down the Via Dolorosa, called "the way of suffering,"
Like a lamb came the Messiah, Christ the King,
But he chose to walk that road
Out of his love for you and me,
Down the Via Dolorosa all the way to Calvary.*

*The blood that would cleanse
The souls of all men
Made its way to the heart of Jerusalem
Down the Via Dolorosa, called "the way of suffering,"
Like a lamb came the Messiah, Christ the King,
But he chose to walk that road
Out of his love for you and me,
Down the Via Dolorosa all the way to Calvary.*

The Place of the Skull

*“And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, **Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews**. And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take. And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself, and come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, he saved others, himself he cannot save. Let Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him.”* John 19:17-19; Mark 15:24, 29-32



Reaching 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 here.

“And sitting down they watched him there.”

*Sitting down, they watched him there,
Watched him, fairest of the fair,
Gazed with cold, unpitying eye,
While the jeering crowd passed by;
For his vesture cast a lot
(Seamless robe, without a spot);
Watched the “Man of Sorrows” there,
Who the world’s great sin must bear;
Watched while darkness veiled the sun,
Watched until he cried, “Tis done!”*



It was a sorrowful gathering for those 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."* Again we have an insight into our Lord's sympathetic nature when we 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 John. *"When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, behold thy mother!"*
John 19:26, 27



Even nature seems to have bowed its head in grief as darkness covered all the land.

“My God! my God! Why hast thou forsaken me?”

Yes, our Lord suffered the penalty for sin, even though he knew no sin; he suffered as a sinner, though he was sinless, *“by his stripes we are healed.”* Separated from communion with his heavenly Father, his heart was broken.

“It is finished.” Yes, his earthly task was done. Three and a half years of dying daily on behalf of others had reached its grand but horrific close.



Sweet the Moments

Sweet the moments, rich in blessing, Which before the cross I spend;
Life and health, and peace possessing, From the sinner's dying Friend.

Truly blessed is this station, Low before his cross to lie,
While I see divine compassion Beaming in his gracious eye.

Here it is I find my heaven While upon the cross I gaze;
Love I much? I've much forgiven; I'm a miracle of grace.

Love and grief my heart dividing, With my tears his feet I'll bathe;
Constant still, in faith abiding, Life deriving from his death.

Here, in tender, grateful sorrow, With my Saviour will I stay;
Here, fresh hope and strength will borrow, Turning darkness into day.

Calvary

*Through many a lovely landscape
My pilgrim-staff I've brought,
From many a rocky em'nence
My gaze the valley sought.
But far above all mountains
I've ever seen, give me
The quiet, lonely hillock,
The mount of Calvary.*

*It towers not with forehead
Ice-crowned into the clouds.
No sunny Alpine glacier
Its shoulders Bare enshroud.
But ne'er in all my wanderings
Seemed heaven so near to me,
And earth so lost in distance,
As there on Calvary.*

*On its bald summit never
A crown of forest stood
No gently waving oak-tops,
No precious cedar-wood.
But all the royal cedars
That Hermon once did see
Their lofty heads are bowing
Before Mount Calvary.*

*Go thither, earth-worn pilgrim,
There seek thy rest at last;
And at the feet of Jesus
Thy heavy burdens cast.
Then come and praise
with gladness –
How much was done for thee!*



It is Finished