

The Sufferings of Christ

Through the day He labored earnestly to save men from destruction. He healed the sick, He comforted the mourning, and brought cheerfulness and hope to the despairing. He brought the dead to life. After His work was finished for the day, He went forth, evening after evening, away from the confusion of the city, and His form was bowed in some retired place, in supplication to His Father.

At times the bright beams of the moon shone upon His bowed form. And then again the clouds and darkness shut away all light. The dew and frost of night rested upon His head and beard while in the attitude of a suppliant. He frequently continued His petitions through the entire night. If the Saviour of men felt the need of prayer in our behalf, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of prayer-- fervent, constant prayer on their own account! When Christ was the most fiercely beset by temptation, He ate nothing. He committed Himself to God, and through earnest prayer, and perfect submission to the will of His Father, came off conqueror.

Into Dark Gethsemane

Jesus had often resorted to Gethsemane with His disciples for meditation and prayer. They were all well acquainted with this sacred retreat. Even Judas knew where to lead the murderous throng, that he might betray Jesus into their hands. Never before had the Saviour visited the spot with His heart so full of sorrow. It was not bodily suffering from which the Son of God shrank, and which wrung from His lips in the presence of His disciples these mournful words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "Tarry ye here," said He, "and watch with Me." He was bowed to the earth with mental anguish, and in an agony He prayed to His heavenly Father. He felt the iniquity of sin, and the wrath of God against the violators of His holy law.

The Horror of Great Darkness

Could mortals view the amazement and sorrow of the angels as they watched in silent grief the Father separating His beams of light, love, and glory from His Son, they would better understand how offensive is sin in His sight. As the Son of God in the Garden of Gethsemane bowed in the attitude of prayer the agony of His spirit forced from His pores sweat like great drops of blood. It was here that the horror of great darkness surrounded Him. The sins of the world were upon Him. He was suffering in man's stead, as a transgressor of His Father's law. Here was the scene of temptation. The divine light of God was receding from His vision, and He was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness. In the agony of His soul He lay prostrate on the cold earth. He was realizing His Father's frown. The cup of suffering Christ had taken from the lips of guilty man, and proposed to drink it Himself, and, in its place, give to man the cup of blessing. The wrath that would have fallen upon man, was now falling upon Christ.

Grief and Agony

The disciples roused from their slumber to find their Master standing over them in a state of mental and bodily anguish such as they never before had witnessed. They saw the grief and agony of His pale face, and the bloody sweat upon His brow, for "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men." The disciples were grieved that they had fallen asleep, so that they could not pray and sympathize with their suffering Lord. They were speechless with sorrow and surprise.

The Curse of Sin

The Suffering Son of God leaves His disciples, for the power of darkness rushes upon Him with an irresistible force which bows Him to the earth. He prays as before, and pours out the burden of His soul with stronger crying and tears. His soul was pressed with such agony as no human being could endure and live.

The sins of the world were upon Him. He felt that He was separated from His Father's love; for upon Him rested the curse because of sin. Christ knew that it would be difficult for man to feel the grievousness of sin, and that close contact and familiarity with sin would so blunt his moral sensibility, that sin would not appear so dangerous to him, and so exceedingly offensive in the sight of God. He knew that but few would take pleasure in righteousness, and accept of that salvation which, at infinite cost He made it possible for them to obtain. While this load of sin was upon Christ, unrealized, and unrepented of by man, doubts rent His soul in regard to His oneness with His Father.

Longing for Sympathy

In this fearful hour of trial Christ's human nature longed even for the sympathy of His disciples. A second time He rose from the earth and went to them and found them sleeping. This was not a deep sleep. They were in a drowse. They had a limited sense of their Lord's suffering and anguish. In tenderness Jesus stood for a moment bending over them, and regarding them with mingled feelings of love and pity. In these sleeping disciples He sees a representation of a sleeping church. When they should be watching, they are sleeping.

Determined to Conquer

Christ had told them before that these things would take place; but they did not understand Him. The scene of His sufferings was to be a fiery ordeal to His disciples, hence the necessity of watchfulness and prayer. Their faith needed to be sustained by an unseen strength, as they should experience the triumph of the powers of darkness. He knew the power which the prince of darkness used to paralyze the senses of His disciples at this time when they should be watching. At this crisis, when they would meet with a great loss, they are found asleep. Again the powers of darkness press upon Him with renewed force, bowing Him to the earth. He leaves His disciples with a determination to conquer the prince of darkness, that man may not be held in chains of hopeless despair. Giving His disciples one look of the tenderest compassion He left them and bowed a third time in prayer, using the same words as before. The divine Sufferer shuddered with amazement at this mysterious and terrible conflict.

Bridging the Abyss

Human minds cannot conceive of the insupportable anguish which tortured the soul of our Redeemer. The holy Son of God had no sins or griefs of His own to bear. He was bearing the griefs of others, for on Him was laid the iniquities of us all. Through divine sympathy He connects Himself to man, and submits as the representative of the race to be treated as a transgressor. He looks into the abyss of woe opened for us by our sins, and proposes to bridge the gulf with His own person. Those who cannot see the force of the sacred claims of God's law cannot have a clear and definite understanding of the atonement.

Anguish and Blood

It was soul anguish that wrenched from the lips of God's dear Son these mournful words: "Now is My soul troubled, My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." Christ's soul was bearing a weight of anguish because of the transgression of God's law. He was overwhelmed with honor and consternation at the fearful work sin had wrought. His burden of guilt was so great because of man's transgression of His Father's law, that human nature was inadequate to bear it. His inexpressible anguish forced from His pores large drops of blood, which fell upon the ground and moistened the sods of Gethsemane.

The Awful Moment

The sufferings of martyrs can bear no comparison with the sufferings of Christ. The divine presence was with them in their physical sufferings. There was the hiding of the Father's face from His dear Son. Humanity staggered and trembled in that trying hour. It was soul anguish beyond the endurance of finite nature. It was woe condensed that brought from the trembling lips of the noble Sufferer these words: "Now is My soul troubled." "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." Again from His pale lips are heard these words: "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me,

except I drink it, Thy will be done." The awful moment had come which was to decide the destiny of the world. Angels are waiting and watching with intense interest.

The Trembling Cup

The fate of the world is trembling in the balance. The Son of God may even now refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty man. He may wipe the blood sweat from His brow, and leave the world to perish in their iniquity. Will the Son of the infinite God drink the cup of humiliation and agony? Will the innocent suffer the curse of God to save the guilty? It was here the mysterious cup trembled in His hand, and the destiny of a ruined world was balanced. The world's Redeemer sees that the transgressors of His Father's law must perish under His displeasure. He sees the power of sin and the utter helplessness of man to save himself.

The Decision is Made

The woes and lamentations of a doomed world come up before Him, and His decision is made. He will save man at any cost to Himself. He has accepted His baptism of blood, that perishing millions through Him might gain everlasting life. He left the heavenly courts where all was purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world which had fallen by transgression. He will not leave man in his sins. He will reach to the very depths of misery to rescue him. The sleeping disciples see not that their beloved Teacher is fainting. He falls to the earth, and is dying. Where are His disciples, to place their hands tenderly beneath the head of their suffering Master, and bathe that brow, marred indeed more than the sons of men? Our Saviour trod the winepress alone, and of all the people there was none with Him.

They Both Suffered

Christ suffered not alone. Saith He, "I and My Father are one." God suffered with His Son. The sacrifice that an infinite God has made in giving up His Son to reproach and agony cannot be comprehended by man. In giving His Son for the sins of the world, God has evidenced His boundless love to man. The angels who had learned to do Christ's will in heaven were anxious to comfort Him. But what can they do? Such sorrow, such agony, is beyond their power to alleviate. They have never felt the sins of a ruined world, and with astonishment they behold the object of their adoration subject to grief. Although the Father does not remove the cup from the trembling hand and pale lips of His Son, He sends an angel to give Him strength to drink it. The angel raises the Son of God from the cold ground, and brings Him messages of love from His Father. He is strengthened and fortified. He has the assurance that He is gaining eternal joys for all who will accept redemption.

A Quiet Acceptance

The fearful hour in Gethsemane is passed. Our divine Saviour has accepted the cup to drain it to the dregs. In behalf of man He has conquered in the hour of temptation. Serenity and calmness are now seen in the pale and bloodstained face. And the third time He comes to His disciples and finds them overcome with sleep. Sorrowfully and pityingly He looks upon them and says, "Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." Even while these words were upon His lips, He heard the footsteps of the mob that was in search of Him. Judas took the lead, and was closely followed by the high priest. Jesus aroused His disciples with these words: "Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me." The countenance of Christ wore an expression of calm dignity. The traces of His recent agony were not visible as He walked forth to meet His betrayer.

The Hardened Mob

Jesus steps out in front of His disciples and inquires, "whom seek ye?" They answer, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replies, "I am He." At these words the mob staggers backward; and the priest, the elders, the hardened soldiers, and even Judas, fall powerless to the ground, giving ample opportunity for Christ to release Himself if He chose. But He stands as one glorified amid that coarse and hardened band. As Jesus said, "I am He," the angel which had ministered unto Him in His anguish, moved between Him and the murderous mob. They see a divine light glorifying the Saviour's face, and a dove-like form overshadowing

Him. Their sinful hearts are filled with terror. They cannot stand for a moment in the presence of divine glory, but fall as dead men to the ground.

The angel withdrew, and left Jesus standing calm and self-possessed, with the bright beams of the moon upon His pale face, and still surrounded by prostrate, helpless men, while the disciples were too much amazed to utter a word. As the angel removes, the hardened Roman soldiers start to their feet, and, with the priest and Judas, they gather about Christ as though ashamed of their weakness, and fearful that He would yet escape out of their hands. Again the question is asked by the world's Redeemer, "Whom seek ye?" Again they answer, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus answered, "I have told you that I am He. If, therefore, ye seek Me, let these go their way." In this hour of humiliation Christ's thoughts are not for Himself, but for His beloved disciples. He wishes to save them from any further trial of their strength.

Betrayal with a Kiss

Judas, the betrayer of our Saviour, does not forget his part, but comes close to Jesus, and takes His hand as a familiar friend, and bestows the traitor's kiss. Jesus says to him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" His voice trembled with sorrow as He addressed deluded Judas. "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?" This most touching appeal should have roused the conscience of Judas, and touched his stubborn heart: but honor, fidelity, and even human tenderness seem to have left him. He stood bold and defiant, showing no disposition to relent, He had given himself up to the control of Satan, to work wickedness, and he had no will to resist. Jesus did not resist the traitor's kiss. In this He gives us an example of forbearance, love, and pity that is without a parallel.

Though the murderous throng are surprised and awed by what they have seen and felt, their assurance and hardihood returns as they see the boldness of Judas in touching the person of Christ, whom so recently they had seen glorified. They lay violent hands upon Jesus, and bind those precious hands that had ever been employed in doing good.

Forsook Him and Fled

When the disciples saw that Jesus did not deliver Himself from His enemies, but permitted Himself to be taken, they forsook Him and fled, leaving their Master alone. Christ had foreseen this desertion, and had told them in the upper chamber before it took place, of what they would do: "Behold the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

Wonder, O Heavens!

Wonder, O Heavens, and be astonished, O Earth! Behold the oppressor and the oppressed! A vast multitude enclose the Saviour of the world. Mockings and jeerings are mingled with the coarse oaths of blasphemy.

His lowly birth and humble life are commented upon by unfeeling wretches. His claim to be the Son of God is ridiculed by the chief priests and elders and the vulgar jest and insulting derision are passed from lip to lip. Satan was having full control of the minds of his servants. In order to do this effectually, he commences with the chief priests and elders, and imbues them with religious frenzy. They are actuated by the same satanic spirit which moves the most vile and hardened wretches.

The Path of Blood

There is a corrupt harmony in the feelings of all, from the hypocritical priests and elders down to the most debased. Christ, the precious Son of God, was led forth, and the cross was laid upon His shoulders. At every step was left blood which flowed from His wounds. Thronged by an immense crowd of bitter enemies and unfeeling spectators, He is led away to the crucifixion. "He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."

Who can comprehend the love here displayed? The angelic host beheld with wonder and with grief Him who had been the majesty of heaven, and who had worn the crown of glory, now wearing the crown of thorns, A bleeding victim to the rage of an infuriated mob, who were fired to insane madness by the wrath of Satan.

Between Heaven and Earth

His sorrowing disciples follow Him at a distance, behind the murderous throng. He is nailed to the cross, and hangs suspended between the heavens and the earth. Their hearts are bursting with anguish as their beloved Teacher is suffering as a criminal. Close to the cross are the blind, bigoted, faithless priests and elders, taunting, mocking, and jeering: "Thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself he cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him; for He said, I am the Son of God."

"Father, forgive them."

Not one word did Jesus answer to all this. Even while the nails were being driven through His hands and the sweat drops of agony were forced from His pores, from the pale quivering lips of the innocent Sufferer a prayer of pardoning love was breathed for His murderers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." All heaven was gazing with profound interest upon the scene. The glorious Redeemer of a lost world was suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law. He was about to ransom His people with His own blood. He was paying the just claims of God's holy law, that man might by His grace be enabled to obey it. This was the means through which an end was to be finally made of sin and Satan, and his vile host to be vanquished.

The Crushing Weight of Sin

Oh, was there ever suffering and sorrow like that endured by the dying Saviour! It was the sense of His Father's displeasure which made His cup so bitter. It was not bodily suffering which so quickly ended the life of Christ upon the cross. It was the crushing weight of the sins of the world, and a sense of His Father's wrath that broke His heart. The Father's glory and sustaining presence had left Him, and despair pressed its crushing weight of darkness upon Him, and forced from His pale and quivering lips the anguished cry: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

The Horrid Sight

Jesus had united with the Father in making the world. Amid the agonizing suffering of the Son of God, blind and deluded men alone remain unfeeling. The chief priests and elders revile God's dear Son while in His expiring agonies. Yet inanimate nature groans in sympathy with her bleeding, dying Author. The earth trembles. The sun refuses to behold the scene. The heavens gather blackness. Angels have witnessed the scene of suffering until they can look on no longer, and hide their faces from the horrid sight. Christ is in despair! He is dying! His Father's approving smile is removed, and angels are not permitted to lighten the gloom of the terrible hour. They could only behold in amazement their loved Commander suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law.

A Terrible Future

Even doubts assailed the dying Son of God. He could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the tomb a conqueror, and His Father's acceptance of His sacrifice. The sin of the world with all its terribleness was felt to the utmost by the Son of God. The displeasure of the Father for sin, and its penalty which was death, were all that He could realize through this amazing darkness. He was tempted to fear that sin was so offensive in the sight of His Father that He could not be reconciled to His Son. The fierce temptation that His own Father had forever left Him, caused that piercing cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

Drinking of the Wrath

Christ felt much as sinners will feel when the vials of God's wrath shall be poured out upon them. Black despair like the pall of death will gather about their guilty souls, and then they will realize to the fullest extent the sinfulness of sin. Salvation has been purchased for them by the suffering and death of the Son of God. It might be theirs if they would accept of it willingly, gladly; but none are compelled to yield obedience to the law of God. If they refuse the heavenly benefit, if they choose the pleasures and deceitfulness of sin, they can have their choice, and at the end receive their wages, which is the wrath of God and eternal death. They will be forever separated from the presence of Jesus, whose sacrifice they had despised. They will have lost a life of happiness, and sacrificed eternal glory for the pleasures of sin for a season.

Trusting by Faith

Faith and hope trembled in the expiring agonies of Christ, because God had removed the assurance He had heretofore given His beloved Son of His approbation and acceptance. The Redeemer of the world then relied upon the evidences which had hitherto strengthened Him, that His Father accepted His labors and was pleased with His work. In His dying agony, as He yields up His precious life, He has by faith alone to trust in Him whom it has ever been His joy to obey. He is not cheered with clear, bright rays of hope on the right hand nor on the left. All is enshrouded in oppressive gloom. Amid the awful darkness which is felt even by sympathizing nature, the Redeemer drains the mysterious cup even to its dregs. Denied even bright hope and confidence in the triumph which will be His in the near future, He cries with a loud voice, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." He is acquainted with the character of His Father, His justice, His mercy and great love. In submission He drops into the hands of His Father. Amid the convulsions of nature are heard by the amazed spectators the dying words of the Man of Calvary, "It is finished."

"It is Finished"

Jesus did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and exclaimed with His departing breath, "It is finished!" Satan was then defeated. He knew that his kingdom was lost. Angels rejoiced as the words were uttered, "It is finished." The great plan of redemption, which was dependent on the death of Christ, had been thus far carried out. And there was joy in heaven that the sons of Adam could, through the life of obedience, be finally exalted to the throne of God. Oh, what love! What amazing love! that brought the Son of God to earth to be made sin for us, that we might be reconciled to God, and elevated to a life with Him in His mansions in glory. And Oh! what is man that such a price should be paid for his redemption!

The Very Depths

Some have limited views of the atonement. They think that Christ suffered only a small portion of the penalty of the law of God, and that while the wrath of God was felt by His dear Son, they suppose that He had, through all His painful sufferings, the evidence of His Father's love and acceptance, and that the portals of the tomb before Him were illuminated with bright hope. Here is a great mistake. Christ's keenest anguish was a sense of His Father's displeasure. His mental agony because of this was of such intensity that man can have but faint conception of it.

Behold this Love

He was eternally rich, "yet for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich." He was clothed with light and glory, surrounded with hosts of heavenly angels waiting to execute His commands. Yet He put on our nature, and came to sojourn among sinful men. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." Here is love that no language can express. Our souls should be enlivened, elevated, and enraptured with the theme of the love of the Father and the Son. "And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." The followers of Christ should learn here to reflect back in some degree that mysterious love preparatory to joining all the redeemed in ascribing "Blessings, and honor, and glory, and power unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever."

Through all the ages we'll praise Him--
--Jesus the One who took our place

The Son of God consented to die in the sinner's stead, that man might, by a life of obedience, escape the penalty of the law of God. His death did not slay the law, lessen its holy claims, nor detract from its sacred dignity. The death of Christ proclaimed the justice of His Father's law in punishing the transgressor, in that He consented to suffer the penalty in order to save fallen man from its curse. The death of God's beloved Son on the cross shows the immutability of God's law. His death magnifies the law and makes it honorable, and gives evidence of its changeless character. From His own lips is heard, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." The death of the divine Son justified the claims of the divine law. In order to more fully realize the value of redemption, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of limited views of the sufferings of the divine Son of God, many place a low estimate upon the great work of the the atonement.

"God is love." And His matchless love manifested toward fallen man, in the gift of His beloved Son, amazed the holy angels. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." He was the Father's appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds." He was the "brightness of His glory, and the the express image of His person." and He upheld "all things by the word of His power." He possessed divine excellence and greatness. It pleased the Father that in Him all fullness should dwell. And Christ "thought it not robbery to be equal with God." Yet He "made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was make in the likeness of men. and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."