EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS

ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE.

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MATTHEW XXVII. 1–10

1 When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death:

2 And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor.

3 Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,

4 Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.

5 And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.

6 And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.

7 And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter’s field, to bury strangers in.

8 Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day.

9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value;

10 And gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord appointed me.

THEopening of this chapter describes the delivery of our Lord Jesus Christ into the hands of the Gentiles. The chief priests and elders of the Jews led Him away to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. We may see in this incident the finger of God. It was ordered by His providence, that Gentiles as well as Jews should be concerned in the murder of Christ. It was ordered by His providence, that the priests should publicly confess that the “sceptre had departed from Judah.” They were unable to put any one to death, without going to the Romans. The words of Jacob were therefore fulfilled. The Messiah, “Shiloh,” had indeed “come.” (Gen. xlix. 10.) The subject that principally occupies the verses we have read, is the melancholy end of the false apostle, Judas Iscariot. It is a subject full of instruction: let us mark well what it contains.

We see, in the end of Judas, *a plain proof of our Lord’s innocence of every charge laid against Him.*

If there was any living witness who could give evidence against our Lord Jesus Christ, Judas Iscariot was the man. A chosen apostle of Jesus, a constant companion in all His journeyings, a hearer of all His teaching, both in public and private,—he must have known well if our Lord had done any wrong, either in word or deed. A deserter from our Lord’s company, a betrayer of Him into the hands of His enemies, it was his interest for his own character’s sake, to prove Jesus guilty. It would extenuate and excuse his own conduct, if he could make out that his former Master was an offender, and an impostor.

Why then did not Judas Iscariot come forward? Why did he not stand forth before the Jewish Council, and specify his charges, if he had any to make? Why did he not venture to accompany the chief priests to Pilate, and prove to the Romans that Jesus was a malefactor?—There is but one answer to these questions. Judas did not come forward as a witness, because his conscience would not let him. Bad as he was, he knew he could prove nothing against Christ; wicked as he was, he knew well that his Master was holy, harmless, innocent, blameless, and true. Let this never be forgotten. The absence of Judas Iscariot at our Lord’s trial is one among many proofs that the Lamb of God was without blemish,—a sinless man.

We see, for another thing, in the end of Judas, *that there is such a thing as repentance which is too late.* We are told plainly that “Judas repented himself;” we are even told that he went to the priests, and said, “I have sinned:” and yet it is clear that he did not repent unto salvation.

This is a point which deserves special attention. It is a common saying, “that it is never too late to repent.”

The saying, no doubt, is true, if repentance be true; but unhappily, late repentance is often not genuine. It is possible for a man to feel his sins, and be sorry for them,—to be under strong convictions of guilt, and express deep remorse,—to be pricked in conscience, and exhibit much distress of mind,—and yet, for all this, not repent with his heart. Present danger, or the fear of death, may account for all his feelings, and the Holy Ghost may have done no work whatever on his soul.

Let us beware of trusting to a late repentance. “How is the accepted time: to-day is the day of salvation.” One penitent thief was saved in the hour of death, that no man might despair; but only one that no man might presume. Let us put off nothing that concerns our souls, and above all not put off repentance, under the vain idea that it is a thing in our own power. The words of Solomon on this subject are very fearful. He speaks of men who “shall call upon God but He will not answer; who shall seek Him early, and not find Him.” (Prov. i. 28.)

Let us see, for another thing, in the end of Judas, *how little comfort ungodliness brings a man at the last.* We are told that he cast down the thirty pieces of silver, for which he had sold his Master, in the temple, and went away in bitterness of soul. That money was dearly earned. It brought him no pleasure, even when he had it:[[1]](#footnote-1) the “treasures of wickedness profit nothing.” (Prov. x. 2.)

Sin is, in truth, the hardest of all masters. In its service there is plenty of fair promises, but an utter dearth of performance. Its pleasures are but for a season: its wages are sorrow, remorse, self-accusation, and too often death. They that sow to the flesh, do indeed reap corruption.

Are we tempted to commit sin? Let us remember the words of Scripture, “Your sin will find you out,” and resist the temptation. (Numbers xxxii. 23. ) Let us be sure that sooner or later, in this life or in the life to come, in this world or in the judgment day, sin and the sinner will meet face to face, and have a bitter reckoning. Let us be sure that of all trades sin is the most unprofitable. Judas, Achan, Gehazi, Ananias and Sapphira, all found it so to their cost. Well might St. Paul say, “What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?” (Rom. vi. 21.)

Finally, let us see in the case of Judas, *to what a miserable end a man may come*, *if he has great privileges, and does not use them rightly.* We are told that this unhappy man “departed and went and hanged himself.” What an awful death to die. An apostle of Christ, a former preacher of the Gospel, a companion of Peter and John, commits suicide, and rushes into God’s presence unprepared and unforgiven.

Let us never forget that no sinners are so sinful as sinners against light and knowledge. None are so provoking to God: none, if we look at Scripture, have been so often removed from this world by sudden and fearful visitations. Let us remember Lot’s wife, Pharaoh, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and Saul, king of Israel: they are all cases in point. It is a solemn saying of Bunyan, “that none fall so deep into the pit, as those who fall backward.” It is written in Proverbs, “He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” (Prov. xxix. 1.) May we all strive to live up to our light. There is such a thing as sin against the Holy Ghost: clear knowledge of truth in the head, combined with deliberate love of sin in the heart, go a long way towards it.

And now what is the state of our hearts? Are we ever tempted to rest on our knowledge and profession of religion? Let us remember Judas, and beware. —Are we disposed to cling to the world, and to give money a prominent place in our minds? Again, let us remember Judas, and beware.—Are we trifling with any one sin, and flattering ourselves we may repent by and by? Once more, let us remember Judas, and beware.—He is set up before us as a beacon: let us look well at him, and not make shipwreck.

MATTHEW XXVII. 11–26.

11 And Jesus stood before the governor: and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus said unto him, Thou sayest.

12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

13 Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee?

14 And he answered him to never a word: insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.

15 Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.

16 And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

17 Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

19 When he was set down on the judgment-seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

20 But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

21 The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

22 Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified

23 And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

24 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.

25 Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children,

26 Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

THESEverses describe our Lord’s appearance before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. That sight must have been wonderful to the angels of God. He, who will one day judge the world, allowed Himself to be judged and condemned, though “He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.” (Isa. liii. 9.) He from whose lips Pilate and Caiaphas will one day receive their eternal sentence, suffered silently an unjust sentence to be passed upon Him. Those silent sufferings fulfilled the words of Isaiah: “As a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.” (Isa. liii. 7.) To those silent sufferings believers owe all their peace and hope.—Through them they will have boldness in the day of judgment, who in themselves would have nothing to say.

Let us learn, from the conduct of Pilate, *how pitiful is the condition of an unprincipled great man.*

Pilate appears to have been inwardly satisfied that our Lord had done nothing worthy of death. We are told distinctly, that “he knew that for envy they had delivered Him.” Left to the exercise of his own unbiassed judgment, he would probably have dismissed the charges against our Lord, and let Him go free.

But Pilate was the governor of a jealous and turbulent people. His great desire was to procure favour with them and please them. He cared little how much he sinned against God and conscience, so long as he had the praise of man. Though willing to save our Lord’s life, he was afraid to do it if it offended the Jews; and so, after a feeble attempt to divert the fury of the people from Jesus to Barabbas,—and a feebler attempt to satisfy his own conscience, by washing his hands publicly before the people,—he at last condemned One whom he himself called a “just person!” He rejected the strange and mysterious warning which his wife sent to him after her dream. He stifled the remonstrances of his own conscience. He “delivered Jesus to be crucified.’’

We see in this miserable man a lively emblem of many a ruler of this world! How many there are who know well that their public acts are wrong, and yet have not the courage to act up to their knowledge. They fear the people; they dread being laughed at. They cannot bear being unpopular! Like dead fish, they float with the tide. The praise of man is the idol before which they bow down, and to that idol they sacrifice conscience, inward peace, and an immortal soul.

Whatever our position in life may be, let us seek to be guided by principle, and not by expediency. The praise of man is a poor, feeble, uncertain thing: it is here today and gone to-morrow. Let us strive to please God, and then we may care little who else is pleased; let us fear God, and then there is none else of whom we need be afraid.

Let us learn from the conduct of the Jews, described in these verses, *the desperate wickedness of human nature*.

The behaviour of Pilate afforded the chief priests and elders an occasion of reconsidering what they were about. The difficulties he raised about condemning our Lord, gave time for second thoughts: but there were no second thoughts in the minds of our Lord’s enemies. They pressed on their wicked deed. They rejected the compromise that Pilate offered. They actually preferred having a wretched felon, named Barabbas, set at liberty rather than Jesus. They clamoured loudly for our Lord’s crucifixion; and they wound up all by recklessly taking on themselves all the guilt of our Lord’s death, in words of portentous meaning: “His blood be on us and on our children.”

And what had our Lord done, that the Jews should hate Him so? He was no robber, or murderer. He was no blasphemer of their God, or reviler of their prophets. He was one whose life was love. He was one who “went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.” (Acts x. 38.) He was innocent of any transgression against the law of God or man; and yet the Jews hated Him, and never rested till He was slain! They hated Him, because He told them the truth. They hated Him, because He testified of their works that they were evil: they hated the light, because it made their own darkness visible. In a word, they hated Christ, because He was righteous and they were wicked,—because He was holy and they were unholy,—because He testified against sin, and they were determined to keep their sins and not let them go.

Let us observe this. There are few things so little believed and realized as the corruption of human nature. Men fancy that if they saw a perfect person they would love and admire him. They flatter themselves that it is the inconsistency of professing Christians which they dislike and not their religion. They forget that when a really perfect man was on earth, in the person of the Son of God, He was hated and put to death. That single fact goes far to prove the truth of an old saying, that “unconverted men would kill God, if they could get at Him.”

Let us never be surprised at the wickedness there is in the world. Let us mourn over it, and labour to make it less, but let us never be surprised at its extent. There is nothing which the heart of man is not capable of conceiving, or the hand of man of doing. As long as we live, let us mistrust our own hearts: even when renewed by the Spirit, they are still “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. xvii. 9.)

MATTHEW XXVII. 27–44

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

29 And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

30 And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

31 And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

32 And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.

33 And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull,

34 They gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

35 And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

36 And sitting down they watched him there;

37 And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

38 Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.

39 And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads,

40 And saying, 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.

41 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

42 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.

43 He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

THESEverses describe the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ after His condemnation by Pilate,—His sufferings in the hands of the brutal Roman soldiers, and His final sufferings on the cross. They form a marvellous record. They are marvellous when we remember the Sufferer,—the eternal Son of God! They are marvellous when we remember the persons for whom these sufferings were endured. We and our sins were the cause of all this sorrow! He “died for our sins.” (1 Cor. xv. 3.)

Let us observe, in the first place, *the extent and reality of our Lord’s sufferings.*

The catalogue of all the pains endured by our Lord’s body is indeed a fearful one: seldom has such suffering been inflicted on one body in the last few hours of a life. The most savage tribes, in their refinement of cruelty, could hardly have heaped more agonizing tortures on an enemy than were accumulated on the flesh and bones of our beloved Master. Never let it be forgotten that He had a real human body, a body exactly like our own, just as sensitive, just as vulnerable, just as capable of feeling intense pain. And then let us see what that body endured.

Our Lord, we must remember, had already passed a night without sleep, and endured excessive fatigue. He had been taken from Gethsemane to the Jewish council, and from the council to Pilate’s judgment hall. He had been twice placed on His trial, and twice unjustly condemned. He had been already scourged and beaten cruelly with rods, and now, after all this suffering, He was delivered up to the Roman soldiers, a body of men no doubt expert in cruelty, and, of all people, least likely to behave with delicacy or compassion.—These hard men at once proceeded to work their will. They “gathered together the whole band;” they stripped our Lord of His raiment, and put on Him, in mockery, a scarlet robe; they “plaited a crown of sharp thorns,” and in derision placed it on His head. They then bowed the knee before him in mockery, as nothing better than a pretended king; they “spit upon Him;” they “smote Him on the head:” and finally, having put His own robe on Him, they led Him out of the city to a place called Golgotha, and there crucified Him between two thieves.

But what was a crucifixion? Let us try to realize it, and understand its misery. The person crucified was laid on his back on a piece of timber, with a cross-piece nailed to it near one end,—or on the trunk of a tree with branching arms, which answered the same purpose. His hands were spread out on the cross-piece, and nails driven through each of them, fastening them to the wood; his feet in like manner were nailed to the upright part of the cross: and then, the body having been securely fastened, the cross was raised up, and fixed firmly in the ground. And there hung the unhappy sufferer, till pain and exhaustion brought him to his end: not dying suddenly, for no vital part of him was injured; but enduring the most excruciating agony from his hands and feet, and unable to move. Such was the death of the cross. Such was the death that Jesus died for us! For six long hours He hung there before a gazing crowd, naked, and bleeding from head to foot,—His head pierced with thorns, His back lacerated with scourging,—His hands and feet torn with nails,—and mocked and reviled by His cruel enemies to the very last.

Let us meditate frequently on these things: let us often read over the story of Christ’s cross and passion. Let us remember, not least, that all these horrible sufferings were borne without a murmur: no word of impatience crossed our Lord’s lips. In His death, no less than in His life, He was perfect: to the very last Satan found nothing in Him. (John xiv. 30.)

Let us observe, in the second place, that *all our Lord Jesus Christ’s sufferings were vicarious.* He suffered not for His own sins, but for ours. He was eminently our substitute in all His passion.

This is a truth of the deepest importance. Without it the story of our Lord’s sufferings, with all its minute details, must always seem mysterious and inexplicable. It is a truth, however, of which the Scriptures speak frequently, and that too with no uncertain sound. We are told that Christ “bare our sins in His own body on the tree,”—that He “suffered for sin, the just for the unjust,”—that “He was made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,”—that “He was made a curse for us,”—that “He was offered to bear the sins of many,”—that “He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities,”—and that “the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” (1 Peter ii. 22, and iii. 18; 2 Cor. v. 21; Gal. iii. 13; Heb. ix. 28; Isaiah liii. 5, 6.) May we all remember these texts. They are among the foundation stones of the Gospel.

But we must not be content with a vague general belief that Christ’s sufferings on the cross were vicarious. We are intended to see this truth in every part of His passion. We may follow Him all through, from the bar of Pilate, to the minute of His death, and see Him at every step as our mighty Substitute, our Representative, our Head, our Surety, our Proxy,—the Divine Friend who undertook to stand in our stead, and by the priceless merit of His sufferings, to purchase our redemption. Was He scourged? It was that “through His stripes we might be healed.”—Was He condemned, though innocent? It was that we might be acquitted, though guilty. Did He wear a crown of thorns? It was that we might wear the crown of glory.—Was He stripped of His raiment? It was that we might be clothed in everlasting righteousness.—Was He mocked and reviled? It was that we might be honoured and blessed.—Was He reckoned a malefactor, and numbered among transgressors? It was that we might be reckoned innocent, and justified from all sin.—Was He declared unable to save Himself? It was that He might be able to save others to the uttermost.—Did He die at last, and that the most painful and disgraceful of deaths? It was that we might live for evermore, and be exalted to the highest glory.—Let us ponder these things well: they are worth remembering. The very key to peace is a right apprehension of the vicarious sufferings of Christ.

Let us leave the story of our Lord’s passion with feelings of deep thankfulness. Our sins are many and great: but a great atonement has been made for them. There was an infinite merit in all Christ’s sufferings. They were the sufferings of One who was God as well as man. Surely it is meet, right, and our bounden duty, to praise God daily because Christ has died.

Last, but not least, let us ever learn from the story of the passion, to hate sin with a great hatred. Sin was the cause of all our Saviour’s suffering. Our sins platted the crown of thorns; our sins drove the nails into His hands and feet; on account of our sins His blood was shed. Surely the thought of Christ crucified should make us loathe all sin. Well says the Church of England Homily of the Passion: “Let this image of Christ crucified be always printed in our hearts. Let it stir us up to the hatred of sin, and provoke our minds to the earnest love of Almighty God.”

MATTHEW XXVII. 45–56.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

47 Some of them that stood there, when they heard *that,* said, This *man* calleth for Elias.

48 And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled *it* with vinegar, and put *it* on a reed, and gave him to drink.

49 The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.

50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.

51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

53 And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

54 Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

55 And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him:

56 Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s children.

INthese verses we read the conclusion of our Lord Jesus Christ’s passion. After six hours of agonizing suffering, He became obedient even unto death, and “yielded up the ghost.” Three points in the narrative demand a special notice: to them let us confine our attention.

Let us observe, in the first place, *the remarkable words which Jesus uttered shortly before His death:* “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!”

There is a deep mystery in these words, which no mortal man can fathom. No doubt they were not wrung from our Lord by mere bodily pain: such an explanation is utterly unsatisfactory, and dishonourable to our blessed Saviour. They were meant to express the real pressure on His soul of the enormous burden of a world’s sins. They were meant to show how truly and literally He was our substitute,—was made sin, and a curse for us, and endured God’s righteous anger against a world’s sin in His own person. At that awful moment the iniquity of us all was laid upon Him to the uttermost. It pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and put Him to grief. (Isaiah liii. 10.) He bore our sins. He carried our transgressions. Heavy must have been that burden, real and literal must have been our Lord’s substitution for us, when He, the eternal Son of God, could speak of Himself as for a time “forsaken.”

Let the expression sink down into our hearts, and not be forgotten. We can have no stronger proof of the sinfulness of sin, or of the vicarious nature of Christ’s sufferings, than His cry, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me!” It is a cry that should stir us up to hate sin, and encourage us to trust in Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Let us observe, in the second place, *how much is contained in the words which describe our Lord’s end.* We are simply told “He yielded up the Ghost.”

There never was a last breath drawn of such deep import as this: there never was an event on which so much depended. The Roman soldiers, and the gaping crowd around the cross, saw nothing remarkable. They only saw a person dying as others die, with all the usual agony and suffering which attend a crucifixion. But they knew nothing of the eternal interests which were involved in the whole transaction.

That death discharged in full the mighty debt which sinners owe to God, and threw open the door of life to every believer; that death satisfied the righteous claims of God’s holy law, and enabled God to be “just, and yet the Justifier” of the ungodly (Rom. iii. 26); that death was no mere example of self-sacrifice, but a complete atonement and propitiation for man’s sin, affecting the condition and prospects of all mankind; that death solved the hard problem, how God could be perfectly holy, and yet perfectly merciful. It opened to the world a fountain for all sin and uncleanness. It was a complete victory over Satan, and spoiled him openly; “it finished the transgression, made an end of sins, made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. ix. 24); it proved the sinfulness of sin, when it needed such a sacrifice to atone for it; it proved the love of God to sinners, when He sent His own Son to make the atonement. Never, in fact, was there, or could there be again, such a death. No wonder that the earth quaked, when Jesus died in our stead on the accursed tree. The solid frame of the world might well tremble and be amazed, when the soul of Christ was made “an offering for sin.” (Isaiah liii. 10.)

Let us observe, in the last place, *what a remarkable miracle occurred at the hour of our Lord’s death*, *in the very midst of the Jewish temple.* We are told that “the veil of the temple was rent in twain.” The curtain which separated the holy of holies from the rest of the temple, and through which the high priest alone might pass, was suddenly “split from top to bottom.”

Of all the wonderful signs which accompanied our Lord’s death, none was more significant than this. The mid-day darkness, for three hours, must needs have been a startling event; the earthquake, which rent the rocks, must have been a tremendous shock: but there was a meaning in the sudden “rending of the veil from top to bottom,” which must have pricked the heart of any intelligent Jew. The conscience of Caiaphas, the high priest, must have been hard indeed, if the tidings of that rent veil did not fill him with dismay.

That rending of the veil proclaimed the termination and passing away of the ceremonial law. It was a sign that the old dispensation of sacrifices and ordinances was no longer needed. Its work was done. Its occupation was gone, from the moment that Christ died. There was no more need of an earthly high priest, and a mercy-seat, and a sprinkling of blood, and an offering up of incense, and a day of atonement. The true High Priest had at length appeared. The true Lamb of God had been slain. The true mercy-seat was at length revealed. The figures and shadows were no longer wanted. May we all remember this! To set up an altar, and a sacrifice, and a priesthood *now*, is to light a candle at noon-day.

That rending of the veil proclaimed the opening of the way of salvation to all mankind. The way into the presence of God was unknown to the Gentile, and only seen dimly by the Jew, until Christ died; but Christ having now offered up a perfect sacrifice, and obtained eternal redemption, the darkness and mystery were to pass away. All were to be invited now to draw near to God with boldness, and approach Him with confidence, by faith in Jesus. A door was thrown open, and a way of life set before the whole world. May we all remember this! From the time that Jesus died, the way of peace was never meant to be shrouded in mystery: there was to be no reserve. The Gospel was the revelation of a mystery, which had been hid from ages and generations: to clothe religion *now* with mystery, is to mistake the grand characteristic of Christianity.

Let us turn from the story of the crucifixion, every time we read it, with hearts full of praise. Let us praise God for the confidence it gives us, as to the ground of our hope of pardon. Our sins may be many and great, but the payment made by our Great Substitute far outweighs them all.—Let us praise God for the view it gives us of the love of our Father in heaven. He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, will surely with Him give us all things. (Rom. viii. 32.) Not least, let us praise God for the view it gives us of the sympathy of Jesus with all His believing people. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; He knows what suffering is: He is just the Saviour that an infirm body, with a weak heart, in an evil world, requires.

MATTHEW XXVII. 57–66.

57 When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathæa, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple:

58 He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.

59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth,

60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.

61 And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.

62 Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and pharisees came together unto Pilate,

63 Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again.

64 Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.

65 Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make *it* as sure as ye can.

66 So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

THESEverses contain the history of our Lord Jesus Christ’s burial. There was yet one thing needful, in order to make it certain that our Redeemer accomplished that great work of redemption which He undertook. That holy body, in which He bore our sins on the cross, must actually be laid in the grave, and rise again. His resurrection was to be the seal and headstone of all the work.

The infinite wisdom of God foresaw the objections of unbelievers and infidels, and provided against them.—Did the Son of God really die? Did He really rise again? Might there not have been some delusion as to the reality of His death? Might there not have been imposition or deception, as to the reality of His resurrection?—All these, and many more objections, would doubtless have been raised, if opportunity had been given. But He who knows the end from the beginning, prevented the possibility of such objections being made. By His over-ruling providence He ordered things so that the death and burial of Jesus were placed beyond a doubt.—Pilate gives consent to His burial: a loving disciple wraps the body in linen, and lays it in a new tomb hewn out of a rock, “wherein was never man yet laid;” the chief priests themselves set a guard over the place where His body was deposited. Jews and Gentiles, friends and enemies, all alike testify to the great fact, that Christ did really and actually die, and was laid in a grave. It is a fact that can never be questioned.—He was really “bruised;” He really “suffered;” He really “died;” He was really “buried.” Let us mark this well: it deserves recollection.

Let us learn, for one thing, from these verses, that *our Lord Jesus Christ has friends of whom little is known*.

We cannot have a more striking example of this truth than we see in the passage now before us. A man named Joseph, of Arimathæa, comes forward, when our Lord was dead, and asks permission to bury Him. We have never heard of this man at any former period of our Lord’s earthly ministry. We never hear of him again. We know nothing, but that he was a disciple who loved Christ, and did Him honour. At a time when the Apostles had forsaken our Lord,—at a time when it was a dangerous thing to profess regard for Him,—at a time when there seemed to be no earthly advantage to be gained by confessing His discipleship,—at such a time as this, Joseph comes forward boldly, and begs the body of Jesus, and lays it in his own new tomb.

This fact is full of comfort and encouragement. It shows us that there are some quiet, retiring souls on earth, who know the Lord, and the Lord knows them, and yet they are little known by the Church. It shows us that there are “diversities of gifts” among Christ’s people: there are some who glorify Christ passively, and some who glorify Him actively; there are some whose vocation it is to build the Church, and fill a public place, and there are some who only come forward, like Joseph, in times of special need. But each and all are led by one Spirit, and each and all glorify God in their several ways.

Let these things teach us to be more hopeful. Let us believe that “many shall yet come from the east and west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. viii. 11.) There may be in some dark corners of Christendom many, who, like Simeon, and Anna, and Joseph of Arimathæa, are at present little known, who shall shine brightly among the Lord’s jewels in the day of His appearing.

Let us learn, for another thing, from these verses, *that God can make the devices of wicked men work round to His own glory.*

We are taught that lesson in a striking manner, by the conduct of the priests and Pharisees, after our Lord was buried. The restless enmity of these unhappy men could not sleep, even when the body of Jesus was in the grave. They called to mind the words, which they remembered He had spoken, about “rising again.” They resolved, as they thought, to make His rising again impossible. They went to Pilate: they obtained from him a guard of Roman soldiers; they set a watch over the tomb of our Lord; they placed a seal upon the stone. In short they did all they could to “make the sepulchre sure.”

They little thought what they were doing. They little thought that unwittingly they were providing the most complete evidence of the truth of Christ’s coming resurrection. They were actually making it impossible to prove that there was any deception or imposition. Their seal, their guard, their precautions, were all to become witnesses, in a few hours, that Christ had risen. They might as well have tried to stop the tides of the sea, or to prevent the sun rising, as to prevent Jesus coming forth from the tomb. They were taken in their own craftiness (1 Cor. iii. 19): their own devices became instruments to show forth God’s glory.

The history of the Church of Christ is full of examples of a similar kind. The very things that have seemed most unfavourable to God’s people, have often turned out to be for their good. What harm did the “persecution which arose about Stephen” do to the Church of Christ? They that were scattered “went everywhere, preaching the Word.” (Acts vii. 4.)—What harm did imprisonment do St. Paul? It gave him time to write many of those Epistles which are now read all over the world.—What real harm did the persecution of bloody Mary do to the cause of the English Reformation? The blood of the Martyrs became the seed of the Church. —What harm does persecution do the people of God at this very day? It only drives them nearer to Christ. It only makes them cling more closely to the throne of grace, the Bible, and prayer.

Let all true Christians lay these things to heart, and take courage. We live in a world where all things are ordered by a hand of perfect wisdom, and where all things are working together continually for the good of the body of Christ. The powers of this world are only tools in the hand of God. He is ever using them for His own purposes, however little they may be aware of it.—They are the instruments by which He is ever squaring and polishing the living stones of His spiritual temple, and all their schemes and plans will only turn to His praise. Let us be patient in days of trouble and darkness, and look forward. The very things which now seem against us are all working together for God’s glory. We see but half now: yet a little, we shall see all; and we shall then discover that all the persecution we now endure was, like “the seal” and “the guard,” tending to God’s glory. God can make the “wrath of man praise Him.” (Psalm lxxvii. 10.)

1. It is a great and undeniable difficulty, that the words quoted as having been used by “Jeremy the prophet,” are not to be found in any writings of Jeremiah that we possess, and that they are found in the prophet Zechariah. The following solutions of the difficulty have been suggested.

1. Some think that the prophecy quoted by Matthew was really delivered by Jeremiah, though not written, and only handed down and recorded by Zechariah. In favour of this view, we must remember that we have a saying of our Lord’s at Acts xx. 35, which is not recorded in the Gospel, and a prophecy of Enoch’s in Jude. (Jude 14.)

2. Some think that the name of Jeremiah was applied by the Jews to all that portion of the Old Testament Scripture containing prophecies, and that Matthew did not really mean that Jeremy had delivered the prophecy. This is the view of Lightfoot.

3. Some think that Matthew originally wrote the words “The prophet,” without quoting the name of any one in particular, and that the word “Jeremy” was inserted by an ignorant transcriber. In favour of this view, it is fair to say that the Syriac version, one of the oldest extant, simply says “the prophet,” and omits Jeremy’s name. The Persian version of the Gospels also omits it.

4. Some think that Matthew originally wrote the words “Zechariah the prophet,” and that some ignorant transcriber changed the word into Jeremiah. In favour of this view it must be fairly remembered that in manuscripts, names were often written short, and that IOU, —and ZOU, are not very unlike.

I offer no opinion on these solutions of the difficulty. A question of this sort, which has puzzled so many interpreters, is not likely to be settled at this period of the world.

One solution of the difficulty I only mention in order to enter my protest against it. That solution is adopted by many modern divines. It is simply this, that “Matthew forgot what he was doing, and made a blunder. He quoted from memory, and inaccurately. He meant Zechariah, and not Jeremiah.” I can only say that at this rate we must give up the inspiration of Scripture altogether! If writers of the Bible could make blunders like this, we never know where we are in quoting a text. To use such an argument is putting a sword into the hands of Arians and Socinians, which they well know how to use. Once give up the *verbal* inspiration of Scripture, and we stand on a quicksand. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The following quotations deserve notice, and throw light on this peculiarly solemn portion of Scripture.

“Our Lord said this under a deep sense of His Father's wrath unto mankind, in whose stead He now underwent that which was due for the sins of the whole world. When He said ‘Why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ He implied that God had for the time withdrawn from Him the sense and vision of His comfortable presence. When He said ‘My God,’ he implied the strength of His faith whereby He did firmly apprehend the sure and gracious aid of His eternal Father*.*”*—Bishop Hall.*

“All the wailings and howlings of the damned to all eternity, will fall infinitely short of expressing the evil and bitterness of sin with such emphasis as these few words, ‘My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me.’”—*Jamieson.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)