

We have been considering the perfections of Christ as revealed in Passion Week. We noticed that there were 7 trials of our Lord Jesus and 7 accusations made against Him. We noticed also there were 7 references by Pilate, struggling to find a way of escape from Christ as he acknowledged ~~a bold confession of~~ Christ's faultlessness, ^(reckoning of those in the people). Indeed there were 7 people altogether who confessed Christ's innocence on that occasion and you can trace the 7 through the gospel record. Later we find the 7 wounds of Christ and the 7 sayings from the cross. All of these indicate the marvels, the intricate wonders associated with this holy of holies in world history, the Atonement by God's own Son for the sins of all men and women of all ages. There is a greater depth in every part of the gospel record than appears on the surface. When we read, for example, of our Lord's scourgings and buffetings, being spat upon, being blindfolded, stripped naked and attired with a mocking robe, all of these, my friends, have a depth and a significance that are worthy of our meditation.

Let me try and indicate some of these. That wounded body with wounded hands and feet, and riven side, and bruised back, and ~~bleeding~~ ^{bleeding} brow from the crown of thorns. What is it meant to tell us? His sacred body was all one wound for our sakes, because there's no part of our body but which ministers to sin. Of us, it is said "From the soul of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores." ^{Isaiah} And our Lord took upon Himself our penalty as is confessed through the Psalmist (Ps.38:4) "My loins are filled with a sore disease, there is no whole part in my body." And in another place: "My wickednesses are gone over my head and they are like a sore burden, too heavy for me to bear." My friends, our Lord Jesus wore that mock crown on account of our ambition, and the thorns of which it was made were on account of those worldly cares in us which choke the good seed. His ears were full of reproaches on account of our love of flattery. His face was defiled with spitting on account of our personal vanity. It's our vanity that leads to so much sorrow and sin and He suffered for the vanity of all. For the abuse of our liberty, He is bound to the pillar. For the pollution of our

hands His are pierced with nails. And because our feet have gone astray, His are bleeding. His shame and nakedness is to atone for our vain adornings. His silent patience is to expiate our impatient murmurings and false excuses. The lying accusations that are poured on Him are because of our lying reproaches of each other. His tongue is dried up for our evil language. For our desires to be glorified and admired in the assemblies of men, He is brought forth by Pilate in derision and scorn saying to the assembled multitude "Behold the Man."

Everything that was done, my friends, was ordered by God so as to have an infinite meaning. He's clothed in purple and scarlet for He is a military conqueror and king. He's crowned with thorns for He has a diadem won by suffering - the diadem of the world. He has a reed in His Hand for He wields a royal sceptre. A cross is laid on His shoulders for this is the sign of the Son of Man, the trophy of His victory by which He takes away sin and conquers Satan. And His titles on the cross? "This is the King. The King of the Jews". For He is indeed sovereign Lord of Abraham and his seed. Those that are Christ's are Abraham's seed. In all these circumstances Christ is worshipped, even when He is mocked.

Christ deigned to be spat upon, He ~~the One~~ Who'd healed the blind man with His spittle. He was crowned with thorns, Christ Who covers the martyrs with unfading flowers. Christ was stripped of His earthly robe. Christ, the One Who clothes us with the robes of immortality. He received gall to eat, He Who feeds us with heavenly food. He received vinegar to drink, He Who gives us the cup of salvation. He Who was innocent was numbered with the transgressors. He Who was the truth is oppressed by false witnesses. The Judge of all is judged. The eternal Word of God is led forth as a Victim and yet holds His peace. Wonder of wonders and marvel of marvels that the infinite God should suffer as we deserve to suffer.

If you care to count it up, my friends, all the 7 main signs of the Fall in Eden are found in the story of our Lord's passion. There in Genesis we are told "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" and Christ became a curse for us. The sinner Adam was told "Thorns and thistles will the ground bring forth." And so Christ has a crown of thorns put upon His brow. Adam was stripped naked by his sin and the second Adam was stripped naked to atone for our sins. Adam experienced the sword that separated him from the Father and Christ on the cross cries out "My God, My God, Why hast Thou separated Thyself from Me?" "Why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Adam was told that in the sweat of his brow would he eat bread and Christ sweat in Gethsemane as it were great drops of blood. Adam's sorrows were multiplied until they climaxed in death and Christ became a Man of sorrows and died in our stead. And so, my friends, all the marks of Eden - the curse, the sorrow, the sweat, the thorns, the nakedness, the separation, the sword that brought death, all these our Lord endured in His passion.

What a marvellous account is this story of Calvary. It's our story. When we look at that Man on the cross, we are seeing there ourselves and we are meant as we see ourselves, to see the love of God Who could love like that. It was James Denney who said "I wish that I were a Catholic priest so that I could thrust a crucifix under a dying man's glazed eyes and say "God loves like that." The great difference between Christianity and all other religions and philosophies is that Christianity has a unique power to evoke faith and hope and love, the three principles which alone can change a soiled, sorry, dying life. Calvary was designed of Heaven to remove not only the guilt of sin but its power. And all history and biography demonstrates that its not enough to know what's right, we need the power to do what's right. As we are meditating upon the cross in these few studies of ours, it is in order that faith, hope and love may be evoked as we see our Lord suffering in our stead, as we deserve to suffer. It is quite true that its not enough to command a man to do what is right, not enough to convince him by argument that such and such is the

right thing to do. There has to be an emotional content for action. There's always a gap between ought to do and do and the cross, my friends, bridges that gap. Its the only thing that can.

Thomas Carlyle, the great historian and writer, was often critical of the church. He was once seated with his aged mother by the fireside inveighing against the preachers of the day as was his custom, when he suddenly concluded "If I had to preach, I'd go into the pulpit and say no more than this: All you people know what you ought to do. Well, go and do it." His mother was a devout soul. She continued knitting in silence and then replied "Aye, Thomas, but will ye tell them how?" And that's it, my friends. Our real problem is not ignorance but impotence. To know is one thing. To do is another. The two things are altogether distinct and we know it. The most terrible thing about all of us is not that we've made mistakes but that we've made the same mistakes again and again and again and we've done it knowingly. Coleridge, the writer, was a hopeless slave to opium. His addiction was a mania. He knew that opium was a drug that enslaved and eventually destroys. He knew the imperative immediate need for abstinence and amendment. So he hired a man to watch him day and night, but then spent his time seeking to deceive the very man he was paying to watch him. How stupid we all are. ~~My friends,~~ The poet Drinkwater ~~had it~~ right. He prayed:

*Grant us the will to fashion as we feel
Grant us the strength to labour as we know
Grant us the purpose ribbed and edged with steel
To strike the blow
Knowledge we ask not, knowledge Thou hast lent
But Lord, the will. There lies our bitter need.
Grant us to build above the deep intent
The deed, the deed.*

Only a sight of the cross with the awareness that the cross is our biography, that its wooden form is the table, Christ's flesh the parchment, His blood the ink, the nails the quill — ~~Only this awareness, my friends,~~ that its our biography that was written at Calvary can make us to hate sin and to love righteousness.

Sometimes a man plays fast and loose with his marriage. He flirts with other women. What's he need? A book on ethics? A psychiatrist? No. He loves that sort of thing better than he loves his wife. If he loved his wife he'd be faithful to her. And when a man comes to love God, he's faithful to God. Punishment can't change a person. Penalty can't change them. Moral exhortations can't change them. But to fall in love with God-"the love of God constraineth us". This, ~~my friends~~, is part of the power of Calvary that enables us to hate our sins and to forsake them. I'd remind you that you must not strive to believe in order to see Christ and become better. Believing doesn't enable one to see Christ. But seeing Christ on the cross will enable you to believe. You know the old Negro spiritual "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" My friends, we were there. The people about the cross represent us. The indifferent were there - the soldiers. They weren't violently opposed, nor were they in favour of Christ. Sitting down they watched Him there and played dice for their recreation. Their Creator dying and they joked and played. It reminds one of the Old Testament prophet who wrote "Is it nothing to all ye that pass by?" So the indifferent were at the cross of Calvary, and we've all been indifferent to Christ. His enemies were there - the scribes and Pharisees that He had confuted in debate. The people whose hypocrisies He'd exposed. They were there. "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." They railed upon Him, mocking Him. His enemies. And we've been His enemies. When the commands of Christ have cut across our will and our desires, He's become our Enemy. But there were also His friends there. John was there and His mother and Mary Magdalene; children and older people whom He'd healed. They were struck strangely silent by the paradox that He Who had worked miracles for them could work none for Himself. "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." They didn't know how true that was. The bonds of love kept Christ on the cross. He could save others but not Himself. That is, He couldn't save Himself and save others. And so here, my friends, at the cross we see apathy, antipathy and sympathy and each of us have had all three attitudes. Apathy when Christ was only a Name. Antipathy when first His

claims cut across our desires and our lust, but sympathy when we found that He loved us and gave Himself for us. "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Yes, you were there. I was there. We crucified Him. Our sins.

Six hours He was spread-eagled naked upon the cross. His dislocated bleeding body exposed to the common jeering mob. In those six hours He spoke 7 times. The last words of the world's great men always hold an interest for us. How much more the words of the dying God. Many, many scholars have written upon these infinite phrases, these last words of the Saviour. Men like Spurgeon, Arthur Pink, and Alexander McLaren have excelled themselves as they've looked into the depths of these wonderful sayings and we'll draw some of the jewels from their comments. The 7 sayings on the cross were these:

1. "Father, forgive them for they know now what they do" - that's the word of forgiveness for Christ's enemies.
2. And then to the thief "Verily, I say unto you today, you'll be with Me in Paradise." - that's the word of salvation to a dying thief.
3. "Woman, behold thy son"; "Son behold thy mother." - Here we have the word of affection to and for His mother.
4. "My God, my God why hast Thou forsaken Me?" - here's the word of anguish to God.
5. "I thirst" - the word of suffering to the spectators.
6. "It is finished" the word of victory to His people.
7. "Father, into Thy hands I commit My Spirit." - the word of contentment to His Father.

Let us look briefly at these 7 words on the cross, remembering indeed that they are an infinite abyss comprehending not only the offices of Christ but His perfections and His truth. This infinite expanse reflects all our daily duties as well as the glories of the Saviour. They reveal Christ as:

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| 1. Priest and Intercessor ("Father forgive them"); | 2. a King promising Paradise |
| 3. the perfect Man | 4. our Sacrifice |
| 5. the Sufferer | 6. the great Worker |
| 7. our Example. | |

Consider the truths that are expressed in these sayings on the cross. All the great truths of the gospel are here. We find that forgiveness is free and available and for the worst; that heaven is sure for the vilest or weakest who'll accept the forgiveness. We see the true humanity of Christ. We observe His substitutionary sufferings. We learn of the truthfulness of Scripture. We see how His work was a finished, completed work. From these same seven sayings we learn our duties. It's our duty to forgive, to be penitent, to exercise faith, to have fidelity in human relationships, to trust in the darkness, to submit to the providence of God, to be obedient, to be resigned and content with divine providences. All these, our duties, are taught us in order by the seven sayings of the suffering Saviour on Calvary.

These wonderful sayings interlock. While the third one stresses His relationship to men, the fourth deals with His relationship to God. And if the fourth shows His agony of spirit, the fifth ("I thirst") is His agony in the flesh, because the penalty of the law falls upon soul and body. Having declared all to be finished in the sixth cry, we have the perfect reconciliation demonstrated by the contented, trustful, final word "Father, into Thy Hands I commend My life." We will not dwell on the first three sayings, but ~~briefly~~ we should look at them *briefly*.

"Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Man had done his worst and now we find Christ in an attitude of prayer. That's the way His public ministry had begun. Remember at His baptism He knelt on the bank and prayed. And now on the cross He can no longer work for men; He can no longer heal men and so He prays for them. And His prayer indicates that we are never to regard any as beyond the reach of prayer. Indeed the answer to this prayer began to be seen on the day of Pentecost when a great number of the priests and Pharisees were obedient to the faith. [In this prayer we see Christ identified with His people. Never before had He asked God to forgive. He gave that forgiveness Himself. But now He's numbered with the transgressors. Now He's bearing guilt Himself as our Representative. Notice, ~~my friends~~, that

ignorance does not mean innocence. Forgive them for they know not. They still needed forgiveness. They were still guilty. Learn how high is God's standard. How great is our need and then praise Christ for His Atonement of infinite sufficiency which cleanses from all sin. Observe the blindness of the human heart. "They know not what they do." They are ignorant of the enormity of their crime. My friends, we have neglected our Christ times without number, without knowing what we did. How wonderfully Christ exemplifies His own teaching: "Bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you."

Notice from this first saying from the cross that man's great and primary need is forgiveness. This is what religion is all about. ~~My friends~~ True religion is about what God has done for us, not what we can do for God. It's the good news that God loves us just as we are, that Christ has atoned for our sins, wiped them out, all of our sins - yesterday's, today's and tomorrow's. He disposed of them all on Calvary. It's ^{is} vain to select noble ideals or to form good resolutions, to adopt excellent rules to live by, until the sin question ^{has} been settled. We can't love until we're forgiven. Shoes are of no use if our feet are paralysed. Glasses are of no use if we're blind. Forgiveness, that's our great and primary need. "Then, said Jesus, Father forgive them." This statement follows on the verse that says "They crucified Him." When they crucified Him He loved them and interceded for them.

The second saying was to the penitent thief "Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." The thief had joined with his friend in reviling Christ but as he watched the suffering One, his own heart was broken. Law had never been able to help him. He'd passed through many a trial. But the sight of the love of Christ melted him until he cried "Lord, remember me, when Thou comest in Thy kingdom." Notice that if Christ could save a man like this at the eleventh hour, there is hope for everybody. There is hope for you and for me. There is no sin too great for Christ to pardon. It is never too late provided we want to turn from our sins. If you will, turn today, though

you can do nothing for Him, perhaps its your last hour. The thief could run on no errands for Christ. Though we have nothing to offer our Lord, for salvation is full and free, He will say, if we will trust Him, "I say unto thee today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

And then to His mother, "Woman behold thy son." And to the beloved disciple "Son, behold thy mother." Notice the Saviour has a concern for our temporal as well as for our spiritual interests. Even on the cross when expiating the sins of a lost world, He thinks of the comfort of his widowed mother. Let all the needy, let all the deserted take courage from this. Cast your care upon Him for He careth for you.

"There is a green hill far away,
Without a city wall
Where the dear Lord was crucified
Who died to save us all.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin
He only could unlock the gate
And take the sinner in

Oh, dearly, dearly has He loved
And we must love Him too
And trust in His redeeming blood
And try His works to do.

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a tribute far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my life, my love, my all.*

Amen.

Please find a place between the three stanzas & the fourth because they belong to two different hymns.