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Wonderful Journeys in the Fields of Scripture.

CHAPTER I.

From Gethsemane to the Sepulchre.

Matt. xxvi.—xxviii.

THE closing scenes in our Lord's life are variously presented in the Gospels. The first of the Evangelists presents Christ as the great sin offering. In Mark, He is shown on the cross, as the great trespass offering, hence those two Gospels alone have the cry of agony which measured His anguish in that awful hour when sin was condemned and sins were borne. In Luke, His manhood is characteristically presented, and the great meat, or rather meal offering, is before our view, in the bruising and suffering of the perfect man, Christ Jesus. In the fourth Gospel, the great burnt offering, all God-ward and whose efficacy is eternal and ever ascending as a sweet savour of rest to the heart of Jehovah, meets our gaze. Connect the four, and you have the great peace or communion offering in which God, His Son, and His priestly people rejoice together.

The gloom was thickening, and the heavy clouds were gathering when Jesus announced that on the passover day He would be betrayed for the cross (chap. xxvi. 2). That was God's counsel which

was accomplished, spite of the united plotting of the ecclesiastical guides in Jerusalem who resolved to kill the Prince of life, but not on that day (verse 5). Jesus, with the shadow of death resting on His soul, retired to Bethany, which had witnessed life's triumph over the power of death (John xi). It was His last visit on this side of the resurrection. He visited it again as the Risen One. (Luke xxiv. 50).

There the heart of Mary poured its tribute of undying affection on the head of Jesus. Is He going to the tomb, then all that is costly must go with Him? It is the same Mary and the same act that is recorded in John xii.; *there*, however, the feet are spoken of as anointed, *here* His head, as His kingly glory is in view. But it is traducing the character of beloved Mary of Bethany to connect her with the unnamed sinner of Luke vii.

It was wasted ointment, so said the disciples. The poor were more to them than their beloved Master, but Jesus vindicates her, and her action. Yea, we have that memorial of love preached everywhere in the midst of a selfish world. Oh, how the heart of Jesus prized that act of devotedness and love. God, too, has written down the story of that woman's affection in tablets that will never perish (verse 13).

The cold, calculating heart of Judas could reckon up the price of the wasted ointment! ("The love of money is the root of all evil,") and Judas sold his Master and his own soul for thirty pieces of silver. The price of a male or female slave (Exod. xxi. 32) was settled upon, as the worth of the Lord of glory (Zech. xi. 12, 13). All this is followed by the Messiah eating the last passover

with His own, and instituting that touching feast which celebrates, till His return, His moral triumph, in death, in agony, and in shame, over all the power of Satan and the effects of sin. It is a blessed memorial feast, calling Him to mind and showing His death. Mary had pledged her love to *Him*. He had thus pledged His love to *them*. Then the hymn was sung. The Jewish doctors tell us that the psalm sung on paschal occasions—the great Hallel—was that cluster of sacred songs from No. cxiii.-cxviii. in the Book of Psalms. Then the weakness of the flesh in all the disciples, the self-confidence of Peter, and the treachery of Judas, came out in the presence of the Lord's perfect knowledge of all, as also of His infinite grace and love.

Now they enter Gethsemane, a favourite resort of our Lord and His disciples (John xviii. 2). Removed a short distance from the hum and din of the city, the Saviour sought its quiet and seclusion, where, screened from observation amongst its olive trees, the deepening agony of those hours when Satan's power, which is death, and the judgment of God, were pressed upon His soul. *Actually* He drank the cup of wrath upon the cross, but *anticipatively* He passed along, in spirit, the way to the cross; *its* unfathomable anguish known alone and measured only by the Blessed One Who would endure and suffer it all. The details of Gethsemane are more fully narrated in the Gospel of Luke than here, as *there* the Spirit loves to depict the anguished, suffering Son of Man.

He craved for His specially loved ones to watch with Him, if but for an hour. Strong crying,

tears, and blood-like sweat, and His return again and again to the awful conflict, reveal a scene to us of unfathomable anguish. As the agony deepened in character and intensity, His fellowship with His Father about it also deepened. It was all gone through there, so that when the time came, it found Him in the holy calm of one superior to it all. What a contrast to the disciples! But the shadow of the *agony* was theirs, yet they slept, even as they slept when the skirts of the *glory* rested on them (chap. xvii.). O Peter thou wouldest enter prison and face death for thy Master—yet found asleep when it is neither prison nor death, but “watch with me *one* hour.” The only perfect One, whether in suffering, service, death, is our adorable Lord and Master.

As the appointed Lamb to found the glory of Israel on the basis of His own death, He quietly yields Himself up as a willing victim, as a lamb led to the slaughter. Betrayed by the deceitful kiss of Judas, denied by Peter, and forsaken by all, He would taste to the full every element of sorrow known and unknown by us. Now the first stage of this wonderful journey is reached, and they enter the palace of the high priest, where the chiefs of the nation were assembled, waiting for their victim. He is led into their midst. There was no lack of perjured testimony (verse 60), but you see the law must be maintained, while the Lord of Glory and Messiah of Israel must die; so with difficulty they procured “the two witnesses” required by Jewish law (Deut. xvii. 6), yet again they were baffled, for not on *their* false testimony but on His *own* confession He was condemned to death. While the council and witnesses wrought

clumsily to each other's hands, He was silent. Oh, it is a terrible thing when God keeps silent in the presence of men. But perfect in all, He respects the judicial oath ; God is now brought into the scene and Jesus speaks (verse 63). Their eyes would witness Him yet again, but in majesty and power, the clouds of heaven His chariot, and the right hand of power His throne (verse 64). It was enough. Their vile spital overspread His blessed face, while blows and buffetings, insult and outrage are showered upon Him by all. Poor Peter ! the suffering Lord's look, and blessed word, broke his heart ; " He went out and wept bitterly." What a night it had been ; We need to tread these scenes with unsandalled feet, for the ground is holy ! (chapter xxvi.)

The next stage of the path of sorrow is reached in the morning, when He was led bound to Pilate. The Gentile heart must now be exposed as the Jewish one has been. The legal sanction of Rome's representative must be granted, and to obtain this was the next piece of wickedness. Determined in their purpose, the priests, not now afraid of the people, engaged the fickle multitude and wrought upon the fears and weakness of the governor. Pilate, conscious of the Lord's innocence and warned, moreover, by a testimony from his wife, sought to stem the torrent of wickedness. Before Pilate, Jesus confessed His Messianic glory ; before Caiaphas He owned Himself as Son of God ; under these very titles rejected, He will yet be received by Israel (John i. 49 ; Ps. ii). Pilate washed his hands and pronounced Him *just* ; yea, it was so. What about the vaunted justice of the Roman name ? Satan goaded on these religious guides

and leaders, and the vacillating governor is somewhat relieved as answered " *All* the people and said, His blood be on us and on our children." Barabbas, the murderer, was the choice of the people, and the Lord of glory was doomed to the cross. O guilty Gentile, but yet more guilty Jew! Barabbas had outraged the laws which Pilate was set there to maintain, his hands, too, were stained by the blood of his fellows, but what of that? Anyone but Jesus, the hated one of the human heart. Man hates Jesus. Now He is delivered over to the brutality of the Gentile soldiers. It is all too much to speak of (chap. xxvii. 27-31). Simon, the Cyrenian, who was cruelly compelled to bear the cross, is not forgotten in the after grace of the Lord (see Rom. xvi. 13).

Now comes another stage in the closing journey. Refusing the stupifying drink (verse 34), while afterwards drinking the vinegar in accomplishment of Scripture (John xix. 28), He is crucified. Amidst the darkness and at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a *loud voice*, " My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?" O desolate cry ! the most anguished exclamation which ever entered the ears of God. The veil is rent and the tombs are burst open. God and creation add their solemn confirmation to the reality and efficacy of that death (chapter xxvii.)

The last stage is reached and Jesus is laid in the sepulchre. Ere the stone had been rolled away, its official seal broken, and the watch dispersed—Jesus had risen. The angel of the Lord sits upon the stone, for death can now become the footstool of the saint, and sounds out the invitation, " Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

CHAPTER II.

From the Cross to Paradise

Luke xxiii.

BEFORE God turned man out of paradise he had already departed from God, and when sought for, was found hid behind the trees of the garden. Now the guilt of 4000 years is consummated by man turning God, in Christ, out of His own world. He came into it in a love which no opposition could turn aside, which no sorrows or contradiction could weaken. For His love He received hate. But the counsels of love must be accomplished, and if sinners are to have a place prepared for them in God's Glory, *Jesus must die*: "The Son of man must be lifted up."

Outrage, insult, blows, and spittings, were man's answer to God's sovereign goodness. In the garden of old, man believed the devil's lie to God's blessed word. Outside the garden, Satan himself was preferred to God, the only good and wise, and man gave himself up to idolatry. Now after 40 centuries of probationary trial, man is set face to face with a murderer, Barabbas, and with the Prince of Life. It had been a custom for the Roman Lieutenant of Judea, and as a memorial of the ancient dignity of the conquered

nation, to grant yearly at the passover the release of any prisoner they desired. Now, the weak and vacillating Pilate, himself cruel, but hating it in others, conscious, too, of the innocence of the Lord, and worried, moreover, by his wife's dream and some stings of natural conscience beside, sought to deliver the Lord. All, however, must be put to the proof. Where was the boasted righteousness of the Roman government? Delivering to death a prisoner whom, three times, their representative declared innocent; and in whom their favourite vassal, king Herod, too, found no fault. What about the institution of priesthood? The priests who were set there to shield, and strengthen, and support the weak; and display grace, themselves were the leaders of the cry "Crucify Him, Crucify Him!" What, too, about the fickle multitude who, but a few days before, cried "Hosanna to the Son of David, . . . Hosanna in the highest." Now they loudly and clamorously demand His death; and people, rulers, high priests, soldiers, and the two dying robbers (Mark xv. 32) revile, insult, taunt; the passers-by wag their heads, and the drunkards in their cups make *Him* the subject of their ribald jest and song. What about the disciples? His familiar friend (Ps. xli. 9) has sold Him for the bare price of a slave—30 pieces of silver. Another, who vowed that he would face prison and death for His beloved Master, has denied Him to a servant-maid, and cursed and swore that he knew Him not. *All* forsook Him and fled. Such was the world *then*. Such is the world *now*.

Ah! my reader, were the Lord of Glory to enter your town on a Sunday, the day of highest

profession, thousands of those people with Bible and hymn book in their hands, would unite—like Herod and Pilate of old, who shook hands over the murder of Jesus (Luke xxiii. 12)—yes, all creeds and classes, political and ecclesiastical, would unite to slay the Lord. Is the heart changed? Oh, have we read aright the lesson of the cross, that nothing can avail for man save redemption and a new nature. Man is irrecoverably gone in *evil*.

But at that solemn moment love rises over all the enmity and rage of man. “Where sin abounded grace did *much more* abound.” Jesus was born into the world Saviour (Luke ii. 11), and He would maintain His Saviour character as He leaves it (Luke xxiii. 40-43).

One of the dying malefactors has his conscience awakened by the Spirit of God. A little before, with his fellow in crime and suffering, he challenged the Lord to measure His grace and power in saving Himself and them. Ah, is it not the very instinct of the human heart, and under every circumstance of life *to hate Jesus*. Is your heart and mine a whit better? Nay! the polishing and white-washing of nearly 2000 years have left untouched the root, which is the heart of man, “deceitful above *all* things, and *desperately* wicked.” Pause reader, over the twofold work at the cross. Is there not confusion abroad, to the ruin of souls and to the exceeding hurt of others, on this vital point? There is a work of the Spirit of God *upon* the soul and conscience, and there is a work of the Son of God *for* the soul and conscience. The work of the Spirit (oh, how needful!) is not the *ground* of peace; but the work of Jesus on the

cross *is alone the ground of peace*. His work on the throne of God in glory, is all for the saint and respects his need, and is not finished, but is finishing. His work on the cross, in agony, was all for the sinner, and respects his guilt, and surely for the glory of God too. That work was declared to be finished, not finishing. This, then, was the rest of the dying robber, of the religious Nicodemus, and of thousands since. I trust that it is yours also, my reader?

Grace wrought rapidly, deeply, and effectually in the man's soul. Bowed down by a sense of guilt, and of the just judgment of God, he turned in rebuke to his fellow in crime, "Dost not thou fear God?" He takes God's part against himself and his dying companion—"We receive the due reward of our deeds." Surely there is the dawn of a bright and eternal day in that dark soul. And now will my reader turn to the fifty-third chapter of the prophet Isaiah, and read the second clause of the eighth verse thus: "Who shall declare His manner of life?" Who? Who? is Jehovah's selected advocate, to declare in face of the world, the sinlessness of Jesus? Who will declare His perfection in the presence of the hypocrisy which is now rampant in Immanuel's land, and of the manifest unrighteousness of the civil powers, yes, and of the wild raging of Satan too? What if the world and hell, man and Satan, are united? This dying robber raises his voice—his crime-stained lips, now touched with a live coal from off the alter (Isa. vi.), to emphatically declare, "*This man hath done nothing amiss.*"

But grace upon grace is given, and Jesus is

tasting once more the meat He ate of at Sychar's well (John iv). There in weariness and hunger He sat pouring His grace into the woman's empty heart. He feasted and fed. Now in agony and death He feasts once again, as this dying sinner seeks to hide himself and his guilt in the bosom of the Saviour, where no love was found to reproach. What an appeal! How pointed, how direct! "Lord, remember me when Thou comest (not "into," but) *in* Thy kingdom." There is triumphant faith for you! The dying Saviour owned as "Lord," and Lord too of a "kingdom." The robber asks to be remembered amidst its joys and glories. Would the then exalted Lord but glance at the one who in death and suffering looked to Him? Oh, how quickly the Spirit of God teaches! "When Thou comest in Thy kingdom." Christ who brought the grace would bring the glory—not a kingdom set up by man, and He enter it, but having gone to receive for Himself a kingdom, He will return with it (Luke xix.). Do you await the blessed Lord's answer to the dying sinner's request? Hear it then: "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Would that time and space had enabled us to linger fondly over each word in this answer of perfect grace. "Verily:" a word of unshaken confidence. "To-day:" not a future entrance into the kingdom—that is sure enough—but in the meantime PARADISE, better far than the kingdom even, is immediately granted to the dying thief. Is going to Paradise going to sleep? Is the soul asleep or unconscious? Ah, that were not Paradise! And where is this garden of delight? It is "the third heaven," the immediate presence of God. Paul was in it

but the joy was all too much ; and it was fourteen years after that he spoke of it, telling us that he could not utter its delights in mortal ears (2 Cor. xii. 1-4).

The Lord died first, and went to Paradise to welcome the saved thief. What a journey ! From the cross to Paradise—from gloom and darkness to light and glory. Have you started on the journey, my reader ? It is God's order for every soul. The cross is the starting point, the Paradise of God, the blessed goal.

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