

THE PRESENT TRUTH

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It Was for Us Pt.4

Jesus was hurried to Calvary amid the shouts and jeers of the crowd. As He passed the gate of Pilate's court, the heavy cross which had been prepared for Barabbas was laid upon His bruised and bleeding shoulders. Crosses were placed also upon two thieves, who were to suffer death at the same time with Jesus. The load was too heavy for the Saviour in His weary, suffering condition. He had gone but a few rods when He fell fainting beneath the cross. When He revived, the cross was again placed upon His shoulders. He staggered on a few steps, and again fell to the ground as one lifeless. His persecutors now realized that it was impossible for Him to go farther with His burden, and they were puzzled to find someone who would carry the humiliating load.

Just then they were met by Simon a Cyrenian, coming from the opposite direction. Him they seized and compelled to carry the cross to Calvary. The sons of Simon were disciples of Jesus, but he himself had not accepted the Saviour. Simon was ever after grateful for the privilege of bearing the cross of the Redeemer. The burden he was thus forced to carry became the means of his conversion. The events of Calvary and the words uttered by Jesus led Simon to accept Him as the Son of God. Arriving at the place of crucifixion, the condemned were bound to the instruments of torture. The two thieves wrestled in the hands of those who stretched them upon the cross; but the Saviour made no resistance.

The mother of Jesus had followed Him on that awful journey to Calvary. She longed to minister to Him as He sank exhausted under His burden, but she was not allowed this privilege. At every step of that wearisome way she had looked for Him to manifest His God-given power, and release Himself from the murderous throng. And now that the final scene was reached, and she saw the thieves bound to the cross, what an agony of suspense she endured! Would He who had given life to the dead suffer Himself to be crucified? Would the Son of God suffer Himself to be thus cruelly slain? Must she give up her faith that He was the Messiah?

She saw His hands stretched upon the cross--those hands that had ever been reached out to bless the suffering. The hammer and the nails were brought, and as the spikes were driven through the tender flesh, the heart-broken disciples bore from the cruel scene the fainting form of the mother of Jesus. The Saviour made no murmur of complaint; His face remained pale and serene, but great drops of sweat stood on His brow. His disciples had fled from the dreadful scene. He was treading the winepress alone; and of the people there were none with Him. (Isaiah 63:3.)

As the soldiers were doing their work, the mind of Jesus passed from His own sufferings to the terrible retribution that His persecutors must one day meet. He pitied them in their ignorance, and prayed: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Christ was earning the right to become the advocate for men in the Father's presence. That prayer for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner who had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Whenever we sin, Christ is wounded afresh. For us He lifts His pierced hands before the Father's throne, and says, "Forgive them; for they know not what they do."

As soon as Christ was nailed to the cross, it was lifted by strong men, and with great violence thrust into the place prepared for it. This caused intense suffering to the Son of God. Pilate then wrote an inscription in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and placed it upon the cross, above the head of Jesus, where all might see it. It read: "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." The Jews requested that this might be changed. The chief priests said: "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that He said, I am King of the Jews." But Pilate was angry with himself because of his former weakness. He also thoroughly despised the jealous and wicked rulers. So he answered: "What I have written I have written." John 19:22.

The soldiers divided the clothing of Jesus among themselves. One garment was woven without seam, and about this there was a contention. They finally settled the matter by casting lots. God's prophet had foretold that they would do this. He wrote: "Dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet. . . . They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture." Psalms 22:16, 18.

As soon as Jesus was lifted up on the cross, a terrible scene took place. Priests, rulers, and scribes joined with the rabble in mocking and jeering the dying Son of God, saying: "If Thou be the King of the Jews, save Thyself." Luke 23:37. "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." Matthew 27:42, 43. "And they that passed by railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself, and come down from the cross." Mark 15:29, 30. Christ could have come down from the cross. But if He had done this, we could never have been saved. For our sake He was willing to die. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." Isaiah 53:5.

In yielding up His precious life, Christ was not upheld by triumphant joy. His heart was rent with anguish and oppressed with gloom. But it was not the fear or the pain of death that caused His suffering. It was the crushing weight of the sin of the world, a sense of separation from His Father's love. This was what broke the Saviour's heart, and brought His death so soon. Christ felt the woe that sinners will feel when they awake to realize the burden of their guilt, to know that they have forever separated themselves from the joy and peace of Heaven. Angels beheld with amazement the agony of despair borne by the Son of God. His anguish of mind was so intense that the pain of the cross was hardly felt. Nature itself was in sympathy with the scene. The sun shone clearly until midday, when suddenly it seemed to be blotted out. All about the cross was darkness as deep as the blackest midnight. This supernatural darkness lasted fully three hours. A nameless terror took possession of the multitude. The cursing and reviling ceased. Men, women, and children fell upon the earth in abject terror. Lightnings occasionally flashed forth from the cloud, and revealed the cross and the crucified Redeemer. All thought that their time of retribution had come.

At the ninth hour the darkness lifted from the people, but still wrapped the Saviour as with a mantle. The lightnings seemed to be hurled at Him as He hung upon the cross. It was then that He sent up the despairing cry: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" In the meantime the darkness had settled over Jerusalem and the plains of Judea. As all eyes were turned in the direction of the fated city, they saw the fierce lightnings of God's wrath directed toward it. Suddenly the gloom was lifted from the cross, and in clear, trumpetlike tones, that seemed to resound throughout creation, Jesus cried: "It is finished." John 19:30. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." Luke 23:46.

A light encircled the cross, and the face of the Saviour shone with a glory like the sun. He then bowed His head upon His breast and died. The multitude about the cross stood paralyzed, and with bated breath gazed upon the Saviour. Again darkness settled upon the earth, and a hoarse rumbling like heavy thunder was heard. This was accompanied with a violent earthquake. The people were shaken into heaps by the earthquake. The wildest confusion and terror ensued. In the surrounding mountains, rocks were rent asunder, and went crashing down into the plains below. Tombs were broken open, and many of the dead were cast out. Creation seemed to be breaking into atoms. Priests, rulers, soldiers, and people, mute with terror, were lying prostrate upon the ground.

At the time of the death of Christ, some of the priests were ministering in the temple at Jerusalem. They felt the shock of the earthquake, and at the same moment the vail of the temple, which separated the holy from the most holy place was rent in twain from top to bottom by the same bloodless hand that wrote the words of doom upon the walls of Belshazzar's palace. The most holy place of the earthly sanctuary was no longer sacred. Never would the presence of God again overshadow that mercy seat. Never would the acceptance or displeasure of God be manifested by the light or shadow in the precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest.

Henceforth the blood of the offerings in the temple was of no value. The Lamb of God, in dying, had become the sacrifice for the sins of the world. When Christ died upon the cross of Calvary, the new and living way was thrown open to Jew and Gentile alike. Angels rejoiced as the Saviour cried, "It is finished!" The great plan of redemption was to be carried out. Through a life of obedience, the sons of Adam might be exalted finally to the presence of God. Satan was defeated, and knew that his kingdom was lost.