

WERE YOU THERE? THE PASSION STORY



GETHSEMANE: IN THE GARDEN.

[This chapter is based on Matt. 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12.]

The Redeemer, in company with his disciples, slowly made his way to the garden of Gethsemane. The passover moon, broad and full, shone from a cloudless sky. The city of pilgrims' tents was hushed into silence.

Jesus had been earnestly conversing with and instructing his disciples; but as he neared Gethsemane he became strangely silent. His disciples were perplexed, and anxiously regarded his countenance, hoping there to read an explanation of the change that had come over their Master. They had frequently seen him depressed, but never before so utterly sad and silent. As he proceeded, this strange sadness increased; yet they dared not question him as to the cause. His form swayed as if he was about to fall. His disciples looked anxiously for his usual place of retirement, that their Master might rest.

Upon entering the garden he said to his companions, "Sir ye here, while I go and pray yonder." Selecting Peter, James, and John to accompany him, he proceeded farther into the recesses of the garden. He had been accustomed to brace his spirit for trial and duty by fervent prayer in this retreat, and had frequently spent the entire night thus. On these occasions his disciples, after a little season of watching

and prayer, would sleep undisturbed at a little distance from their Master until he awoke them in the morning to go forth and labor anew. So this act of Jesus called forth no remark from his companions.

Every step that the Saviour now took was with labored effort. He groaned aloud as though suffering under the pressure of a terrible burden; yet he refrained from startling his three chosen disciples by a full explanation of the agony which he was to suffer. Twice his companions prevented him from falling to the ground. Jesus felt that he must be still more alone, and he said to the favored three, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; tarry ye here, and watch with me." His disciples had never before heard him utter such mournful tones. His frame was convulsed with anguish, and his pale countenance expressed a sorrow past all description.

He went a short distance from his disciples-- not so far but that they could both see and hear him--and fell prostrate with his face upon the cold ground. He was overpowered by a terrible fear that God was removing his presence from him. He felt himself being separated from his Father by a gulf of sin, so broad, so black and deep that his spirit shuddered before it. He clung convulsively to the cold, unfeeling ground as if to prevent himself from being drawn still farther from God. The chilling dews of night fell upon his prostrate form, but the Redeemer heeded it not. From his pale, convulsed lips wailed the bitter cry, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

It was not a dread of the physical suffering he was soon to endure that brought this agony upon the Son of God. He was enduring the penalty of man's transgression, and shuddering beneath the Father's frown. He must not call his divinity to his aid, but as a man, he must bear the consequences of man's sin and the Creator's displeasure toward his disobedient subjects. As he felt his unity with the Father broken up, he feared that his human nature would be unable to endure the coming conflict with the prince of the power of darkness; and in that case the human race would be irrecoverably lost, Satan would be victor, and the earth would be his kingdom. The sins of the world weighed heavily upon the Saviour, and bowed him to the earth; and the Father's anger in consequence of that sin seemed crushing out his life.

In the conflict of Christ with Satan in the wilderness of temptation, the destiny of the human race was at stake. But Christ was conqueror, and the tempter left him for a season. He had now returned for the

last fearful conflict. Satan had been preparing for this final trial during the three years of Christ's ministry. Everything was at stake with him. If he failed here, his hope of mastery was lost; the kingdoms of the earth would finally become Christ's who would "bind the strong man" (Satan), and cast him out.

During this scene of the Saviour's anguish, the disciples were at first much troubled to see their Master, usually so calm and dignified, wrestling with a sorrow that exceeded all utterance; but they were tired, and finally dropped asleep, leaving him to agonize alone. At the end of an hour, Jesus, feeling the need of human sympathy, rose with painful effort and staggered to the place where he had left his companions.

But no sympathizing countenance greeted him after his long struggle; the disciples were fast asleep. Ah! if they had realized that this was their last night with their beloved master while he lived a man upon earth, if they had known what the morrow would bring him, they would hardly have yielded to the power of slumber.

The voice of Jesus partially aroused them. They discerned his form bending over them, his expression and attitude indicating extreme exhaustion. They scarcely recognized in his changed countenance the usually serene face of their Master. Singling out Simon Peter, he addressed him: "Simon, sleepest thou? couldst not thou watch one hour?" Oh! Simon, where is now thy boasted devotion? Thou, who didst but lately declare thou couldst go with thy Lord to prison or to death, hast left him in the hour of his agony and temptation, and sought repose in sleep!

John, the loving disciple who had leaned on the breast of Jesus, was also sleeping. Surely, the love of John for his Master should have kept him awake. His earnest prayers should have mingled with those of his loved Saviour in the time of his supreme sorrow. The self-sacrificing Redeemer had passed entire nights in the cold mountains or in the groves, praying for his disciples, that their faith might not fail them in the hour of their temptation. Should Jesus now put to James and John the question he had once asked them: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" they would not have ventured to answer, "We are able."

The evidence of the weakness of his disciples excited the pity and sympathy of the Son of God. He questioned their strength to endure the test they must undergo in witnessing his betrayal and death. He

did not sternly upbraid them for their weakness, but, in view of their coming trial, exhorted them: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." Then, his spirit moving in sympathy with their frailty, he framed an excuse for their failure in duty toward him: "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Again the Son of God was seized with superhuman agony, and, fainting and exhausted, staggered back to the place of his former struggle. Again he was prostrated to the earth. His suffering was even greater than before. The cypress and palm trees were the silent witnesses of his anguish. From their leafy branches dropped heavy dew upon his stricken form, as if nature wept over its Author wrestling alone with the powers of darkness.

A few hours before, Jesus had stood like a mighty cedar, withstanding the storm of opposition that spent its fury upon him. Stubborn wills, and hearts filled with malice and subtlety strove in vain to confuse and overpower him. He stood forth in divine majesty as the Son of God. But now he was like a bruised reed beaten and bent by the angry storm. A short time before, he had poured out his soul to his disciples in noble utterances, claiming unity with the Father, and giving his elect church into his arms in the language of one who had divine authority. Now his voice uttered suppressed wails of anguish, and he clung to the cold ground as if for relief.

The words of the Saviour were borne to the ears of the drowsy disciples: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." The anguish of God's dear Son forced drops of blood from his pores. Again he staggered to his feet, his human heart yearning for the sympathy of his companions, and repaired to where his disciples were sleeping. His presence roused them, and they looked upon his face with fear, for it was stained with blood, and expressed an agony of mind which was to them unaccountable.

He did not again address them, but, turning away, sought again his retreat and fell prostrate, overcome by the horror of a great darkness. The humanity of the Son of God trembled in that trying hour. The awful moment had arrived which was to decide the destiny of the world. The heavenly hosts waited the issue with intense interest. The fate of humanity trembled in the balance. The Son of God might even then refuse to drink the cup apportioned to guilty men. He might wipe the bloody sweat from his brow, and leave men to perish in their iniquity. Will the Son of the Infinite God drink the bitter potion of

humiliation and agony? Will the innocent suffer the consequence of God's curse, to save the guilty? The words fall tremblingly from the pale lips of Jesus: "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done."

Three times has he uttered that prayer. Three times has humanity shrunk from the last crowning sacrifice. But now the history of the human race comes up before the world's Redeemer. He sees that the transgressors of the law, if left to themselves, must perish under the Father's displeasure. He sees the power of sin, and the utter helplessness of man to save himself. The woes and lamentations of a doomed world arise before him. He beholds its impending fate, and his decision is made. He will save man at any cost to himself. He accepts his baptism of blood, that perishing millions through him may gain everlasting life. He left the courts of Heaven, where all was purity, happiness, and glory, to save the one lost sheep, the one world that had fallen by transgression, and he will not turn from the mission he has chosen. He will reach to the very depths of misery to rescue a lost and ruined race.

Having made the decision and reached the final crisis, he fell in a dying condition to the earth from which he had partially risen. Where now were his disciples, to place their hands tenderly beneath the head of their fainting Master, and bathe that brow, marred indeed more than the sons of men? The Saviour trod the winepress alone, and of all the people there was none with him. And yet he was not alone. He had said, "I and my Father are one." God suffered with his Son. Man cannot comprehend the sacrifice made by the infinite God in giving up his Son to reproach, agony, and death. This is the evidence of the Father's boundless love to man.

The angels who did Christ's will in Heaven were anxious to comfort him; but it was beyond their power to alleviate his sorrow. They had never felt the sins of a ruined world, and they beheld with astonishment the object of their adoration subject to a grief beyond all expression. Though the disciples had failed to sympathize with their Lord in the trying hour of his conflict, all Heaven was full of sympathy and waiting the result with painful interest. When it was finally determined, an angel was sent from the throne of God to minister unto the stricken Redeemer.

The disciples were suddenly aroused from their slumber by a bright light shining upon and around the Son of God. They started up in amazement, and beheld a heavenly being, clothed in garments of

light, bending over their prostrate Master. With his right hand he lifted the head of the divine sufferer upon his bosom, and with his left hand he pointed toward Heaven. His voice was like the sweetest music, as he uttered soothing words presenting to the mind of Christ the grand results of the victory he had gained over the strong and wily foe. Christ was victor over Satan; and, as the result of his triumph, millions were to be victors with him in his glorified kingdom.

Well was it for the children of men that the angel's errand was not to notify the Saviour that his thrice-repeated prayer, Let this cup pass from me, had been granted. Then indeed might the disciples have slept on, locked in the slumber of hopeless despair. But the angel was sent from Heaven to support the Redeemer in drinking the cup that was presented him. The language of his prayer was now changed; in the spirit of submission he prayed: "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done." A heavenly serenity now rested upon the Saviour's pale and blood-stained face.

The glorious vision of the angel dazzled the eyes of the disciples. They remembered the mount of transfiguration, the glory that encircled Jesus in the temple, and the voice of God issuing from the cloud. They saw the same glory here revealed, and had no farther fear for their Master, since God had taken him in charge and an angel was present to protect him from his foes. They were weary and heavy with sleep, and again they dropped into unconsciousness.

The Saviour of the world arose and sought his disciples, and, for the third time, found them fast asleep. He looked sorrowfully upon them. His words, however, aroused them: "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."

THE ARREST: THE MOB

[This chapter is based on Matt. 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-50; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12.]

Even while these words were upon his lips, the footsteps of the mob that was in search of him were heard. Judas took the lead and was

closely followed by the high priest. Jesus turned to his disciples, as his enemies approached, and said, "Rise, let us be going; behold, he is at hand that doth betray me." The countenance of the Saviour wore an expression of calm dignity; no traces of his recent agony were visible as he stepped forth to meet his betrayer.

He stood in advance of his disciples, and inquired, "Whom seek ye?" They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." As these words were uttered, the mob staggered back; and the priests, elders, soldiers, and even Judas, dropped powerless to the ground. This gave Jesus ample opportunity to escape from them if he had chosen to do so. But he stood as one glorified amid that coarse and hardened band.

When Jesus answered, "I am he," the angel who had lately ministered unto him moved between him and the murderous mob, who saw a divine light illuminating the Saviour's face, and a dove-like form overshadowing him. Their wicked hearts were filled with terror. They could not for a moment stand upon their feet in the presence of this divine glory, and they fell as dead men to the ground.

The angel withdrew; the light faded away; Jesus was left 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. When the angel departed, the Roman soldiers started to their feet, and, with the priests and Judas, gathered about Christ as though ashamed of their weakness, and fearful that he would yet escape from their hands.

Again the question was asked by the Redeemer, "Whom seek ye?" Again they answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." The Saviour then said, "I have told you that I am he. If, therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way"--pointing to the disciples. In this hour of humiliation Christ's thoughts were not for himself, but for his beloved disciples. He wished to save them from any farther trial of their strength.

Judas, the betrayer, did not forget his part, but came close to Jesus, and took his hand as a familiar friend, and bestowed upon him the traitor's kiss. Jesus said to him, "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" His voice trembled with sorrow as he addressed the deluded Judas: "Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?"

This most touching appeal should have roused the conscience of the betrayer, and touched his stubborn heart; but honor, fidelity, and human tenderness had utterly forsaken him. He stood bold and

defiant, showing no disposition to relent. He had given himself up to the control of Satan, and he had no power to resist him. Jesus did not reject 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 were surprised and awed by what they had seen and felt, their assurance and hardihood returned as they saw the boldness of Judas in touching the person of Him whom they had so recently seen glorified. They now laid violent hands upon Jesus, and proceeded to bind those precious hands that had ever been employed in doing good.

When the disciples saw that band of strong men lying prostrate and helpless on the ground, they thought surely their Master would not suffer himself to be taken; for the same power that prostrated that hireling mob could cause them to remain in a state of helplessness until Jesus and his companions should pass unharmed beyond their reach. They were disappointed and indignant as they saw the cords brought forward to bind the hands of Him whom they loved. Peter in his vehement anger rashly cut off, with his sword, an ear of the servant of the high priest.

When Jesus saw what Peter had done, he released his hands, though held firmly by the Roman soldiers, and saying, "Suffer ye thus far," he touched the wounded ear, and it was instantly made whole. He then said to Peter, "Put up again thy sword into his place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

Jesus then turned to the chief priest, and captains of the temple, who helped compose that murderous throng, "and said, are ye come out as against a thief with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not; but the Scriptures must be fulfilled."

When the disciples saw that Jesus did not deliver himself from his enemies, but permitted himself to be taken and bound, they were offended that he should suffer this humiliation to himself and them. They had just witnessed an exhibition of his power in prostrating to the ground those who came to take him, and in healing the servant's ear, which Peter had cut off, and they knew that if he chose he could

deliver himself from the murderous mob. They blamed him for not doing so, and mortified and terror-stricken by his unaccountable conduct they forsook him and fled.

Christ had foreseen this desertion, and in the upper chamber had forewarned them of the course which they would take at this time, saying, "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."

Judas was himself surprised that Jesus should deliver himself into the hands of those who sought to destroy him. He had frequently known the Saviour's enemies to lay plans to take him, but Jesus would quietly depart and defeat their murderous designs. Now the betrayer saw with astonishment that his Master suffered himself to be bound and led away. The false disciple flattered himself, however, that Jesus had only permitted himself to be taken that he might manifest his power by delivering himself from his enemies in a miraculous manner. He knew that nothing else could free him from that armed band. For three years the Jews had been secretly planning to take him, and now that they had accomplished this they would not let him escape death, if they could prevent it.

Jesus was hurried off by the hooting mob. He moved painfully, for his hands were tightly bound and he was closely guarded. He was first conducted to the house of Annas, the father-in-law of the high priest, the man whose counsel was sought and carried out by the Jewish people as the voice of God. Annas craved the fearful satisfaction of first seeing Jesus of Nazareth a bound captive. Having once been shown to Annas, he was hurried away; for the priests and rulers had decided that if they once had possession of his person, there should be no delays in his trial and condemnation. This was because they feared that the people, remembering his acts of charity and mercy among them, would rescue him out of their hands.

BEFORE ANNAS AND THE COURT OF CAIAPHAS

[This chapter is based on Matt. 26:57-75; 27:1; Mark 14:53-72; 15:1; Luke 22:54-71; John 18:13-27.]

The armed band, with their prisoner, threaded the dark and narrow streets, guided by torches and lanterns, for it was yet early morning and very dark. Amid insult and mockery, the Saviour was hurried to the palace of the officiating high priest, Caiaphas. Here he was

coarsely accused by his persecutors, and sneeringly questioned by the priest, and reviled by the whole assembly. But while enduring this mockery of an examination, the Saviour's heart was pierced by a keener pang than it was in the power of his enemies to inflict. It was when he heard his beloved disciple deny him with cursing and swearing.

After deserting their Master in the garden, two of the disciples regained their presence of mind and ventured to follow, at a distance, the mob that had Jesus in charge. These disciples were Peter and John. The priest recognized John as a well-known disciple of Jesus, and admitted him to the hall where the Saviour was being questioned because he hoped that John, while witnessing the humiliation of his leader, would become affected with the same spirit that actuated his enemies, and scorn the idea of one who could be subjected to such indignities, being the Son of God. John, having secured himself an entrance, spoke in behalf of his companion, Peter, and gained the same favor for him.

The coldest hour of the night was that preceding the dawn, and a fire had been lighted in the hall. Around this a company were gathered; and Peter presumptuously took his place with the rest by the fire, and stood warming himself. He did not wish to be recognized as one of the disciples of Jesus, and he thought by mingling carelessly with the people he would be taken for one of those who had brought Jesus to the hall.

But, as the light flashed upon Peter's countenance, the woman who kept the door cast a searching glance upon him; she had noticed that he came in with John, and conjectured that he was one of Christ's followers. She interrogated him in a taunting manner: "Art not thou also one of this man's disciples?" Peter was startled and confused; the eyes of the company instantly fastened upon him. He pretended not to understand her, but she was persistent, and said to those around her that this man was with Jesus. Peter, feeling compelled to answer, said angrily, "Woman, I know him not." This was the first denial, and immediately the cock crew. O Peter! So soon ashamed of thy Master! So soon to cowardly deny thy Lord! The Saviour is dishonored and deserted in his humiliation by one of his most zealous disciples.

In the first place, Peter had not designed that his real character should be known; and, in assuming an air of indifference, he placed himself on the enemy's ground, and became an easy subject to Satan's temptation. He appeared to be disinterested in the trial of his

Master, while in reality his heart was wrung with sorrow as he heard the cruel taunts and saw the mockery and abuse he was suffering. In addition to this he was surprised and angry that Jesus should humiliate himself and his followers by passively submitting to such treatment. Under these conflicting emotions, it was difficult to preserve his character of indifference. His appearance was unnatural, as he endeavored to join with the persecutors of Jesus in their untimely jests, in order to cover his true feelings.

He was acting a lie, and while trying to talk unconcernedly he could not restrain expressions of indignation at the abuse heaped upon his Master. Accordingly attention was called to him the second time, and he was again charged with being a follower of Jesus. He now denied the accusation with an oath. The cock crew the second time; but Peter heard it not, for he was now thoroughly intent upon carrying out the character which he had assumed. One of the servants of the high priest, being a near kinsman to the man whose ear the disciple had cut off, asked him, "Did not I see thee in the garden with him?" "Surely thou art one of them; for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto."

At this, Peter flew into a rage, and to fully deceive his questioners, and to justify his assumed character, he denied his Master with cursing and swearing. And immediately the cock crew the third time. Peter heard it then; and while the degrading oaths were fresh upon his lips, and the shrill crowing of the cock was yet ringing in his ears, the Saviour turned his face from the frowning judges, and looked full upon his poor disciple. At the same time Peter's eyes were involuntarily fixed upon his Master. He read in that gentle countenance deep pity and sorrow; but there was no anger there.

Peter was conscience-smitten; his memory was aroused; he recalled to mind his promise of a few short hours before, that he would go to prison or to death for his Lord. He remembered his grief when the Saviour told him in the upper chamber that he would deny his Master thrice that same night. Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately he had read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself. He groaned in spirit as he realized that not only was his Master enduring the bitterest humiliation at the hands of his enemies, but he was suffering additional dishonor at the hands of one of his disciples, who had forsaken and refused to acknowledge him in the hour of his trial.

The look of Christ conveyed volumes to the repentant Peter. He read in that glance sorrow, love, and pardon. A tide of memories rushed over him. He remembered the Saviour's tender mercy, his kindness and long-suffering, the patience with which he dealt with his followers. He remembered the caution of Jesus to him: "Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." He reflected with horror upon his base ingratitude, his falsehood and perjury. He looked once more at his Master, and saw a sacrilegious hand raised to smite him in the face. Unable to longer endure the scene, he rushed, heart-broken, from the hall.

He pressed on in solitude and darkness, he knew and cared not whither. At last he found himself in the garden of Gethsemane, where a short time before he had slept while the Saviour wrestled with the powers of darkness. The suffering face of his Lord, stained with bloody sweat and convulsed with anguish, rose before him. He remembered with bitter remorse that Jesus had wept and agonized in prayer alone while those who should have sustained him in that trying hour were sleeping. He remembered his solemn charge: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation." The scene of a few short hours before came vividly to his mind. He witnessed again the tears and groans of Jesus. It was torture to his bleeding heart to know that he had added the heaviest burden to the Saviour's humiliation and grief. He fell prostrate upon the very spot where his Lord had sunk beneath his inexpressible weight of woe.

Peter's first mistake was in sleeping when Christ had bidden him to watch and pray. At the most critical moment, when the Son of God was in need of his sympathy and heartfelt prayers, he was incapable of giving them to him. The disciples lost much by sleeping; Jesus designed to fortify them for the severe test of faith to which they were to be subjected. If they had spent that mournful period in the garden in watching with the dear Saviour, and in prayer to God, Peter would not have been left to depend upon his own feeble strength; he would not have denied his Lord.

This important night-watch should have been spent by the disciples in noble mental struggles and prayers, which would have brought them strength to witness the terrible agony of the Son of God. It would have prepared them, as they should behold his sufferings upon the cross, to understand in some degree the nature of the overpowering anguish which he endured. They would then have been better able to recall the words he had spoken to them in reference to

his sufferings, death, and resurrection; and amid the gloom of that trying hour some rays of hope would have lighted up the darkness, and sustained their faith. Christ had told them before that these things would take place. He knew the power which the prince of darkness would use to paralyze the senses of his disciples when they should be watching and praying.

The disciple John, upon entering the judgment hall, did not try to conceal the fact that he was one of the followers of Jesus. He did not mingle with the rough company that were insulting and mocking his Master. He was not questioned, for he did not assume a false character and thus lay himself liable to suspicion. He sought a retired corner secure from observation of the mob, but as near Jesus as it was possible for him to be. In this place he could hear and see all that transpired at the trial of his Lord.

If Peter had been called to fight for his Master, he would have proved a bold and courageous soldier; but he became a coward when the finger of scorn was pointed at him. Many who do not hesitate to engage in active warfare for the Lord, are driven to deny their faith through the ridicule of their enemies. They place themselves in the way of temptation by associating with those whom they should avoid. They thus invite the enemy to tempt them, and are led to do and say that which they would never have been guilty of under other circumstances. The disciple of Christ, who, in our day, disguises his faith through dread of suffering or reproach, denies his Lord as virtually as did Peter in the judgment hall. There are always those who boast of their freedom of thought and action, and laugh at the scruples of the conscientious who fear to do wrong. Yet if those righteous persons are persuaded to yield their faith, they are despised by the very ones who were Satan's agents to tempt them to their ruin.

Peter, however, as well as John, witnessed much of the mock trial of Jesus. It was necessary that there should be a pretense of legal trial; but great secrecy was maintained lest the people should obtain information of what was being done, and come forward with their testimony in vindication of Jesus, bringing to light the mighty works which he had done. This would bring the indignation of the people upon the Sanhedrim: their acts would be condemned and brought to naught; and Jesus would be liberated and receive new honor at the hands of the people.

While the members of the Sanhedrim council were being called together, Annas and Caiaphas the priest questioned Jesus, with the

purpose of provoking him to make some statement which they could use to his disadvantage. They brought two charges against him, by one or both of which they meant to effect his condemnation. One was that he was a disturber of the peace, the leader of a rebellion. If this charge could be verified he would be condemned by the Roman authorities. The other charge was that he was a blasphemer. This, if proved true, would secure his condemnation among the Jews.

The high priest questioned Jesus concerning his doctrine, and the disciples who believed in him. Jesus answered briefly: "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them; behold, they know what I said."

Jesus was well aware that his questioner designed to draw some statement from him which should awaken the fears of the Roman authorities that he was seeking to establish a secret society with the purpose of finally setting up a new kingdom. He therefore plainly stated to Annas that he had no secrets in regard to his purpose or doctrines. Turning upon his interrogator he said with startling emphasis, "Why askest thou me?" Had not the priests and rulers set spies to watch his movements and report his every word? Had they not been present at every gathering of the people, and carried information of all his sayings and doings on these occasions to the priests? "Ask them that heard me, what I have said," replied Jesus; and his words were a rebuke to Annas, who had hunted him for months, striving to entrap him, and to bring him before a secret tribunal, in which the people could have no voice, that he might obtain by perjury what it was impossible to gain by fair means.

The words of Jesus were so close and pointed that the high priest felt that his very soul was being read by his prisoner. Though Annas was filled with hatred against Jesus at these words, he disguised it until a more fitting opportunity presented itself of giving vent to his malice and jealousy. But one of the servants of the high priest, assuming that his master was not treated with due respect, struck Jesus in the face, saying, "Answerest thou the high priest so?" To this insulting question and blow, Jesus mildly returned, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"

The Majesty of Heaven might have summoned to his aid legions of loyal angels to protect him against the malignity of his enemies; but it was his mission, in the character of humanity, meekly to endure

taunts and stripes, leaving an example of patient forbearance to the children of men. Those into whose power Jesus had fallen had no respect for this sublime forbearance. The fact that he was a passive captive in their hands was the signal for them to wreak upon him the basest insults which their corrupt hearts could invent.

When the council was fully assembled in the judgment hall, Caiaphas took his position as presiding officer. This man had ever regarded Jesus as his rival. The combined simplicity and eloquence of the Saviour had attracted large crowds to listen to his teachings, which contained wisdom such as they had never heard from the lips of priests or scribes. The anxiety of the people to hear Jesus, and their readiness to accept his doctrines, had roused the bitter jealousy of the high priest.

Jesus stood calm and serene before the high priest, while the eyes of the multitude were upon him, and the wildest excitement prevailed around. For a moment Caiaphas looked upon the captive, struck with a sudden admiration for his dignified bearing. A conviction came over him that this man was akin to God. The next instant he banished the thought, scorning the suggestions of his own mind. Immediately, his voice was heard in sneering, haughty tones, requesting Jesus to work before him one of those mighty miracles which had given him such fame among the people; but his words fell upon the ears of the Saviour as though he heard them not.

The people involuntarily compared the excited and malignant deportment of Annas and Caiaphas with the calm, majestic bearing of Jesus. A holy influence seemed to emanate from the Saviour and pervade the atmosphere surrounding him. The question arose even in the minds of the hardened multitude present, Is this man of Godlike presence to be sentenced as a common criminal? Caiaphas, perceiving the influence that was obtaining, hastened the trial. He took his position on the throne of judgment, while Jesus stood at its foot. On either side were the judges and those specially interested in the trial. The Roman soldiers were ranged on the platform, below the throne.

The high priest arose in his gorgeous robe, with glittering tiara and costly breastplate, upon which, in former days, the light of God's glory had often flashed. In strong contrast with this display were the coarse habiliments of Jesus. And yet he who was clad in homely garb had reigned in the courts of Heaven, crowned, and with garments of brightness, attended by holy angels. Yet there he stood at the foot of an earthly throne to be tried for his life.

The priests and rulers had decided in counsel together that Jesus must be condemned, whether or not they could furnish evidence of his guilt. It was necessary to bring charges against him which would be regarded as criminal by the Roman power or they could legally effect nothing against him. His accusers could find plenty who would testify that he had denounced the priests and scribes; that he had called them hypocrites and murderers; but this would weigh nothing with the Romans, who were themselves disgusted with the pretension of the Pharisees. Such testimony would also weigh nothing with the Sadducees; for in their sharp contentions with the Pharisees, they had used to them language of the same import. His accusers were anxious to avoid raising the opposition of the Sadducees against the Pharisees; for if the two parties fell to contending among themselves, Jesus would be likely to escape from their hands.

They could secure abundant evidence that Jesus had disregarded their traditions, and spoken irreverently of many of their ordinances; but such evidence was of no value, as it would have no weight with either the Romans or Sadducees. They dared not accuse him of Sabbath-breaking for fear an examination would reveal what had been the character of his work upon that day. In that event his miracles wrought to heal the afflicted would be brought to light, and defeat the very object they wished to gain.

Christ had said, concerning the temple of his body, that he could destroy it, and raise it again in three days. These words were understood by his hearers to refer to the Jewish temple. Of all that Jesus had said, the priests could find nothing which they could use against him save this. The Romans had engaged in rebuilding and embellishing the temple. They took great pride in it as a work of science and art; and the priests counted upon their indignation when it was proven that Jesus, a humble man, had declared himself able to build it in three days if it should be destroyed. On this ground, Romans and Jews, Pharisees and Sadducees, could meet; for all held the temple in great veneration.

In addition to this they had bribed false witnesses to testify that Jesus was guilty of inciting rebellion and seeking to establish a separate government. This they hoped would farther excite the apprehensions of the Romans and accomplish the desired object. But when these witnesses were called, their testimony was so vague and contradictory that it was worthless. Upon cross-questioning, they were led to falsify their own statements. It was becoming apparent to the people that the charges against Jesus could not be maintained. The life

of the Saviour had been so faultless, and his doctrine so pure, that envy and malice could find little in either capable of being misrepresented.

Two witnesses were at last found whose evidence was not so contradictory as the others had been. One of them, a corrupt man who had sold his honor for a sum of money, spoke of Christ as on a level with himself. Said he, "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days." In the figurative language of prophecy, Jesus had thus foretold his own death and resurrection, his conflict and victory; but his enemies had misconstrued his words to suit their own purposes. The words of Jesus were truth and verity; the evidence was false and malicious. If the words of Jesus had been reported exactly as he uttered them, there would have been nothing offensive in them. If he had been a mere man, as they assumed him to be, his declaration would only have indicated an unreasonable, boastful spirit, but could not have been construed into blasphemy.

Caiaphas urged Jesus to answer to the charge made against him; but the Saviour, knowing that his sentence was already determined, answered him nothing. The evidence gained from the last two witnesses proved nothing against him worthy of death; and Jesus himself remained calm and silent. The priests and rulers began to fear that they would fail to gain their object after all. They were disappointed and perplexed that they had failed to gain anything from the false witnesses upon which to condemn their prisoner. Their only hope now was to make Jesus speak out and say something which would condemn him before the people.

The silence of Christ upon this occasion had already been described by Isaiah in prophetic vision: "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."

The high priest now raised his right hand to toward Heaven in a most imposing manner, and with a solemn voice addressed Jesus: "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God." Thus appealed to by the highest acknowledged authority in the nation, and in the name of the Most High, Jesus, to show proper respect for the law, answered, "Thou hast said." Every ear was bent to listen, and every eye was fixed upon his face, as with calm voice and dignified manner, he made this reply. A

heavenly light seemed to illuminate his pale countenance as he added, "Nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

For a moment the divinity of Christ flashed through his guise of humanity; and the high priest quailed before the penetrating eyes of the Saviour. That look seemed to read his hidden thoughts, and burn into his heart; and never in after-life did he forget that searching glance of the persecuted Son of God. This voluntary confession of Jesus, claiming his Sonship with God, was made in the most public manner, and under the most solemn oath. In it he presented to the minds of those present a reversal of the scene then being enacted before them, when he, the Lord of life and glory, would be seated at the right hand of God, the supreme Judge of Heaven and earth, from whose decision there could be no appeal. He brought before them a view of that day, when, instead of being surrounded and abused by a riotous mob, headed by the priests and judges of the land, he would come in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory, escorted by legions of angels, to pronounce the sentence of his enemies.

Jesus knew what would be the result of this announcement; that it would secure his condemnation. The object of the designing priests was now gained. Jesus had declared himself to be the Christ. The high priest, in order to give those present the impression that he was jealous for the insulted majesty of Heaven, rent his garments, and, lifting his hands toward heaven as if in holy horror, said, in a voice calculated to rouse the excited people to violence, "He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye?" The answer of the judges was, "He is guilty of death."

The priests and judges, exulting in the advantage they had gained through the words of Jesus, but anxious to hide their malicious satisfaction, now pressed close to him, and, as if they could not believe that they had heard aright, simultaneously inquired, "Art thou the Christ? tell us." Jesus looked calmly at his hypocritical questioners, and answered, "If I tell you, ye will not believe. And if I ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go." Jesus could have traced down the prophecies, and given his accusers evidence that the very things were then taking place which had been predicted in regard to Messiah. He could have silenced them thus; but they would not then have believed. He could have pointed them to his mighty miracles; but they had set their hearts against the light of Heaven, and no power could change them.

There were some in that assembly who heeded the words of Jesus and noted his Godlike bearing as he stood serenely before the infuriated judges. The gospel seed found lodgment that day in hearts where it was eventually to spring up and yield an abundant harvest. The reverence and awe which his words inspired in the hearts of many who heard them were to increase and develop into perfect faith in Jesus as the world's Redeemer. Some of the witnesses of that scene were themselves afterward placed in a similar position to that of Jesus in the judgment hall; and were tried for their lives because they were the disciples of Christ.

When the condemnation of Jesus was pronounced by the judges, a satanic fury took possession of the people. The roar of voices was like that of wild beasts. They made a rush toward Jesus, crying, He is guilty, put him to death! and had it not been for the Roman soldiers, Jesus would not have lived to be hanged upon the cross of Calvary. He would have been torn in pieces before his judges, had not Roman authority interfered, and by force of arms withheld the violence of the mob.

Although Jesus was bound, yet he was also guarded, and held by two men lest he should escape from the hands of his persecutors. The judges and rulers now entirely forgot the dignity of their office, and abused the Son of God with foul epithets, railing upon him in regard to his parentage, and declaring that his presumption in proclaiming himself the Messiah, notwithstanding his low birth, made him deserving of the most ignominious death. Most dissolute men engaged in this infamous abuse of the Saviour. An old garment was thrown over his head, and his jeering persecutors struck him in the face, crying, "Prophecy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" Upon the garment being removed, one poor wretch spat in his face. But the Saviour directed no word or look of retaliation against the deluded souls around him, who had cast off all restraint because they perceived that the priests and rulers sanctioned their acts.

Jesus realized that the hosts of Heaven were witnessing his humiliation, and that the least angel, if summoned to his aid, could have instantly dispersed that insulting throng, and delivered him from their power. Jesus himself could have stricken down the excited multitude like dead men, by a look or word of his divinity, or driven them frightened from his presence, as he had the defilers of the temple. But it was in the plan of redemption that he should suffer the scorn and abuse of wicked men, and he consented to all this when he became the Redeemer of man. The angels of God faithfully recorded

every insulting look, word, and act directed against their beloved Commander; and the base men who scorned and spat upon the calm, pale face of Christ, were one day to look upon it in its glory, shining brighter than the sun. In that awful time they would pray to the rocks and the mountains: "Hide us from the face of Him who sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb."

Jesus was pushed hither and thither, and so insulted and abused that at last the Roman officers were ashamed and angry that a man against whom nothing had yet been proven should be subject to the brutal treatment of the worst class of persons. Accordingly they accused the Jewish authorities of assuming to exercise a power that did not belong to them, in trying a man for his life, and pronouncing his condemnation. They declared that in doing this they infringed upon the Roman power, and that it was even against the Jewish law to condemn any man to death on his own testimony. This intervention of Roman authority caused a lull in the rude excitement.

JUDAS

Just then a hoarse voice rang through the hall, which sent a thrill of terror through the hearts of all present: He is innocent. Spare him, O Caiaphas! He has done nothing worthy of death! The tall form of Judas was now seen pressing his way through the startled crowd. His face was pale and haggard, and large drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead. He rushed to the throne of judgment, and threw down before the high priest the pieces of silver he had received as the price of his Lord's betrayal. He eagerly grasped the robe of Caiaphas, and implored him to release Jesus, declaring that he was innocent of all crime. Caiaphas angrily shook him off, but he was confused and knew not what to say. The perfidy of the priests was revealed before the people. It was evident to all that Judas had been bribed to deliver Jesus into the hands of those who sought his life.

Judas continued to beseech Caiaphas to do nothing against Jesus, declaring that he was indeed the Son of God, and cursing himself that he had betrayed innocent blood. But the high priest, having recovered his self-possession, answered with chilling scorn, "What is that to us? see thou to that." He then represented to the people that Judas was some poor maniac, one of the mad followers of Jesus, and charged them not to let any influence prevail to release the prisoner, who was a base deceiver.

Finding his prayers were in vain, Judas fell at the feet of Jesus, acknowledging him to be the Son of God, begging forgiveness for his sin, and imploring him to exercise his God-like power and deliver himself from his enemies. The Saviour did not reproach his betrayer either by look or word. He knew that he was suffering the bitterest remorse for his crime. He gazed compassionately upon Judas, and declared that for that hour he had come into the world.

A murmur of surprise ran through the assembly at the heaven forbearance manifested by Jesus. Again a conviction swept over their minds that this man was more than mortal. But the question then arose, If he was indeed the Son of God, why did he not free himself from his bonds and rise triumphant above his accusers?

The love of money had perverted the nobler nature of Judas, making him a fit agent for Satan to use in the betrayal of Christ. When Judas had become annoyed at the implied rebuke of Jesus because of his covetous spirit upon the occasion of Mary anointing her Lord with costly ointment, he yielded to the tempter, and gave Satan easy access to his mind. But when he decided to sell his Master to the murderous priests and rulers, he had no thought that Jesus would permit himself to be taken. He thought the priests would be cheated of their bribe, and he, the betrayer, would secure the money to use for some purpose of his own, and Jesus would have a new opportunity to display his divine power in delivering himself from the wiles of his enemies.

From the time of his betrayal in the garden, Judas had not lost sight of the Saviour. He eagerly looked for him to surprise his enemies by appearing before them in the character of the Son of God, setting at naught all their plots and power. But when he saw him meekly submitting to their abuse, suffering himself to be tried and condemned to death, his heart smote him, and he realized the full extent of his own crime --he had sold his divine Master to shame and death. He remembered how kind and considerate Jesus had ever been to him, and his heart filled with remorse and anguish. He now despised the covetousness which Jesus had reproved, and which had tempted him to sell the Saviour for a few pieces of silver.

Perceiving that his entreaties to spare the life of Jesus availed nothing with the high priest, he rushed from the hall in despair, crying, It is too late! It is too late! He felt unable to live to see Jesus crucified, and, in an agony of remorse, went out and hanged himself.

Afterward the money which Judas had cast down before the priest was used for the purchase of a public burial ground. "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. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day."

If any testimony had been needed to prove the innocence of Jesus, it was given in the confession of Judas. Not only was it an evidence of the innocence of the Saviour, but the event was a direct fulfillment of prophecy. In prophetic vision Zechariah had looked down the ages and seen the trial of God's dear Son. The act of Judas is thus described: "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter; a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord."

CONDEMNATION OF JESUS

[This chapter is based on Matt. 27:2 , 11-31; Mark 15:1-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 18:28-40; 19:1-16.]

When Jesus was asked the question, Art thou the Son of God? he knew that to answer in the affirmative would make his death certain; a denial would leave a stain upon his humanity. There was a time to be silent, and a time to speak. He had not spoken until plainly interrogated. In his lessons to his disciples he had declared: "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father who is in Heaven." When challenged, Jesus did not deny his relationship with God. In that solemn moment his character was at stake and must be vindicated. He left on that occasion an example for man to follow under similar circumstances. He would teach him not to apostatize from his faith to escape suffering or even death.

Had the Jews possessed the authority to do so, they would have executed Jesus at once upon the hasty condemnation of their judges; but such power had passed from them into the hands of the Romans, and it was necessary that the case be referred to the proper authorities of that government for final decision. The Jews were anxious to hasten the trial and execution of Jesus, because if it were not brought about at once there would be a delay of a week on

account of the immediate celebration of the passover. In that case Jesus would be kept in bonds, and the intense excitement of the mob that was clamoring for his life, would have been allayed, and a natural reaction would have set in. The better part of the people would have become aroused in his behalf, and in all probability his release would be accomplished. The priests and rulers felt that there was no time to lose.

The whole Sanhedrim, followed by the multitude, escorted Jesus to the judgment hall of Pilate, the Roman governor, to secure a confirmation of the sentence they had just pronounced. The Jewish priests and rulers could not themselves enter Pilate's hall for fear of ceremonial defilement, which would disqualify them for taking part in the paschal feast. In order to condemn the spotless Son of God, they were compelled to appeal for judgment to one whose threshold they dared not cross for fear of defilement. Blinded by prejudice and cruelty, they could not discern that their passover festival was of no value, since they had defiled their souls by the rejection of Christ.

The great salvation that he brought was typified by the deliverance of the children of Israel, which event was commemorated by the feast of the passover. The innocent lamb slain in Egypt, the blood of which sprinkled upon the door-posts caused the destroying angel to pass over the homes of Israel, prefigured the sinless Lamb of God, whose merits can alone avert the judgment and condemnation of fallen man. The Saviour had been obedient to the Jewish law, and observed all its divinely appointed ordinances. He had just identified himself with the paschal lamb as its great antitype, by connecting the Lord's supper with the passover. What a bitter mockery then was the ceremony about to be observed by the priestly persecutors of Jesus!

Pilate beheld, in the accused, a man bearing the marks of violence, but with a serene and noble countenance and dignified bearing. Many cases had been tried before the Roman governor, but never before had there stood in his presence a man like this. He discovered no trace of crime in his face; and something in the prisoner's appearance excited his sympathy and respect. He turned to the priests, who stood just without the door, and asked, "What accusation bring ye against this man?"

They were not prepared for this question. They had not designed to state the particulars of the alleged crime of Jesus. They had expected that Pilate would, without delay, confirm their decision against the Saviour. However they answered him that they had tried the prisoner

according to their law and found him deserving of death. Said they, "If he were not a malefactor we would not have delivered him up unto thee." But Pilate was not satisfied with the explanation of the Jews, and reminded them of their inability to execute the law. He intimated that if their judgment only was necessary to procure his condemnation, it was useless to bring the prisoner to him. Said he, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law."

The treacherous priests felt that they were outwitted; they saw that it would not do to specify the grounds for their condemnation of Jesus. The charge of blasphemy would be regarded by Pilate as the expression of religious bigotry and priestly jealousy; and the case would be at once dismissed. But if they could excite the apprehensions of the Roman governor that Jesus was a leader of sedition, their purpose would be accomplished. Tumults and insurrections were constantly arising among the Jews against the Roman government, for many affirmed that it was against the Jewish law to pay tribute to a foreign power.

The authorities had found it necessary to deal very rigorously with these revolts among the people, and were constantly on the watch for developments of that character, in order to suppress them at once. But Jesus had always been obedient to the reigning power. When the scheming priests sought to entrap him by sending spies to him with the question, "Is it lawful to render tribute to Caesar?" he had directed their attention to the image and superscription of Caesar upon the tribute money, and answered, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." Jesus himself had paid tribute, and had taught his disciples to do so.

In their extremity the priests called the false witnesses to their aid. "And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ, a king."

Pilate was not deceived by this testimony. He now became confident that a deep plot had been laid to destroy an innocent man, who stood in the way of the Jewish dignitaries. He turned to the prisoner and "asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest it." Jesus stood before Pilate, pale, bruised, and faint from loss of sleep and food. He had been hurried from place to place, and subjected to insult and violence; yet his bearing was noble, and his countenance was lighted as though a sunbeam were shining upon it.

When his answer was heard by Caiaphas, who stood at the threshold of the judgment hall, the high priest joined with others in calling Pilate to witness that Jesus had admitted his crime by this answer, which was a virtual acknowledgment that he was seeking to establish a throne in Judah in opposition to the power of Caesar. Priests, scribes, and rulers, all united in noisy denunciations of Jesus, and in importuning Pilate to pronounce sentence of death upon him. The lawless uproar of the infuriated priests and dignitaries of the temple confused the senses of the Roman governor.

Finally, when some measure of quiet was secured, he again addressed Jesus, saying, "Answerest thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marveled." The silence of the Saviour perplexed him. He saw in the prisoner no marks of a seditious character, and he had no confidence in the accusations of the priests. Hoping to gain the truth from him, and to escape from the clamor of the excited crowd, he requested Jesus to step with him into his house. When he had done so, and the two were alone, Pilate turned to Jesus, and in a respectful voice asked him, "Art thou the King of the Jews?"

Jesus did not directly answer this question. He knew that conviction was awakened in the heart of Pilate, and he wished to give him an opportunity to acknowledge how far his mind had been influenced in the right direction. He therefore answered, "Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" The Saviour wished a statement from Pilate whether his question arose from the accusations just made by the Jews, or from his desire to receive light from Christ. Pilate longed for a more intelligent faith. The dignified bearing of Jesus, and his calm self-possession when placed in a position where there would naturally be developed a spirit of hate and revenge, astonished Pilate and won his deep respect.

The direct question just asked him by Jesus was immediately understood by him, which evidenced that his soul was stirred by conviction. But pride rose in the heart of the Roman judge and overpowered the Spirit of God. "Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done?"

Pilate's golden opportunity had passed. Jesus, however, did not leave him without farther light. At his desire God sent an angel to Pilate's wife; and, in a dream, she was shown the pure life and holy character of the man who was about to be consigned to a cruel death.

Jesus did not directly answer the question of Pilate as to what he had done; but he plainly stated to him his mission:--

"My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice."

Jesus thus sought to convince Pilate that he was innocent of aspiring to kingly honors upon earth. Pilate had been confused by the disturbed and divided elements of the religious world, and his mind grasped eagerly at the words of Jesus declaring that he had come into the world to bear witness to the truth. Pilate had heard many voices cry, Here is the truth! I have the truth! But this man, arraigned as a criminal, who claimed to have the truth, stirred his heart with a great longing to know what it was, and how it could be obtained.

He inquired of Jesus, "What is truth?" But he did not wait for a reply; the tumult of the excited crowd was continually increasing; their impatient cries jarred upon his ears, and recalled him to his judicial position. He went out to the Jews, who stood beyond the door of the hall, and declared in an emphatic voice, "I find in him no fault at all."

Those words, traced by the pen of inspiration, will forever stand as a proof to the world of the base perfidy and falsehood of the Jews in their charges against Jesus. Even the heathen magistrate pronounced him innocent. As Pilate thus spoke, the rage and disappointment of the priests and elders knew no bounds. They had made great efforts to accomplish the death of Jesus, and now that there appeared to be a prospect of his release they seemed ready to tear him in pieces.

They lost all reason and self-control, and gave vent to curses and maledictions against him, behaving more like demons than men. They were loud in their censures of Pilate, and threatened the vengeance of the Roman law against him if he refused to condemn one who, they affirmed, had set himself up against Caesar.

During all this uproar, Jesus stood unmoved, uttering no word in answer to the abuse that was heaped upon him. He had spoken freely to Pilate when alone with him, that the light of his truth might illuminate the darkened understanding of the Roman governor; and

now he could say nothing more to prevent him from committing the fearful act of condemning to death the Son of God. Pilate turned again to Jesus and inquired, "Hearst thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly."

Angry voices were now heard, declaring that the seditious influence of Jesus was well known throughout all the country. Said they, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." Pilate at this time had no thought of condemning Jesus, because he was certain that he was the victim of the envious and designing priests. As he afterward stated to Jesus, he had the power to condemn or to release him; but he dreaded the ill-will of the people; so when he heard that Jesus was a Galilean and was under the jurisdiction of Herod, he embraced the opportunity to spare himself from farther difficulty, and refused to decide the case, sending him to Herod, who was then in Jerusalem.

Jesus was faint and weary from loss of sleep and food, and the ill-treatment he had received; yet his suffering condition awakened no pity in the hearts of his persecutors. He was dragged away to the judgment hall of Herod amid the hooting and insults of the merciless mob. Besides escaping responsibility in regard to the trial of Jesus, Pilate thought this would be a good opportunity to heal an old quarrel between himself and Herod. He thought that this act on his part would be regarded by Herod as an acknowledgment of his superior authority, and would thus bring about a reconciliation. In this he was not wrong for the two magistrates made friends over the trial of the Saviour.

When Herod had first heard of Jesus and the mighty works wrought by him, he was terror-stricken, and said, "It is John whom I beheaded; he is risen from the dead;" "therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him." Herod had never before met Jesus, but he had long desired to see him, and witness his marvelous power. He was pleased that he was brought to him a prisoner, for he made no doubt that he could force him to work a miracle as a condition of saving his life.

Herod's conscience was far less sensitive than when he had trembled with horror at the request of Herodias for the head of John the Baptist. For a time he had felt the keen stings of remorse for the terrible act he had committed to gratify the revenge of a cruel woman; but his moral perceptions had become more and more degraded by his licentious life, till his sins appeared but trifles in his eyes. The men

who are capable of the worst crimes are those who have once been convicted by the Spirit of truth, and have turned away from the light into the darkness of iniquity. Herod had very nearly become a disciple of John; but at the very point of decision, he had fallen into the snare of Satan and put to death one whom he knew to be a true prophet.

As the Saviour was brought before Herod, the rabble surged and pressed about, crying out against the prisoner, some charging him with one crime and some with another. Herod commanded silence and directed that Jesus be unbound, for he wished to interrogate him. He looked with curiosity, mingled with an impulse of pity, upon the pale, sad face of the Saviour, which was marked with deep wisdom and purity, but showed extreme weariness and suffering. Herod, as well as Pilate, knew from his acquaintance with the character of the Jews, that malice and envy had caused them to condemn this innocent man.

Herod urged Jesus to save his life by working a miracle that would give evidence of his divine power. But the Saviour had no such work to do. He had taken upon himself the nature of man, and was not to perform a miracle to gratify the curiosity of wicked men, nor to save himself one jot of the pain and humiliation that man would suffer under similar circumstances.

Herod urged him to prove that he was not an impostor by demonstrating his power before the crowd. He summoned for the purpose maimed, crippled, and deformed persons, and, in an authoritative manner, commanded Jesus to heal these subjects in his presence, urging that if he had really worked such remarkable cures as were reported of him, he still had power to do like wonders, and could now turn it to his own profit by procuring his release.

But Jesus stood calmly before the haughty ruler as one who neither saw nor heard. Herod repeatedly urged his proposition upon Jesus, and reiterated the fact that he had the power to release or to condemn him. He even dared to boast of the punishment he had inflicted upon the prophet John for presuming to reprove him. To all this, Jesus made no answer either by word or look. Herod was irritated by the profound silence of the prisoner, which indicated an utter indifference to the royal personage before whom he had been summoned. Open rebuke would have been more palatable to the vain and pompous ruler than to be thus silently ignored.

Had Jesus desired to do so, he could have spoken words which would have pierced the ears of the hardened king. He could have

stricken him with fear and trembling by laying before him the full iniquity of his life, and the horror of his approaching doom. But Jesus had no light to give one who had gone directly contrary to the knowledge he had received from the greatest of prophets. The ears of Christ had ever been open to the earnest plea of even the worst sinners; but he had no ear for the commands of Herod.

Those eyes, that had ever rested with pity and forgiveness upon the penitent sinner, however defiled and lowly, had no look to bestow upon Herod. Those lips, that had dropped precious words of instruction, and were ever ready to answer the questions of those who sought knowledge, and to speak comfort and pardon to the sinful and desponding, had no words for proud and cruel Herod. That heart, ever touched by the presence of human woe, was closed to the haughty king who felt no need of a Saviour.

The silence of Jesus could no longer be borne by Herod; his face grew dark with passion, and he angrily threatened Jesus; but the captive still remained unmoved. Herod then turned to the multitude and denounced him as an impostor. His accusers well knew that he was no impostor; they had seen too many evidences of his power to be thus misled. They knew that even the grave had opened at his command, and the dead had walked forth, clothed again with life. They had been greatly terrified when Herod commanded him to work a miracle; for of all things they dreaded an exhibition of his divine power, which would prove a death-blow to their plans, and would perhaps cost them their lives. Therefore the priests and rulers began to cry out vehemently against him, accusing him of working miracles through the power given him of Beelzebub, the prince of devils.

Some cried out that he claimed to be the Son of God, the King of Israel. Herod, hearing this, said, in derision, A king, is he? Then crown him, and put upon him a royal robe, and worship your king. Then turning to Jesus he angrily declared that if he refused to speak, he should be delivered into the hands of the soldiers, who would have little respect for his claims or his person; if he was an impostor it would be no more than he deserved; but if he was the Son of God he could save himself by working a miracle. No sooner were these words uttered than the mob, at the instigation of the priests, made a rush toward Jesus. Had not the Roman soldiers forced them back, the Saviour would have been torn in pieces.

At the suggestion of Herod, a crown was now plaited from a vine bearing sharp thorns, and this was placed upon the sacred brow of

Jesus; and an old tattered purple robe, once the garment of a king, was placed upon his noble form, while Herod and the Jewish priests encouraged the insults and cruelty of the mob. Jesus was then placed upon a large block, which was derisively called a throne, an old reed was placed in his hand as a scepter, and, amid satanic laughter, curses, and jeers, the rude throng bowed to him mockingly as to a king. Occasionally some murderous hand snatched the reed that had been placed in his hand, and struck him on the head with it, forcing the thorns into his temples, and causing the blood to flow down his face and beard.

Satan instigated the cruel abuse of the debased mob, led on by the priest and rulers, to provoke, if possible, retaliation from the world's Redeemer, or to drive him to deliver himself by a miracle from the hands of his persecutors, and thus break up the plan of salvation. One stain upon his human life, one failure of his humanity to bear the terrible test imposed upon it, would make the Lamb of God an imperfect offering, and the redemption of man would be a failure. But he who could command the heavenly hosts, and in an instant call to his aid legions of holy angels, one of whom could have immediately overpowered that cruel mob,--he who could have stricken down his tormentors by the flashing forth of his divine majesty,--submitted to the coarsest insult and outrage with dignified composure. As the acts of his torturers degraded them below humanity, into the likeness of Satan, so did the meekness and patience of Jesus exalt him above the level of humanity.

When Herod saw that Jesus submitted passively to all the indignity that was heaped upon him, preserving an unparalleled serenity through it all, he was moved by a sudden fear that after all this might not be a common man who stood before him. He was greatly perplexed when he looked upon the pure, pale face of the prisoner, and questioned if he might not be a god come down to earth. The very silence of Jesus spoke conviction to the heart of the king, such as no words could have done. Herod noticed that while some bowed before Jesus in mockery, others, who came forward for the same purpose, looked into the sufferer's face and saw expressed there a look so like a king that they turned back, ashamed of their own audacity. Herod was ill at ease, and, hardened as he was, dared not ratify the condemnation of the Jews; and he therefore sent Jesus back to Pilate.

The Saviour, tottering with weariness, pale and wounded, wearing a robe of mockery and a crown of thorns, was mercilessly hurried back to the court of the Roman governor. Pilate was very much irritated; for

he had congratulated himself on being rid of a fearful responsibility when he referred the accusers of Jesus to Herod. He now impatiently inquired of the Jews what they would have him do. He reminded them that he had already examined the prisoner and found no blame in him; that his accusers had failed to sustain a single charge against him; that he had sent Jesus to Herod, a tetrarch of Galilee, and one of their own nation, who also found nothing worthy of death against the prisoner. Said Pilate, "I will therefore chastise him and release him."

Here Pilate exposed his weakness. He had declared that Jesus was innocent of the crimes of which he was accused, yet he was willing to make a partial sacrifice of justice and principle in order to compromise with an unfeeling mob; he was willing to suffer an innocent man to be scourged, that their inhuman wrath might be appeased. But the fact that he proposed to make terms with them placed Pilate at a disadvantage with the ungovernable crowd, who now presumed upon his indecision, and clamored the more for the life of the prisoner. Pilate turned to the people, and represented to them that the priests and elders had not substantiated in any degree the charges brought against Jesus. He hoped by this means to raise their sympathy for him, so they would be willing to release him. Meanwhile Jesus had fallen through exhaustion upon the marble pavement. Just then a messenger pressed through the crowd, and placed in Pilate's hand a letter from his wife, which ran thus:--

"Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him." Pilate's wife was not a Jew; but the angel of God had sent this warning to her, that, through her, Pilate might be prevented from committing the terrible crime of delivering up to death the divine Son of God.

Pilate turned pale when he read the message; but the priests and rulers had occupied the interval in farther inflaming the minds of the people, till they were wrought up to a state of insane fury. The governor was forced to action; he turned to the crowd and spoke with great earnestness: "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" It was customary at this feast for the governor to release one prisoner, whomsoever the people desired to be set at liberty. Pilate seized this as an opportunity to save Jesus; and by giving them a choice between the innocent Saviour and the notable robber and murderer, Barabbas, he hoped to rouse them to a sense of justice. But great was his astonishment when the cry, "Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!" was started by the

priests, and taken up by the mob, resounding through the hall like the hoarse cry of demons.

Pilate was dumb with surprise and disappointment; but by appealing to the people, and yielding his own judgment, he had compromised his dignity, and lost control of the crowd. The priests saw that though he was convinced of the innocence of Jesus, he could be intimidated by them, and they determined to carry their point. So when Pilate inquired, "What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called Christ?" they with one accord cried out, "Let him be crucified!"

"And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified." Here Pilate again revealed his weakness, in submitting the sentence of Jesus to a lawless and infuriated mob. How true were the words of the prophet: "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter." The governor's cheek paled as he heard the terrible cry: "Crucify him!" He had not thought it would come to that--a man whom he had repeatedly pronounced innocent, to be consigned to the most dreaded of deaths.

He now saw what a terrible thing he had done in placing the life of a just man in the balance against the decision of those, who, from envy and malice, had delivered him up to trial. Pilate had taken step after step in the violation of his conscience, and in excusing himself from judging with equity and fairness, as his position demanded he should do, until now he found himself almost helpless in the hands of the Jews.

Again he asked the question, "Why, what evil hath he done?" and again they cried out, "Crucify him!" Once more Pilate expostulated with them against putting to death one against whom they could prove nothing. Again, to conciliate them, he proposed to chastise him and let him go. It was not enough that the Saviour of the world, faint with weariness and covered with wounds, must be subjected to the shameful humiliation of such a trial; but his sacred flesh must be bruised and mangled to gratify the satanic fury of the priests and rulers. Satan, with his hellish army had gained possession of them.

Pilate, in the vain hope of exciting their pity, that they might decide this was sufficient punishment, now caused Jesus to be scourged in the presence of the multitude. The pale sufferer, with a crown of thorns upon his head, and stripped to the waist, revealing the long, cruel stripes, from which the blood flowed freely, was then placed side

by side with Barabbas. Although the face of Jesus was stained with blood, and bore marks of exhaustion and pain, yet his noble character could not be hidden, but stood out in marked contrast with that of the robber chief, whose every feature proclaimed him to be a debased and hardened desperado.

Pilate was filled with sympathy and amazement as he beheld the uncomplaining patience of Jesus. Gentleness and resignation were expressed in every feature; there was no cowardly weakness in his manner, but the strength and dignity of long-suffering. Pilate did not doubt that the sight of this man, who had borne insult and abuse in such a manner, when contrasted with the repulsive criminal by his side, would move the people to sympathy, and they would decide that Jesus had already suffered enough. But he did not understand the fanatical hatred of the priests for Christ, who, as the Light of the world, had made apparent their darkness and error.

Pilate, pointing to the Saviour, in a voice of solemn entreaty said to priests, rulers, and people, "Behold the man." "I bring him forth to you that ye may know that I find no fault in him." But the priests had moved the mob to mad fury; and, instead of pitying Jesus in his suffering and forbearance, they cried, "Crucify him, crucify him!" and their hoarse voices were like the roaring of wild beasts. Pilate, losing all patience with their unreasoning cruelty, cried out despairingly, "Take ye him, and crucify him; for I find no fault in him."

The Roman governor, familiarized with cruel scenes, educated amid the din of battle, was moved with sympathy for the suffering prisoner, who, contemned and scourged, with bleeding brow and lacerated back, still had more the bearing of a king upon his throne than that of a condemned criminal. But the hearts of his own people were hardened against him. The priests declared, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God."

Pilate was startled by these words; he had no correct idea of Christ and his mission; but he had an indistinct faith in God and in beings superior to humanity. The thought that had once before passed through his mind now took more definite shape, and he questioned if it might not be a divine personage who stood before him, clad in the purple robe of mockery, and crowned with thorns, yet with such a noble bearing that the stanch Roman trembled with awe as he gazed upon him.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer." Jesus had already told Pilate that he was the Messiah, that his kingdom was not of this world; and he had no farther words for a man who so abused the high office of judge as to yield his principles and authority to the demands of a blood-thirsty rabble. Pilate was vexed at the silence of Jesus, and haughtily addressed him: --

"Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above; therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." Jesus here laid the heaviest burden of guilt upon the Jewish judges, who had received unmistakable evidence of the divinity of Him whom they had condemned to death, both from the prophecies and his own teachings and miracles. What a scene was this to hand down to the world through all time! The pitying Saviour, in the midst of his intense suffering and grief, excuses as far as possible the act of Pilate, who might have released him from the power of his enemies.

Pilate was now more convinced than before of the superiority of the man before him, and tried again and again to save him. "But the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend; whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar." This was touching Pilate in a weak point. He had been looked upon with some suspicion by the government; and he knew that a report of unfaithfulness on his part would be likely to cost him his position. He knew that if the Jews became his enemies he could hope for no mercy at their hands; for he had before him an example of the perseverance with which they sought to destroy one whom they hated without reason.

The implied threat in the declaration of the priests, regarding his allegiance to Caesar, intimidated Pilate, so that he yielded to the demands of the mob, and delivered Jesus up to the crucifixion rather than risk losing his position. But the very thing he dreaded came upon him afterward in spite of his precautions. His honors were stripped from him; he was cast down from his high office; and, stung by remorse and wounded pride, he committed suicide not long after the crucifixion.

"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." Caiaphas answered defiantly, "His blood be on us, and on our children;" and his words were echoed by the priests and rulers, and taken up by the crowd in an inhuman roar of voices. "Then answered all the people and said, His blood be on us, and on our children."

At this exhibition of satanic madness, the light of conviction shone more clearly upon the mind of Pilate. He had never before witnessed such rash presumption and heartless cruelty. And in strong contrast with the ungovernable passion of his persecutors was the dignified repose of Jesus. In his own mind Pilate said, He is a god, and thought he could discern a soft light shining about his head. Looking thus upon Christ he turned pale with fear and self-condemnation; then, confronting the people with a troubled countenance, he said, I am clear of his blood. Take ye him and crucify him; but mark ye, priests and rulers, I pronounce him a just man, and may He whom he claims as his Father judge you for this day's work, and not me. Then turning to Jesus he continued, Forgive me for this act; I am not able to save you.

Only a short time before, the governor had declared to his prisoner that he had power to release or to condemn him; but he now thought that he could not save him, and also his own position and honor; and he preferred to sacrifice an innocent life rather than his own worldly power. Had he acted promptly and firmly at the first, carrying out his convictions of right, his will would not have been overborne by the mob; they would not have presumed to dictate to him. His wavering and indecision proved his irredeemable ruin. How many, like Pilate, sacrifice principle and integrity, in order to shun disagreeable consequences. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another; and the current, setting strongly in the wrong direction, sweeps away into the thick darkness of guilt him who compromises with evil.

Satan's rage was great as he saw that all the cruelty which he had led the Jews to inflict upon Jesus had not forced the least murmur from his lips. Although he had taken upon himself the nature of man, he was sustained by a Godlike fortitude, and departed in no particular from the will of his Father.

Wonder, O Heavens! and be astonished, O earth! Behold the oppressor and the oppressed. A vast multitude inclose the Saviour of the world. Mocking and jeering are mingled with the coarse oaths of blasphemy. His lowly birth and his 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 sneer are passed from lip to lip. Satan has full control of the minds of his servants. In order to do this effectually, he had commenced with the chief priests and the elders, and imbued them with a religious frenzy. This they had communicated to the rude and uncultivated mob, until there was 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 delivered to the people to be crucified.

CALVARY

[This chapter is based on Matt. 27:31-53; Mark 15:20-38; Luke 23:26-46; John 19:16-30.]

They hurried Jesus away with loud shouts of triumph; but their noise ceased for a time when they passed a retired place, and saw at the foot of a lifeless tree the dead body of Judas, who had betrayed Christ. It was a most revolting spectacle; his weight had broken the cord by which he had hung himself to the tree, and, in falling, his body had become horribly mangled, and was then being devoured by dogs. The mutilated remains were ordered to be buried at once, and the crowd passed on; but there was less noisy mockery, and many a pale face revealed the fearful thoughts within. Retribution seemed already to be visiting those who were guilty of the blood of Jesus.

By this time the news of the condemnation of Jesus had spread through all Jerusalem, striking terror and anguish to thousands of hearts, but bringing a malicious joy to many who had been reprovved by the teachings of the Saviour. The priests had been bound by a promise not to molest any of his disciples if Jesus were delivered up to them; so all classes of people flocked to the scene of outrage, and Jerusalem was left almost empty. Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, had not been summoned to the Sanhedrim council, and their voices had nothing to do with condemning Jesus. They were present at his crucifixion, but unable to change or modify his terrible sentence.

The disciples and believers from the region round about joined the throng that followed Jesus to Calvary. The mother of Jesus was also there, supported by John, the beloved disciple. Her heart was stricken with unutterable anguish; yet she, with the disciples, hoped that the

painful scene would change, and Jesus would assert his power, and appear before his enemies as the Son of God. Then again her mother's heart would sink as she remembered words in which he had briefly referred to the things which were that day being enacted.

Jesus had scarcely passed the gate of Pilate's house when the cross which had been prepared for Barabbas was brought out and laid upon his bruised and bleeding shoulders. Crosses were also placed upon the companions of Barabbas, who were to suffer death at the same time with Jesus. The Saviour had borne his burden but a few rods, when, from loss of blood and excessive weariness and pain, he fell fainting to the ground. As he lay beneath the heavy burden of the cross, how the heart of the mother of Christ longed to place a supporting hand beneath his wounded head, and bathe that brow that had once been pillowed upon her bosom. But, alas, that mournful privilege was denied her.

When Jesus revived, the cross was again placed upon his shoulders and he was forced forward. He staggered on for a few steps, bearing his heavy load, then fell as one lifeless to the ground. He was at first pronounced to be dead, but finally he again revived. The priests and rulers felt no compassion for their suffering victim; but they saw that it was impossible for him to carry the instrument of torture farther. They were puzzled to find any one who would humiliate himself to bear the cross to the place of execution. The Jews could not do it because of defilement, and their consequent inability to keep the coming passover festival.

While they were considering what to do, Simon, a Cyrenian, coming from an opposite direction, met the crowd, was seized at the instigation of the priests, and compelled to carry the cross of Christ. The sons of Simon were disciples of Jesus, but he himself had never been connected with him. This occasion was a profitable one for him. The cross he was forced to bear became the means of his conversion. His sympathies were deeply stirred in favor of Jesus; and the events of Calvary, and the words uttered by Jesus, caused him to acknowledge that he was the Son of God. Simon ever after felt grateful to God for the singular providence which placed him in a position to receive evidence for himself that Jesus was the world's Redeemer.

When Jesus was thought to be dying beneath the burden of the cross, many women, who, though not believers in Christ, were touched with pity for his sufferings, broke forth into a mournful wailing. When Jesus revived, he looked upon them with tender

compassion. He knew they were not lamenting him because he was a teacher sent from God, but from motives of common humanity. He looked upon the weeping women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but for yourselves, and for your children."

Jesus did not despise their tears, but the sympathy which they expressed wakened a deeper chord of sympathy in his own heart for them. He forgot his own grief in contemplating the future fate of Jerusalem. Only a short time ago the people had cried out, "His blood be on us and on our children." How blindly had they invoked the doom they were soon to realize! Many of the very women who were weeping about Jesus were to perish with their children in the siege of Jerusalem.

Jesus referred not only to the destruction of Jerusalem, but to the end of the world. Said he, "Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" The innocent were represented by the green tree. If God suffered his wrath because of the sins of the world to fall upon the Redeemer, in that he was permitted to suffer death by crucifixion, what might be expected to come upon the impenitent and unbelieving, who had slighted the mercies of God, purchased for them by the death of his Son? The mind of Jesus wandered from the destruction of Jerusalem to a wider judgment, when all the impenitent would suffer condemnation for their sins; when the Son of man should come, attended not by a murderous mob, but by the mighty hosts of God.

A great multitude followed the Saviour to Calvary, many mocking and deriding; but some were weeping and recounting his praise. Those whom he had healed of various infirmities, and those whom he had raised from the dead, declared his marvelous works with earnest voice, and demanded to know what Jesus had done that he should be treated as a malefactor. Only a few days before, they had attended him with joyful hosannas, and the waving of palm-branches, as he rode triumphantly to Jerusalem. But many who had then shouted his praise because it was popular to do so, now swelled the cry of "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Upon the occasion of Christ riding into Jerusalem, the disciples had been raised to the highest pitch of expectation. They had pressed close about their Master, and had felt that they were highly honored to be connected with him. Now they followed him in his humiliation at a distance. They were filled with inexpressible grief, and disappointed

hopes. How were the words of Jesus verified: "All ye will be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad." Yet the disciples still had faint hope that their Master would manifest his power at the last moment, and deliver himself from his enemies.

Upon arriving at the place of execution, the condemned were bound to the instruments of torture. While the two thieves wrestled in the hands of those who stretched them upon the cross, Jesus made no resistance. The mother of Jesus looked on with agonizing suspense, hoping that he would work a miracle to save himself. Surely He who had given life to the dead would not suffer himself to be crucified. What torture must this woman have endured as she witnessed the shame and suffering of her son, yet was not able to minister to him in his distress!

Bitter grief and disappointment filled her heart. Must she give up her faith that he was the true Messiah? Would the Son of God allow himself to be thus cruelly slain? She saw his hands stretched upon the cross--those dear hands that had ever dispensed blessings, and had been reached forth so many times to heal the suffering. And now the hammer and nails were brought, and as the spikes were driven through the tender flesh and fastened to the cross, the heart-stricken disciples bore away from the cruel scene the fainting form of the mother of Christ.

Jesus made no murmur of complaint; his face remained pale and serene, but great drops of sweat stood upon his brow. There was no pitying hand to wipe the death-dew from his face, nor words of sympathy and unchanging fidelity to stay his human heart. He was treading the wine-press all alone; and of all the people there was none with him. While the soldiers were doing their fearful work, and he was enduring the most acute agony, Jesus prayed for his enemies-- "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." His mind was borne from his own suffering to the crime of his persecutors, and the terrible but just retribution that would be theirs. He pitied them in their ignorance and guilt. No curses were called down upon the soldiers who were handling him so roughly, no vengeance was invoked upon the priests and rulers who were the cause of all his suffering, and were then gloating over the accomplishment of their purpose, but only a plea for their forgiveness-- "for they know not what they do."

Had they known that they were putting to exquisite torture one who had come to save the sinful race from eternal ruin, they would have

been seized with horror and remorse. But their ignorance did not remove their guilt; for it was their privilege to know and accept Jesus as their Saviour. They rejected all evidence, and not only sinned against Heaven in crucifying the King of Glory, but against the commonest feelings of humanity in putting to a torturous death an innocent man. Jesus was earning the right to become the Advocate for man in the Father's presence. That prayer of Christ for his enemies embraced the world, taking in every sinner who should live, until the end of time.

After Jesus was nailed to the cross, it was lifted by several powerful men, and thrust with great violence into the place prepared for it, causing the most excruciating agony to the Son of God. Pilate then wrote an inscription in three different languages and placed it upon the cross, above the head of Jesus. It ran thus: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." This inscription, placed so conspicuously upon the cross, irritated the Jews. In Pilate's court they had cried, Crucify him! We have no king but Caesar!

They declared that whoever claimed other than Caesar for a king was a traitor. But they had overreached themselves in disclaiming any desire to have a king of their own nation. Pilate, in his inscription, wrote out the sentiments which they had expressed. It was a virtual declaration, and so understood by all, that the Jews acknowledged that on account of their allegiance to the Roman power, any man who aspired to be king of the Jews, however innocent in other respects, should be judged by them worthy of death. There was no other offense named in the inscription; it simply stated that Jesus was the king of the Jews.

The Jews saw this, and asked Pilate to change the inscription. Said the chief priests, "Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews." But Pilate, angry with himself because of his former weakness, and thoroughly despising the jealous and artful priests and rulers, coldly replied, "What I have written I have written."

And now a terrible scene was enacted. Priests, rulers, and scribes forgot the dignity of their sacred offices, and joined with the rabble in mocking and jeering the dying Son of God, saying, "If thou be the King of the Jews, save thyself." And some deridingly repeated among themselves: "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." "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."

These men, who professed to be the expounders of prophecy, were themselves repeating the very words which inspiration had foretold they would utter upon this occasion; yet, in their blindness, they did not perceive that they were fulfilling prophecy. The dignitaries of the temple, the hardened soldiers, the vile thief upon the cross, and the base and cruel among the multitude, all united in their abuse of Christ.

The thieves who were crucified with Jesus suffered like physical torture with him; but one was only hardened and rendered desperate and defiant by his pain. He took up the mocking of the priests, and railed upon Jesus, saying, "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us." The other malefactor was not a hardened criminal; his morals had been corrupted by association with the base, but his crimes were not so great as were those of many who stood beneath the cross reviling the Saviour.

In common with the rest of the Jews, he had believed that Messiah was soon to come. He had heard Jesus, and been convicted by his teachings; but through the influence of the priests and rulers he had turned away from him. He had sought to drown his convictions in the fascinations of pleasure. Corrupt associations had led him farther and farther into wickedness, until he was arrested for open crime and condemned to die upon the cross. During that day of trial he had been in company with Jesus in the judgment hall and on the way to Calvary. He had heard Pilate declare him to be a just man; he had marked his Godlike deportment and his pitying forgiveness of his tormentors. In his heart he acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God.

When he heard the sneering words of his companion in crime, he "rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." Then, as his heart went out to Christ, heavenly illumination flooded his mind. In Jesus, bruised, mocked, and hanging upon the cross, he saw his Redeemer, his only hope, and appealed to him in humble faith: "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom! And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Jesus did not promise the penitent thief that he should go with him, upon the day of their crucifixion, to Paradise; for he himself did not ascend to his Father until three days afterward. See John 20: 17. But he declared unto him, "I say unto thee today--" meaning to impress the fact upon his mind, that at that time, while enduring ignominy and persecution, he had the power to save sinners. He was man's Advocate with the Father, having the same power as when he healed the sick and raised the dead to life; it was his divine right to promise that day to the repentant, believing malefactor, "Thou shalt be with me in Paradise."

The criminal upon the cross, notwithstanding his physical suffering, felt in his soul the peace and comfort of acceptance with God. The Saviour, lifted upon the cross, enduring pain and mockery, rejected by the priests and elders, is sought by a guilty, dying soul with a faith discerning the world's Redeemer in Him who is crucified like a malefactor. For such an object did the Son of God leave Heaven, to save lost and perishing sinners. While the priests and rulers, in their self-righteous scorn, fail to see his divine character, he reveals himself to the penitent thief as the sinner's Friend and Saviour. He thus teaches that the vilest sinner may find pardon and salvation through the merits of the blood of Christ.

The Spirit of God illuminated the mind of this criminal, who took hold of Christ by faith, and, link after link, the chain of evidence that Jesus was the Messiah was joined together, until the suffering victim, in like condemnation with himself, stood forth before him as the Son of God. While the leading Jews deny him, and even the disciples doubt his divinity, the poor thief, upon the brink of eternity, at the close of his probation, calls Jesus his Lord! Many were ready to call him Lord when he wrought miracles, and also after he had risen from the grave; but none called him Lord as he hung dying upon the cross, save the penitent thief, who was saved at the eleventh hour.

This was a genuine conversion under peculiar circumstances, for a special and peculiar purpose. It testified to all beholders that Jesus was not an impostor, but sustained his character, and carried out his mission to the closing scene of his earthly life. Never in his entire ministry were words more grateful to his ears than the utterance of faith from the lips of the dying thief, amid the blasphemy and taunts of the mob. But let no one neglect present opportunities and delay repentance, presuming on the eleventh-hour conversion of the thief, and trusting to a death-bed repentance.

Every ray of light neglected leaves the sinner in greater darkness than before, till some fearful deception may take possession of his mind, and his case may become hopeless. Yet there are instances, like that of the poor thief, where enlightenment comes at the last moment, and is accepted with an intelligent faith. Such penitents find favor with Christ.

With amazement the angels beheld the infinite love of Jesus, who, suffering the most excruciating agony of mind and body, thought only of others, and encouraged the penitent soul to believe. While pouring out his life in death, he exercised a love for man stronger than death. In Christ's humiliation, he, as a prophet, had addressed the daughters of Jerusalem; as priest and Advocate, he had pleaded with the Father to forgive the sins of his destroyers; as a loving Saviour, he had forgiven the iniquity of the penitent thief who called upon him. Many who witnessed those scenes upon Calvary were afterward established by them in the faith of Christ.

The serpent lifted up in the wilderness represented the Son of man lifted upon the cross. Christ said to Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." In the wilderness all who looked upon the elevated brazen serpent lived, while those who refused to look died.

The two thieves upon the cross represent the two great classes of mankind. All have felt the poison of sin, represented by the sting of the fiery serpent in the wilderness. Those who look upon and believe in Jesus Christ, as the thief looked upon him when lifted upon the cross, shall live forever; but those who refuse to look upon him and believe in him, as the hardened thief refused to look upon and believe in the crucified Redeemer, shall die without hope.

The enemies of Jesus now awaited his death with impatient hope. That event they imagined would forever hush the rumors of his divine power, and the wonders of his miracles. They flattered themselves that they should then no longer tremble because of his influence. The unfeeling soldiers who had stretched the body of Jesus upon the cross, divided his clothing among themselves, contending over one garment, which was woven without seam. They finally decided the matter by casting lots for it.

The pen of inspiration had accurately described this scene hundreds of years before it took place: "For dogs have compassed me; the

assembly of the wicked have inclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet." "They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots."

The eyes of Jesus wandered over the multitude that had collected together to witness his death, and he saw at the foot of the cross John supporting Mary, the mother of Christ. She had returned to the terrible scene, not being able to longer remain away from her son. The last lesson of Jesus was one of filial love. He looked upon the grief-stricken face of his mother, and then upon John; said he, addressing the former: "Woman, behold thy son." Then, to the disciple: "Behold thy mother." John well understood the words of Jesus, and the sacred trust which was committed to him. He immediately removed the mother of Christ from the fearful scene of Calvary. From that hour he cared for her as would a dutiful son, taking her to his own home. O pitiful, loving Saviour! Amid all his physical pain, and mental anguish, he had a tender, thoughtful care for the mother who had borne him. He had no money to leave her, by which to insure her future comfort, but he was enshrined in the heart of John, and he gave his mother unto the beloved disciple as a sacred legacy. This trust was to prove a great blessing to John, a constant reminder of his beloved Master.

The perfect example of Christ's filial love shines forth with undimmed luster from the mist of ages. While enduring the keenest torture, he was not forgetful of his mother, but made all provision necessary for her future. The followers of Christ should feel that it is a part of their religion to respect and provide for their parents. No pretext of religious devotion can excuse a son or daughter from fulfilling the obligations due to a parent.

The mission of Christ's earthly life was now nearly accomplished. His tongue was parched, and he said, "I thirst." They saturated a sponge with vinegar and gall and offered it him to drink; and when he had tasted it, he refused it. And now the Lord of life and glory was dying, a ransom for the race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon him as man's substitute, that made the cup he drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God. Death is not to be regarded as an angel of mercy. Nature recoils from the thought of dissolution, which is the consequence of sin.

But it was not the dread of death which caused the inexpressible agony of Jesus. To believe this would be to place him beneath the martyrs in courage and endurance; for many of those who have died for their faith, yielded to torture and death, rejoicing that they were

accounted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. Christ was the prince of sufferers; but it was not bodily anguish that filled him with horror and despair; it was a sense of the malignity of sin, a knowledge that man had become so familiar with sin that he did not realize its enormity, that it was so deeply rooted in the human heart as to be difficult to eradicate.

As man's substitute and surety, the iniquity of men was laid upon Christ; he was counted a transgressor that he might redeem them from the curse of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon his heart; and the wrath of God, and the terrible manifestation of his displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of his Son with consternation. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour, in this hour of supreme anguish, pierced his heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man.

Every pang endured by the Son of God upon the cross, the blood drops that flowed from his head, his hands, and feet, the convulsions of agony which racked his frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled his soul at the hiding of his Father's face from him, speak to man, saying, It is for love of thee that the Son of God consents to have these heinous crimes laid upon him; for thee he spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise and immortal life. He who stilled the angry waves by his word, and walked the foam-capped billows, who made devils tremble, and disease flee from his touch, who raised the dead to life and opened the eyes of the blind,-- offers himself upon the cross as the last sacrifice for man. He, the sin-bearer, endures judicial punishment for iniquity, and becomes sin itself for man.

"IT IS FINISHED"

Satan, with his fierce temptations, wrung the heart of Jesus. Sin, so hateful to his sight, was heaped upon him till he groaned beneath its weight. No wonder that his humanity trembled in that fearful hour. Angels witnessed with amazement the despairing agony of the Son of God, so much greater than his physical pain that the latter was hardly felt by him. The hosts of Heaven veiled their faces from the fearful sight.

Inanimate nature expressed a sympathy with its insulted and dying Author. The sun refused to look upon the awful scene. Its full, bright

rays were illuminating the earth at midday, when suddenly it seemed to be blotted out. Complete darkness enveloped the cross, and all the vicinity about, like a funeral pall. There was no eclipse or other natural cause for this darkness, which was deep as midnight without moon or stars. The dense blackness was an emblem of the soul-agony and horror that encompassed the Son of God. He had felt it in the garden of Gethsemane, when from his pores were forced drops of blood, and where he would have died had not an angel been sent from the courts of Heaven to invigorate the divine sufferer, that he might tread his blood-stained path to Calvary.

The darkness lasted three full hours. No eye could pierce the gloom that enshrouded the cross, and none could penetrate the deeper gloom that flooded the suffering soul of Christ. A nameless terror took possession of all who were collected about the cross. The silence of the grave seemed to have fallen upon Calvary. The cursing and reviling ceased in the midst of half-uttered sentences. Men, women, and children prostrated themselves upon the earth in abject terror. Vivid lightnings, unaccompanied by thunder, occasionally flashed forth from the cloud, and revealed the cross and the crucified Redeemer.

Priests, rulers, scribes, executioners, and the mob, all thought their time of retribution had come. After a while, some whispered to others that Jesus would now come down from the cross. Some attempted to grope their way back to the city, beating their breasts and wailing in fear.

At the ninth hour the terrible darkness lifted from the people, but still wrapt the Saviour as in a mantle. The angry lightnings seemed to be hurled at him as he hung upon the cross. Then "Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" As the outer gloom settled about Christ, many voices exclaimed, The vengeance of God is upon him! The bolts of God's wrath are hurled upon him because he claimed to be the Son of God! When the Saviour's despairing cry rang out, many who had believed on him were filled with terror; hope left them; if God had forsaken Jesus, what was to become of his followers, and the doctrine they had cherished?

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"and one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down."

In yielding up his precious life, Christ was not cheered by triumphant joy; all was oppressive gloom. There hung upon the cross the spotless Lamb of God, his flesh lacerated with stripes and wounds; those precious hands, that had ever been ready to relieve the oppressed and suffering, extended upon the cross, and fastened by the cruel nails; those patient feet, that had traversed weary leagues in the dispensing of blessings and in teaching the doctrine of salvation to the world, bruised and spiked to the cross; his royal head wounded by a crown of thorns; those pale and quivering lips, that had ever been ready to respond to the plea of suffering humanity, shaped to the mournful words, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

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The darkness was again lifted from Calvary, and hung like a pall over Jerusalem. At the moment in which Christ died, there were priests ministering in the temple before the veil which separated the holy from the most holy place. Suddenly they felt the earth tremble beneath them, and the veil of the temple, a strong, rich drapery that

had been renewed yearly, 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, that had been sacredly entered by human feet only once a year, was revealed to the common gaze. God had ever before protected his temple in a wonderful manner; but now its sacred mysteries were exposed to curious eyes. No longer would the presence of God overshadow the earthly mercy-seat. No longer would the light of his glory flash forth upon, nor the cloud of his disapproval shadow, the precious stones in the breast-plate of the high priest.

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But when the earth was draped with blackness, and they stood accused by their own consciences, reason again resumed her sway, and they felt guilty of doing a great wrong. No jest nor mocking laughter was heard in the midst of that fearful gloom; and when it was lifted, they solemnly made their way to their homes, awestruck and conscience-smitten. They were convinced that the accusations of the priests were false, that Jesus was no pretender; and a few weeks later they were among the thousands who became thorough converts to Christ, when Peter preached upon the day of Pentecost, and the great mystery of the cross was explained with other mysteries in regard to Messiah.

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At his birth the angel star in the heavens had known Christ, and had conducted the seers to the manger where he lay. The heavenly hosts had known him, and sung his praise over the plains of Bethlehem. The sea had acknowledged his voice, and was obedient to his command. Disease and death had recognized his authority, and yielded their prey to his demand. The sun had known him, and hidden its face of light from the sight of his dying anguish. The rocks had known him, and shivered into fragments at his dying cry. Although inanimate nature recognized, and bore testimony of Christ, that he was the Son of God, yet the priests and rulers knew not the Saviour, rejected the evidence of his divinity, and steeled their hearts against his truths. They were not so susceptible as the granite rocks of the mountains.

IN JOSEPH'S TOMB

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The Jews were unwilling that the bodies of those who had been executed should remain that night upon the cross. They dreaded to have the attention of the people directed any farther to the events attending the death of Jesus. They feared the results of that day's work upon the minds of the public. So, under pretext that they did not wish the sanctity of the Sabbath to be defiled by the bodies remaining upon the cross during that holy day, which was the one following the crucifixion, the leading Jews sent a request to Pilate that he would permit them to hasten the death of the victims, so that their bodies might be removed before the setting of the sun.

Pilate was unwilling as they were that the spectacle of Jesus upon the cross should remain a moment longer than was necessary. The consent of the governor having been obtained, the legs of the two that were crucified with Jesus were broken to hasten their death; but Jesus was already dead, and they broke not his legs. The rude soldiers, who had witnessed the looks and words of Jesus upon his way to Calvary, and while dying upon the cross, were softened by what they had witnessed, and were restrained from marring him by breaking his limbs. Thus was prophecy fulfilled, which declared that a bone of him should not be broken; and the law of the passover, requiring the sacrifice to be perfect and whole, was also fulfilled in the offering of the Lamb of God. "They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor

break any bone of it; according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it."

A soldier, at the suggestion of the priests who wished to make the death of Jesus sure, thrust his spear into the Saviour's side, inflicting a wound which would have caused instant death if he had not already been dead. From the wide incision made by the spear there flowed two copious and distinct streams, one of blood, the other of water. This remarkable fact was noted by all the beholders, and John states the occurrence very definitely; he says: "One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled. A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced."

After the resurrection, the priests and rulers caused the report to be circulated that Jesus did not die upon the cross, that he merely fainted and was afterward resuscitated. Another lying report affirmed that it was not a real body of flesh and bone but the likeness of a body that was laid in the tomb. But the testimony of John concerning the pierced side of the Saviour, and the blood and water that flowed from the wound, refutes these falsehoods that were brought into existence by the unscrupulous Jews.

Treason against the Roman government was the alleged crime for which Jesus was executed, and persons put to death for this offense were taken down by the common soldiers and consigned to a burial ground reserved exclusively for that class of criminals who had suffered the extreme penalty of the law.

John was at a loss to know what measures he should take in regard to the body of his beloved Master. He shuddered at the thought of its being handled by rough and unfeeling soldiers, and placed in a dishonored burial place. He knew he could obtain no favors from the Jewish authorities, and he could hope little from Pilate. But Joseph and Nicodemus came to the front in this emergency. Both of these men were members of the Sanhedrim, and acquainted with Pilate. Both were men of wealth and influence. They were determined that the body of Jesus should have an honorable burial.

Joseph went boldly to Pilate, and begged from him the body of Jesus for burial. His prayer was speedily granted by Pilate, who firmly

believed Jesus to have been innocent. Pilate now for the first time heard from Joseph that Jesus was really dead. The knowledge had been purposely kept from him, although various conflicting reports had reached his ears concerning the strange events attending the crucifixion. Now he learned that the Saviour died at the very moment when the mysterious darkness that enshrouded the earth had passed away. Pilate was surprised that Jesus had died so soon; for those who were crucified frequently lingered days upon the cross. The account which Pilate now received of the death of Jesus caused him more firmly to believe that he was no ordinary man. The Roman governor was strangely agitated, and regretted most keenly the part he had taken in the condemnation of the Saviour.

The priests and rulers had charged Pilate and his officers to guard against any deception which the disciples of Jesus might attempt to practice upon them in regard to the body of their Master. Pilate, therefore, before granting the request of Joseph, sent for the centurion who was in command of the soldiers at the cross, and heard for a certainty from his lips that Jesus was dead; and in compliance with Pilate's earnest request he recounted the fearful scenes of Calvary, corroborating the testimony of Joseph.

Pilate then gave an official order that the body of Jesus should be given to Joseph. While the disciple John was anxious and troubled about the sacred remains of his beloved Master, Joseph of Arimathea returned with the commission from the governor; and Nicodemus, anticipating the result of Joseph's interview with Pilate, came with a costly mixture of myrrh and aloes of about one hundred pounds' weight. The most honored in all Jerusalem could not have been shown more respect in death.

The women of Galilee had remained with the disciple John to see what disposition would be made of the body of Jesus, which was very precious to them, although their faith in him as the promised Messiah had perished with him. The disciples were plunged in sorrow; they were so overwhelmed by the events which had transpired that they were unable to recall the words of Jesus stating that just such things would take place concerning him. The women were astonished to see Joseph and Nicodemus, both honored and wealthy councilors, as anxious and interested as themselves for the proper disposal of the body of Jesus.

Neither of these men had openly attached himself to the Saviour while he was living, although both believed on him. They knew that if

they declared their faith they would be excluded from the Sanhedrim council, on account of the prejudice of the priests and elders toward Jesus. This would have cut them off from all power to aid or protect him by using their influence in the council. Several times they had shown the fallacy of the grounds of his condemnation, and protested against his arrest, and the council had broken up without accomplishing that for which it had been called together; for it was impossible to procure the condemnation of Jesus without the unanimous consent of the Sanhedrim. The object of the priests had finally been obtained by calling a secret council, to which Joseph and Nicodemus were not summoned.

The two councilors now came boldly forth to the aid of the disciples. The help of these rich and honored men was greatly needed at that time. They could do for the slain Saviour what it was impossible for the poorer disciples to do; and their influential positions protected them, in a great measure, from censure and remonstrance. While the acknowledged disciples of Christ were too thoroughly disheartened and intimidated to show themselves openly to be his followers, these men came boldly to the front and acted their noble part.

Gently and reverently they removed with their own hands the body of Jesus from the instrument of torture, their sympathetic tears falling fast as they looked upon his bruised and lacerated form, which they carefully bathed and cleansed from the stain of blood. Joseph owned a new tomb, hewn from stone, which he was reserving for himself; it was near Calvary, and he now prepared this sepulcher for Jesus. The body, together with the spices brought by Nicodemus, was carefully wrapped in a linen sheet, and the three disciples bore their precious burden to the new sepulcher, wherein man had never before lain. There they straightened those mangled limbs, and folded the bruised hands upon the pulseless breast.

The Galilean women drew near, to see that all had been done that could be done for the lifeless form of their beloved Teacher. Then they saw the heavy stone rolled against the entrance of the sepulcher, and the Son of God was left at rest. The women were last at the cross, and last at the tomb of Christ. While the evening shades were gathering, Mary Magdalene and the other Marys lingered about the sacred resting-place of their Lord, shedding tears of sorrow over the fate of Him whom they loved.

AFTER THE CRUCIFIXION

The Jewish priests and rulers had now carried out their fiendish purpose of putting to death the Son of God; but their apprehensions were not quieted, nor was their jealousy of Christ dead. Mingled with the joy of gratified revenge, there was an ever-present fear that his dead body lying in Joseph's tomb would come forth to life.

They had labored to believe that he was a deceiver; but it was in vain. They everywhere heard inquiries for Jesus of Nazareth from those who had not heard of his death, and had brought their sick and dying friends to the passover to be healed by the great Physician. The priests knew in their hearts that Jesus had been all-powerful; they had witnessed his miracle at the grave of Lazarus; they knew that he had there raised the dead to life, and they trembled for fear he would himself rise from the dead.

They had heard him declare that he had power to lay down his life and to take it up again; they remembered that he had said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up;" they put this and that together, and were afraid. When Judas had betrayed his Master to the priests, he had repeated to them the declaration which Jesus had privately made to his disciples while on their way to the city. He had said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again."

They remembered many things which he had said, that they now recognized as plain prophecies of the events which had taken place. They did not desire to think of these things, but they could not shut them from their understanding. Like their father, the devil, they believed and trembled.

Now that the frenzy of excitement was passed, the image of Christ would intrude upon their minds, as he stood serene and uncomplaining before his enemies, suffering their taunts and abuse without a murmur. They remembered the prayer for forgiveness, offered in behalf of those who nailed him to the cross, his forgetfulness of his own suffering, and his merciful response to the prayer of the dying thief, the darkness which covered the earth, its sudden lifting, and his triumphant cry, "It is finished," which seemed to resound through the universe, his immediate death, the quaking of the earth and the shivering of the rocks, the opening of the graves and the rending of the vail of the temple. All these remarkable circumstances pressed

upon their minds the overpowering evidence that Jesus was the Son of God.

They rested but little upon the Sabbath. Though they would not step over a Gentile's threshold for fear of defilement, yet they held a council concerning the body of Christ. They knew that the disciples would not attempt to remove him until after the Sabbath; but they were anxious that all precautions should be taken at its close. Therefore "the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command, therefore, that the sepulcher 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."

Pilate was as unwilling as were the Jews that Jesus should rise with power to punish the guilt of those who had destroyed him, and he placed a band of Roman soldiers at the command of the priests. Said he, "Ye have a watch; go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch."

The discipline of the Roman army was very severe. A sentinel found sleeping at his post was punishable with death. The Jews realized the advantage of having such a guard about the tomb of Jesus. They placed a seal upon the stone that closed the sepulcher, that it might not be disturbed without the fact being known, and took every precaution against the disciples practicing any deception in regard to the body of Jesus. But all their plans and precautions only served to make the triumph of the resurrection more complete, and to more fully establish its truth.

How must God and his holy angels have looked upon all those preparations to guard the body of the world's Redeemer! How weak and foolish must those efforts have seemed! The words of the psalmist picture this scene: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his Anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." Roman guards and Roman arms were powerless to confine the Lord of life within the narrow inclosure of the sepulcher. Christ had declared that he had power to lay down his life and to take it up again. The hour of his victory was near.

God had ruled the events clustering around the birth of Christ. There was an appointed time for him to appear in the form of humanity. A long line of inspired prophecy pointed to the coming of Christ to our world, and minutely described the manner of his reception. Had the Saviour appeared at an earlier period in the world's history, the advantages gained to Christians would not have been so great, as their faith would not have been developed and strengthened by dwelling upon the prophecies which stretched into the far future, and recounted the events which were to transpire.

Because of the wicked departure of the Jews from God, he had allowed them to come under the power of a heathen nation. Only a certain limited power was granted the Jews; even the Sanhedrim was not allowed to pronounce final judgment upon any important case which involved the infliction of capital punishment. A people controlled, as were the Jews, by bigotry and superstition, are most cruel and unrelenting. The wisdom of God was displayed in sending his Son to the world at a time when the Roman power held sway. Had the Jewish economy possessed full authority, we should not now have a history of the life and ministry of Christ among men.

The jealous priests and rulers would have quickly made away with so formidable a rival. He would have been stoned to death on the false accusation of breaking the law of God. The Jews put no one to death by crucifixion; that was a Roman method of punishment; there would therefore have been no cross upon Calvary. Prophecy would not then have been fulfilled; for Christ was to be lifted up in the most public manner on the cross, as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness.

Had the coming of Christ been deferred many years later, until the Jewish power had become still less, prophecy would have failed of its fulfillment; for it would not have been possible for the Jews, with their waning power, to have influenced the Roman authorities to sign the death-warrant of Jesus upon the lying charges presented, and there would have been no cross of Christ erected upon Calvary.

Soon after the Saviour's execution the method of death by crucifixion was abolished. The scenes which took place at the death of Jesus, the inhuman conduct of the people, the supernatural darkness which veiled the earth, and the agony of nature displayed in the rending of the rocks and the flashing of the lightning, struck them with such remorse and terror, that the cross, as an instrument of death, soon fell into disuse. At the destruction of Jerusalem, when mob power

again obtained control, crucifixion was again revived for a time, and many crosses stood upon Calvary.

Christ coming at the time and in the manner which he did was a direct and complete fulfillment of prophecy. The evidence of this, given to the world through the testimony of the apostles and that of their contemporaries, is among the strongest proofs of the Christian faith. We were not eye-witnesses of the miracles of Jesus, which attest his divinity; but we have the statements of his disciples who were eye-witnesses of them, and we see by faith through their eyes, and hear through their ears; and our faith with theirs grasps the evidence given.

The apostles accepted Jesus upon the testimony of prophets and righteous men, stretching over a period of many centuries. The Christian world have a full and complete chain of evidence running through both the Old and the New Testament; in the one pointing to a Saviour to come, and in the other fulfilling the conditions of that prophecy. All this is sufficient to establish the faith of those who are willing to believe. The design of God was to leave the race a fair opportunity to develop faith in the power of God, and of his Son, and in the work of the Holy Spirit.

The priests who ministered before the altar had gloomy presentiments as they looked upon the vail, rent by unseen hands from top to bottom, and which there had not been time to replace or to fully repair. The uncovering of the sacred mysteries of the most holy place brought to them a shuddering dread of coming calamity. Many of the officiating priests were deeply convicted of the true character of Jesus; their searching of the prophecies had not been in vain, and after he was raised from the dead they acknowledged him as the Son of God.

During that memorable passover the scenes of the crucifixion were the theme of thought, and the topic of conversation. Hundreds had brought with them to the passover their afflicted relatives and friends, expecting to see Jesus and prevail upon him to heal and save them. Great was their disappointment to find that he was not at the feast; and when they were told that he had been executed as a criminal, their indignation and grief knew no bounds.

The multitudes of sufferers who had come with the expectation of being healed by the Saviour sank under their disappointment. The streets and the temple courts were filled with mourning. The sick were dying for want of the healing touch of Jesus of Nazareth. Physicians

were consulted in vain; there was no skill like that of Him who lay in state in Joseph's tomb. The afflicted, who had long looked forward to this time as their only hope of relief, asked in vain for the Healer they had sought.

The revenge which the priests thought would be so sweet had already become bitterness to them. They knew that they were meeting the severe censure of the people; they knew that the very persons whom they had influenced against Jesus were now horrified by their own shameful work. As they witnessed all these proofs of the divine influence of Jesus, they were more afraid of his dead body in the tomb than they had been of him when he was living and among them. The possibility of his coming forth from the sepulcher filled their guilty souls with indescribable terror. They felt that Jesus might at any time stand before them, the accused to become the accuser, the condemned to in turn condemn, the slain to demand justice in the death of his murderers.

"THE LORD IS RISEN"

[This chapter is based on Matt. 28:2-4, 11-15.]

Every preparation had been made at the sepulcher to prevent any surprise or fraud being perpetrated by the disciples. The night had worn slowly away, and the darkest hour before daybreak had come. The Roman guards were keeping their weary watch, the sentinels pacing to and fro before the sepulcher, while the remainder of the detachment of one hundred soldiers were reclining upon the ground in different positions, taking what rest they could. But angels were also guarding the sepulcher, one of whom could have stricken down the whole Roman army by the putting forth of his power.

One of the most exalted order of angels is sent from Heaven; his countenance is like the lightning, and his garments white as snow. He parts the darkness from his track, and the whole heavens are lit with his resplendent glory. The sleeping soldiers start simultaneously to their feet, and gaze with awe and wonder at the open, lighted heavens, and the vision of brightness which approaches. The earth trembles and heaves; soldiers, officers, and sentinels all fall as dead men prostrate upon the earth. The evil angels, who have triumphantly claimed the body of Christ, flee in terror from the place. One of the mighty, commanding angels who has, with his company, been keeping watch over the tomb of his Master, joins the powerful angel who

comes from Heaven; and together they advance directly to the sepulcher.

The angelic commander laid hold of the great stone which had required many strong men to place it in position, rolled it away, and took his seat upon it, while his companion entered the sepulcher and unwound the wrappings from the face and head of Jesus. Then the mighty angel, with a voice that caused the earth to quake, was heard: Jesus, thou Son of God, thy Father calls thee! Then he who had earned the power to conquer death and the grave came forth, with the tread of a conqueror, from the sepulcher, amid the reeling of the earth, the flashing of lightning, and the roaring of thunder. An earthquake marked the hour when Christ laid down his life; and another earthquake signaled the moment when he took it up again in triumph.

Jesus was the first-fruits of them that slept. When he came forth from the tomb he called a multitude from the dead, thus settling forever the long-disputed question of the resurrection. In raising this multitude of captives from the dead, he gives evidence that there will be a final resurrection of those who sleep in Jesus. The believers in Christ thus receive the very light they want in regard to the future life of the pious dead.

Satan was bitterly incensed that his angels had fled from the presence of the heavenly angels, and that Christ had conquered death, and shown by this act what his future power was to be. All the triumph that Satan had experienced in witnessing his own power over men, which had urged them on to insult and murder the Son of God, fled before this exhibition of the divine power of Christ. He had dared to hope that Jesus would not take up his life again; but his courage failed him when the Saviour came forth, having paid the full ransom of man, and enabled him to overcome Satan in his own behalf in the name of Christ, the Conqueror. The arch-enemy now knew that he must eventually die, and that his kingdom would have an end.

In this scene of the resurrection of the Son of God is given a lively image of the glory that will be revealed at the general resurrection of the just at the second appearing of Christ in the clouds of heaven. Then the dead that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth to life; and not only the earth, but the heavens themselves, shall be shaken. A few graves were opened at the resurrection of Christ; but at his second coming all the precious dead, from righteous Abel to the last saint that dies, shall awake to glorious, immortal life.

If the soldiers at the sepulcher were so filled with terror at the appearance of one angel clothed with heavenly light and strength, that they fell as dead men to the ground, how will his enemies stand before the Son of God, when he comes in power and great glory, accompanied by ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands of angels from the courts of Heaven? Then the earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and be removed as a cottage. The elements shall be in flames, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll.

At the death of Jesus the soldiers had beheld the earth wrapped in profound darkness at midday; but at the resurrection they saw the brightness of the angels illuminate the night, and heard the inhabitants of Heaven singing with great joy and triumph: Thou hast vanquished Satan and the powers of darkness! Thou hast swallowed up death in victory! "And I heard a loud voice saying in Heaven, Now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ; for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accused them before our God day and night."

The casting down of Satan as an accuser of the brethren in Heaven was accomplished by the great work of Christ in giving up his life. Notwithstanding Satan's persistent opposition, the plan of redemption was being carried out. Man was esteemed of sufficient value for Christ to sacrifice his life for him. Satan, knowing that the empire he had usurped would in the end be wrested from him, determined to spare no pains to destroy as many as possible of the creatures whom God had created in his image. He hated man because Christ had manifested for him such forgiving love and pity, and he now prepared to practice upon him every species of deception by which he might be lost; he pursued his course with more energy because of his own hopeless condition.

Christ came to earth to vindicate the claims of his Father's law, and his death shows the immutability of that law. But Satan thrusts upon man the fallacy, that the law of God was abolished by the death of Christ, and he thus leads many professed Christians to transgress the Father's commandments, while they assume devotion to his Son.

The Christian world is not sufficiently acquainted with the history of Satan, and the terrible power that he wields. Many look upon him as a mere imaginary being. Meanwhile he has crept into the popular mind; he sways the people--he assumes the character of an angel of light--he marshals his trained forces like a skilled general--he has gained

profound knowledge of human nature, and can be logical, philosophical, or hypocritically religious.

He now prepared to work upon the minds of the priests in regard to the event of the resurrection of Christ. He knew that, having already fallen into his trap, and committed the horrible crime of slaying the Son of God, they were entirely in his power, and their only course to escape the wrath of the people was to persist in denouncing Jesus as an impostor, and to accuse his disciples of stealing away his body that they might declare him to be risen from the dead.

After the exceeding glory of the angelic messenger had faded from the heavens and from the sepulcher, the Roman guards ventured to raise their heads and to look about them. They saw that the great stone at the door of the sepulcher was removed, and they arose in consternation to find the body of Jesus gone and the tomb empty.

They turned from the sepulcher, overwhelmed by what they had seen and heard, and made their way with all haste to the city, relating to those whom they met the marvelous scenes they had witnessed. Some of the disciples, who had passed a sleepless night, heard the wonderful story with mingled hope and fear. Meanwhile a messenger was dispatched to the priests and rulers, announcing to them: Christ whom ye crucified is risen from the dead!

A servant was immediately sent with a private message summoning the Roman guard to the palace of the high priest. There they were closely questioned; they gave a full statement of what they had witnessed at the sepulcher: That an awful messenger had come from Heaven with face like the lightning for brightness, and with garments white as snow; that the earth shook and trembled, and they were stricken powerless; that the angel had laid hold of the immense stone at the door of the sepulcher, and had rolled it away as if it had been a pebble; that a form of great glory had emerged from the sepulcher; that a chorus of voices had made the heavens and earth vocal with songs of victory and joy; that when the light had faded out, and the music had ceased, they had recovered their strength, found the tomb empty, and the body of Jesus nowhere to be found.

When the priests, scribes, and rulers heard this account, their faces were blanched to a deadly pallor. They could not utter a word. With horror they perceived that two-thirds of the prophecy concerning Messiah had now been fulfilled, and their hearts failed them with fear of what might be about to take place. They could not question the

evidence of the witnesses before them. Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified one, had indeed risen from the dead.

When they had recovered from their first shock at hearing this news, they began to consider what course they would best pursue, and Satan was present to suggest ways and means. They felt that they had placed themselves where they had no alternative but to brave it out, and deny Christ to the very last. They reasoned that if this report should be circulated among the people, they would not only be stripped of their honor and authority, but would probably lose their lives. Jesus had said that he would rise from the dead and ascend to Heaven; they determined to keep the people in ignorance of the fulfillment of his word. They thought this could be done if the Roman guard could be bought with money.

They found upon trial that the guard could be induced by large bribes to deny their former report, and to testify that the disciples had stolen the body of Jesus in the night, while the sentinels slept. It was a crime punishable by death for a sentinel to sleep at his post; and, in order to secure the evidence they wished, the priests promised to insure the safety of the guard. The Roman soldiers sold their integrity to the false Jews for money. They came in before the priests burdened with a most startling message of truth, and went out with a burden of money, and with a lying report upon their tongues which had been framed for them by the priests.

Meanwhile a messenger had been sent, bearing the news to Pilate. When he heard what had occurred, his soul was filled with terror. He shut himself within his home, not wishing to see any one; but the priests found their way into his presence, and urged him to make no investigation of the affirmed neglect of the sentinels, but to let the matter pass. Pilate at length consented to this, after having a private interview with the guard, and learning all the particulars from them. They dared not conceal anything from the governor for fear of losing their lives. Pilate did not prosecute the matter farther, but from that time there was no more peace or comfort for him.

"WHY WEEPEST THOU?"

[This chapter is based on Matt. 28:1, 5-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-18.]

The spices with which the body of Jesus was to be anointed had been prepared on the day preceding the Sabbath. Early in the morning of the first day of the week, the Marys, with certain other women, went to the sepulcher to proceed with the work of embalming the body of the Saviour. As they neared the garden, they were surprised to see the heavens beautifully lighted up, and the earth trembling beneath their feet. They hastened to the sepulcher, and were astonished to find that the stone was rolled away from the door, and that the Roman guard were not there. They noticed a light shining about the tomb, and, looking in, saw that it was empty.

Mary then hastened with all speed to the disciples, and informed them that Jesus was not in the sepulcher where they had laid him. While she was upon this errand, the other women, who waited for her at the sepulcher, made a more thorough examination of the interior, to satisfy themselves that their Lord was indeed gone. Suddenly they beheld a beautiful young man, clothed in shining garments, sitting by the sepulcher.

It was the angel who had rolled away the stone, and who now assumed a character that would not terrify the women who had been the friends of Christ, and assisted him in his public ministry. But notwithstanding the veiling of the brightness of the angel, the women were greatly amazed and terrified at the glory of the Lord which encircled him. They turned to flee from the sepulcher, but the heavenly messenger addressed them with soothing and comforting words: "Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him; lo, I have told you."

As the women responded to the invitation of the angel, and looked again into the sepulcher, they saw another angel of shining brightness, who addressed them with the inquiry: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." These angels were well acquainted with the words of Jesus to his disciples, for they had been with him in the capacity of guardian angels, through all the scenes of his life, and had witnessed his trial and crucifixion.

With combined wisdom and tenderness, the angels reminded the women of the words of Jesus, warning them-beforehand of his crucifixion and resurrection. The women now fully comprehended the words of their Master, which at the time were veiled in mystery to them. They gathered fresh hope and courage. Jesus had declared that he would rise from the dead, and had rested his claims as the Son of God, the Redeemer of the world, upon his future resurrection from the dead.

Mary, who had first discovered that the tomb was empty, hurried to Peter and John, and announced that the Lord had been taken out of the sepulcher, and she knew not where they had laid him. At these words the disciples both hastened to the sepulcher, and found it as Mary had said. The body of their Master was not there, and the linen clothes lay by themselves.

Peter was perplexed; but John believed that Jesus had risen from the dead, as he had told them he should do. They did not understand the scripture of the Old Testament, which taught that Christ should rise from the dead; but the belief of John was based upon the words of Jesus himself while he was yet with them.

The disciples left the sepulcher, and returned to their homes; but Mary could not bear to leave while all was uncertainty as to what had become of the body of her Lord. As she stood weeping, she stooped down to once more look into the sepulcher; and lo, there were two angels, clothed in garments of white. They were disguised by an appearance of humanity, and Mary did not recognize them as celestial beings. One sat where the head of Jesus had rested, and the other where his feet had been. They addressed Mary with the words: "Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." In view of the open sepulcher, and the disappearance of her Master's body, Mary was not easily comforted.

In her abandonment of grief she did not notice the heavenly appearance of those who addressed her. As she turned aside to weep, another voice inquired, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" Her eyes were so blinded by tears that she did not observe the person who spoke to her, but she immediately rasped the idea of obtaining from her interrogator some information concerning the whereabouts of her Master's body. She thought that the speaker might be the one who had charge of the garden, and she addressed him

pleadingly: "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away."

She felt that if she could only gain possession of the precious crucified body of her Saviour, it would be a great consolation to her grief. She thought that if this rich man's tomb was considered too honorable a place for her Lord, she would herself provide a place for him. Her great anxiety was to find him, that she might give him honorable burial. But now the voice of Jesus himself fell upon her astonished ears. He said to her, "Mary." Instantly her tears were brushed away; and he whom she supposed was the gardener stood revealed before her--it was Jesus! For a moment she forgot in her joy that he had been crucified; she stretched forth her hands to him, saying, "Rabboni!" Jesus then said, "Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended to my Father; but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

Jesus refused to receive the homage of his people until he knew that his sacrifice had been accepted by the Father, and until he had received the assurance from God himself that his atonement for the sins of his people had been full and ample, that through his blood they might gain eternal life. Jesus immediately ascended to Heaven and presented himself before the throne of God, showing the marks of shame and cruelty upon his brow, his hands and feet. But he refused to receive the coronet of glory, and the royal robe, and he also refused the adoration of the angels as he had refused the homage of Mary, until the Father signified that his offering was accepted.

He also had a request to prefer concerning his chosen ones upon earth. He wished to have the relation clearly defined that his redeemed should hereafter sustain to Heaven, and to his Father. His church must be justified and accepted before he could accept heavenly honor. He declared it to be his will that where he was, there his church should be; if he was to have glory, his people must share it with him. They who suffer with him on earth must finally reign with him in his kingdom. In the most explicit manner Christ pleaded for his church, identifying his interest with theirs, and advocating, with a love and constancy stronger than death, their rights and titles gained through him.

God's answer to this appeal goes forth in the proclamation: "Let all the angels of God worship him." Every angelic commander obeys the royal mandate, and Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain; and

that lives again a triumphant conqueror! echoes and re-echoes through all Heaven. The innumerable company of angels prostrate themselves before the Redeemer. The request of Christ is granted; the church is justified through him, its representative and head.

Here the Father ratifies the contract with his Son, that he will be reconciled to repentant and obedient men, and take them into divine favor through the merits of Christ. Christ guarantees that he will make a man "more precious than fine gold, even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir." All power in Heaven and on earth is now given to the Prince of life; yet he does not for a moment forget his poor disciples in a sinful world, but prepares to return to them, that he may impart to them his power and glory. Thus did the Redeemer of mankind, by the sacrifice of himself, connect earth with Heaven, and finite man with the infinite God.

Jesus said to Mary, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." When he closed his eyes in death upon the cross, the soul of Christ did not go at once to Heaven, as many believe, or how could his words be true--"I am not yet ascended to my Father"? The spirit of Jesus slept in the tomb with his body, and did not wing its way to Heaven, there to maintain a separate existence, and to look down upon the mourning disciples embalming the body from which it had taken flight. All that comprised the life and intelligence of Jesus remained with his body in the sepulcher; and when he came forth it was as a whole being; he did not have to summon his spirit from Heaven. He had power to lay down his life and to take it up again.

The brightest morning that ever dawned upon a fallen world, was that in which the Saviour rose from the dead; but it was of no greater importance to man than the day upon which his trial and crucifixion took place. It was no marvel to the heavenly host that He who controlled the power of death, and had life in himself, should awaken from the sleep of the grave. But it was a marvel to them that their loved Commander should die for rebellious men.

Christ rested in the tomb on the Sabbath day, and when holy beings of both Heaven and earth were astir on the morning of the first day of the week, he rose from the grave to renew his work of teaching his disciples. But this fact does not consecrate the first day of the week, and make it a Sabbath. Jesus, prior to his death, established a memorial of the breaking of his body and the spilling of his blood for the sins of the world, in the ordinance of the Lord's supper, saying, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the

Lord's death till he come." And the repentant believer, who takes the steps required in conversion, commemorates in his baptism the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He goes down into the water in the likeness of Christ's death and burial, and he is raised out of the water in the likeness of his resurrection--not to take up the old life of sin, but to live a new life in Christ Jesus.

The other women who had seen and been addressed by the angels, left the sepulcher with mingled feelings of fear and great joy. They hastened to the disciples, as the angels had directed, and related to them the things which they had seen and heard. Peter was expressly mentioned by the angel as one to whom the women were to communicate their news. This disciple had been the most despondent of all the little company of Christ's followers, because of his shameful denial of the Lord.

Peter's remorse for his crime was well understood by the holy angels, and their tender compassion for the wayward and sorrowing is revealed in the solicitude they manifested for the unhappy disciple, and which evidenced to him that his repentance was accepted, and his sin forgiven.

When the disciples heard the account which the women brought, they were astonished. They began to recall the words of their Lord which foretold his resurrection. Still, this event, which should have filled their hearts with joy, was a great perplexity to them. After their great disappointment in the death of Christ, their faith was not strong enough to accept the fact of the resurrection. Their hopes had been so blighted that they could not believe the statement of the women, but thought that they were the subjects of an illusion. Even when Mary Magdalene testified that she had seen and spoken with her Lord, they still refused to believe that he had risen.

They were terribly depressed by the events that had crowded upon them. On the sixth day they had seen their Master die; upon the first day of the succeeding week they found themselves deprived of his body, and the stigma resting upon them of having stolen it away for the purpose of practicing a deception upon the people. They despaired of ever correcting the false impressions that had gained ground against them; and now they were newly perplexed by the reports of the believing women. In their trouble their hearts yearned for their beloved Master, who had always been ready to explain the mysteries that perplexed them and to smooth their difficulties.

THE WALK TO EMMAUS

[This chapter is based on Luke 24:13-33.]

On this same day Jesus met several of his disciples, and greeted them with "All hail," upon which they approached him and held him by the feet and worshiped him. He permitted this homage, for he had then ascended to his Father, and had received his approval, and the worship of the holy angels. Late in the afternoon of the same day, two of the disciples were on their way to Emmaus, eight miles from Jerusalem.

They had come to the city to keep the passover, and the news of the morning in regard to the removal of the body of Jesus from the sepulcher had greatly perplexed them. This perplexity had been increased by the reports of the women concerning the heavenly messengers, and the appearance of Jesus himself. They were now returning to their home to meditate and pray, in hope of gaining some light in reference to these matters which so confused their understanding.

These two disciples had not held a prominent position beside Jesus in his ministry, but they were earnest believers in him. Soon after they began their journey, they observed a stranger coming up behind them, who presently joined their company; but they were so busy with perplexing thoughts, which they were communicating to each other, that they scarcely noticed they were not alone.

Those strong men were so burdened with grief that they wept as they traveled on. Christ's pitying heart of love saw here a sorrow which he could relieve. The disciples were reasoning with each other concerning the events of the past few days, and marveling how the fact of Jesus yielding himself up to a shameful death could be reconciled with his claims as the Son of God.

One maintained that he could be no pretender, but had been himself deceived in regard to his mission and his future glory. They both feared that what his enemies had flung in his teeth was too true--"He saved others; himself he cannot save." Yet they wondered how he could be so mistaken in himself, when he had given them such repeated evidence that he could read the hearts of others. And the strange reports of the women threw them into still greater uncertainty.

Long might these disciples have perplexed themselves over the mysteries of the past few days, if they had not received enlightenment from Jesus. He, disguised as a stranger, entered into conversation with them. "But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad? And the one of them whose name was Cleopas, answering said unto him. Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people."

They then recounted to him the facts of the trial and crucifixion of their Master, together with the testimony of the women in regard to the removal of his body, and vision of angels which they had seen, the news of the resurrection, and the report of those disciples who had gone to the sepulcher. "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken; ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

The disciples were silent from amazement and delight. They did not venture to ask the stranger who he was. They listened to him intently, charmed by his intelligence, and drawn toward him by his gracious words and manner, as he opened the Scriptures to their understanding, showing them from prophecy how Christ must suffer, and after suffering enter into his glory.

Jesus began with the first book written by Moses, and traced down through all the prophets the inspired proof in regard to his life, his mission, his suffering, death, and resurrection. He did not deem it necessary to work a miracle to evidence that he was the risen Redeemer of the world; but he went back to the prophecies, and gave a full and clear explanation of them to settle the question of his identity, and the fact that all which had occurred to him was foretold by the inspired writers.

Jesus ever carried the minds of his hearers back to the precious mine of truth found in the Old-Testament Scriptures. The esteem in which he held those sacred records is exemplified in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, where he says, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." The apostles also all testify to the importance of the Old

Testament Scriptures. Peter says: "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Luke thus speaks of the prophets who predicted the coming of Christ: "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people; and hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began."

It is the voice of Christ that speaks through the prophets and patriarchs, from the days of Adam even down to the closing scenes of time. This truth was not discerned by the Jews who rejected Jesus, and it is not discerned by many professing Christians today. A beautiful harmony runs through the Old and New Testaments; passages which may seem dark at a first reading, present clear interpretations when diligently studied, and compared with other scripture referring to the same subject. A careful search of the prophecies would have so enlightened the understanding of the Jews that they would have recognized Jesus as the predicted Messiah. But they had interpreted those predictions to meet their own perverted ideas and ambitious aspirations.

The disciples had been confused by the interpretations and traditions of the priests, and hence their darkness and unbelief in regard to the trial, death, and resurrection of their Master. These misinterpreted prophecies were now made plain to the understanding of the two disciples, by Him who, through his Holy Spirit, inspired men to write them. Jesus showed his disciples that every specification of prophecy regarding Messiah had found an exact fulfillment in the life and death of their Master. He addressed them as a stranger, and as one who was astonished that they had not interpreted the Scriptures correctly, which would have relieved them from all their difficulties.

Although Jesus had previously taught them in regard to the prophecies, yet they had been unable to entirely relinquish the idea of the temporal kingdom of Christ at his first coming. Their preconceived views led them to look upon his crucifixion as the final destruction of all their hopes. But when, in the midst of their discouragement, they were shown that the very things which had caused them to despair formed the climax of proof that their belief had been correct, their faith returned with increased strength. They now comprehended many things which their Master had said before his trial, and which they could not at that time understand. Everything was clear and plain to their minds. In the life and death of Jesus they saw the fulfillment of prophecy, and their hearts burned with love for their Saviour.

Many professed Christians throw aside the Old Testament, and shut themselves up to the New. The cry now is, "Away with the law and the prophets, and give us the gospel of Christ." If the life of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament Scriptures were all that was necessary to establish belief, why did not Jesus upon this occasion merely refer to the doctrines he had taught, the wisdom and purity of his character, and the miracles he had performed, as sufficient evidence of his Messiahship?

The history of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as that of the Son of God, cannot be fully demonstrated without the evidence contained in the Old Testament. Christ is revealed in the Old Testament as clearly as in the New. The one testifies of a Saviour to come, while the other testifies of a Saviour that has come in the manner predicted by the prophets. In order to appreciate the plan of redemption, the Scripture of the Old Testament must be thoroughly understood. It is the glorified light from the prophetic past that brings out the life of Christ and the teachings of the New Testament with clearness and beauty. The miracles of Jesus are a proof of his divinity; but the strongest proofs that he is the world's Redeemer are found in the prophecies of the Old Testament compared with the history of the New. Jesus said to the Jews "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." At that time there was no other scripture in existence save that of the Old Testament; so the injunction of the Saviour is plain.

As the disciples walked on with Jesus, listening intently to his gracious words, nothing in his bearing suggested to them that they were listening to other than a casual pilgrim, returning from the feast, but one who thoroughly understood the prophecies. He walked as carefully as they over the rough stones, halting with them for a little rest after climbing some unusually steep place. Thus the two disciples made their way along the mountainous road in company with the divine Saviour, who could say, "All power is given unto me in Heaven and on earth."

This mighty conqueror of death, who had reached to the very depths of human misery to rescue a lost world, assumed the humble task of walking with the two disciples to Emmaus, to teach and comfort them. Thus he ever identifies himself with his suffering and perplexed people. In our hardest and most trying paths, lo, Jesus is with us to smooth the way. He is the same Son of man, with the same sympathies and love which he had before he passed through the tomb and ascended to his Father.

At length, as the sun was going down, the disciples with their companion arrived at their home. The way had never before seemed so short to them, nor had time ever passed so quickly. The stranger made no sign of halting; but the disciples could not endure the thought of parting so soon from one who had inspired their hearts with new hope and joy, and they urged him to remain with them over night. Jesus did not at once yield to their invitation, but seemed disposed to pursue his journey. Thereupon the disciples, in their affection for the stranger, importuned him earnestly to tarry with them, urging as a reason that "the day was far spent." Jesus yielded to their entreaties and entered their humble abode.

The Saviour never forces his presence upon us. He seeks the company of those whom he knows need his care, and gives them an opportunity to urge his continuance with them. If they, with longing desire, entreat him to abide with them he will enter the humblest homes, and brighten the lowliest hearts. While waiting for the evening meal, Jesus continued to open the Scriptures to his hosts, bringing forward the evidence of his divinity, and unfolding to them the plan of salvation. The simple fare was soon ready, and the three took their position at the table, Jesus taking his place at the head as was his custom.

The duty of asking a blessing upon the food usually devolved upon the head of the family; but Jesus placed his hands upon the bread and blessed it. At the first word of his petition the disciples looked up in amazement. Surely none other than their Lord had ever done in this manner. His voice strikes upon their ear as the voice of their Master, and, behold, there are the wounds in his hands! It is indeed the well-known form of their beloved Master! For a moment they are spell-bound; then they arise to fall at his feet and worship him; but he suddenly disappears from their midst.

Now they know that they have been walking and talking with the risen Redeemer. Their eyes had been clouded so that they had not before discerned him, although the truths he uttered had sunk deep in their discouraged hearts. He who had endured the conflict of the garden, the shame of the cross, and who had gained the victory over death and the tomb--He, before whom angels had fallen prostrate, worshiping with thanksgiving and praise, had sought the two lonely and desponding disciples, and been in their presence for hours, teaching and comforting them, yet they had not known him.

Jesus did not first reveal himself in his true character to them, and then open the Scriptures to their minds; for he knew that they would be so overjoyed to see him again, risen from the dead, that their souls would be satisfied. They would not hunger for the sacred truths which he wished to indelibly impress upon their minds, that they might impart them to others, who should in their turn spread the precious knowledge, until thousands of people should receive the light given that day to the despairing disciples as they journeyed to Emmaus.

He maintained his disguise till he had interpreted the Scriptures, and had led them to an intelligent faith in his life, his character, his mission to earth, and his death and resurrection. He wished the truth to take firm root in their minds, not because it was supported by his personal testimony, but because the typical law, and the prophets of the Old Testament, agreeing with the facts of his life and death, presented unquestionable evidence of that truth. When the object of his labors with the two disciples was gained, he revealed himself to them that their joy might be full, and then vanished from their sight.

When these disciples left Jerusalem, to return to their homes, they intended to take up their old employment again, and conceal their blighted hopes as best they could. But now their joy exceeded their former despair. "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

They forgot their hunger and fatigue, and left the prepared repast, for they could not tarry in their homes and hold their newly found knowledge from the other disciples. They longed to impart their own joy to their companions, that they might rejoice together in a living Saviour risen from the dead. Late as it was, they set about retracing their way to Jerusalem; but how different were their feelings now from those which depressed them when they set out upon their way to Emmaus. Jesus was by their side, but they knew it not. He heard with gladness their expressions of joy and gratitude as they talked with each other by the way.

They were too happy to notice the difficulties of the rough, uncertain road. There was no moon to light them, but their hearts were light with the joy of a new revelation. They picked their way over the rough stones, and the dangerous ledges, sometimes stumbling and falling in their haste. But not at all disconcerted by this, they pressed resolutely on. Occasionally they lost their path in the darkness, and were obliged to retrace their steps until they found the track, when they renewed

their journey with fresh speed. They longed to deliver their precious message to their friends. Never before had human lips such tidings to proclaim; for the fact of Christ's resurrection was to be the great truth around which all the faith and hope of the church would center.

"PEACE BE UNTO YOU"

[This chapter is based on Luke 24:33-48; John 20:19-29.]

When the disciples arrived at Jerusalem they entered the eastern gate, which was open on festal occasions. The houses were dark and silent, but they made their way through the narrow streets by the light of the rising moon. They knew that they would find their brethren in the memorable upper chamber where Jesus had spent the last night before his death. Here the disciples had passed the Sabbath in mourning for their Lord. And now they had no disposition to sleep, for exciting events were being related among them. Cautious hands unbarred the door to the repeated demand of the two travelers; they entered, and with them also entered Jesus, who had been their unseen companion all the way.

They found the disciples assembled, and in a state of excitement. Hope and faith were struggling for ascendancy in their minds. The report of Mary Magdalene, and that of the other women, had been heard by all; but some were too hopeless to believe their testimony. The evidence of Peter, concerning his interview with the risen Lord, was borne with great ardor and assurance, and had more weight with the brethren, and their faith began to revive. When the disciples from Emmaus entered with their joyful tidings, they were met by the exclamation from many voices: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon."

The two from Emmaus told their story of how the Lord had opened their eyes, and revealed to them the straight chain of prophecy which reached from the days of the patriarchs to that time, and foreshadowed all that had transpired regarding their Saviour. The company heard this report in breathless silence. Some were inspired with new faith; others were incredulous. Suddenly Jesus himself was in their midst. His hands were raised in blessing, and he said unto them, "Peace be unto you."

"But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones,

as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet."

There they beheld the feet and hands marred by the cruel nails; and they recognized his melodious voice, like none other they had ever heard. "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them." Faith and joy now took the place of doubt and unbelief, and they acknowledged their risen Saviour with feelings which no words could express.

Jesus now expounded the Scriptures to the entire company, commencing with the first book of Moses, and dwelling particularly on the prophecy pointing to the time then present, and foretelling the sufferings of Christ and his resurrection. "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things."

The disciples now began to realize the nature and extent of their commission. They were to proclaim to the world the wonderful truths which Christ had intrusted to them. The events of his life, his death, and resurrection, the harmony of prophecy with those events, the sacredness of the law of God, the mysteries of the plan of salvation, the power of Jesus for the remission of sins--to all these things were they witnesses, and it was their work to make them known to all men, beginning at Jerusalem. They were to proclaim a gospel of peace and salvation through repentance and the power of the Saviour.

At the first advent of Jesus to the world, the angel announced: Peace on earth, and good will to men. After his earthly life was completed, he came forth from the dead, and, appearing for the first time to his assembled disciples, addressed them with the blessed words, "Peace be unto you."

Jesus is ever ready to speak peace to souls that are troubled with doubts and fear. This precious Saviour waits for us to open the door of our heart to him, and say, Abide with us. He says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." Our life is a continual strife; we must war against principalities and powers,

against spiritual wickedness, and foes that never sleep; we must resist temptations, and overcome as Christ overcame. When the peace of Jesus enters our heart we are calm and patient under the severest trials.

The resurrection of Jesus was a sample of the final resurrection of all who sleep in him. The risen body of the Saviour, his deportment, the accents of his speech, were all familiar to his followers. In like manner will those who sleep in Jesus rise again. We shall know our friends even as the disciples knew Jesus. Though they may have been deformed, diseased, or disfigured in this mortal life, yet in their resurrected and glorified body their individual identity will be perfectly preserved, and we shall recognize, in the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, the lineaments of those we love.

The death of Jesus had left Thomas in blank despair. His faith seemed to have gone out in utter darkness. He was not present in the upper chamber when Jesus appeared to his disciples. He had heard the reports of the others, and had received copious proof that Jesus had risen, but stolid gloom and stubborn unbelief closed his heart against all cheering testimony.

As he heard the disciples repeat their account of the wonderful manifestation of the resurrected Saviour, it only served to plunge him in deeper despair; for if Jesus had really risen from the dead there could be no farther hope of his literal earthly kingdom. It also wounded his vanity to think that his Master would reveal himself to all his disciples but him; so he was determined not to believe, and for an entire week he brooded over his wretchedness, which seemed all the darker as contrasted with the reviving hope and faith of his brethren.

During this time he frequently, when in company with his brethren, reiterated the words, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." He would not see through the eyes of his brethren, nor exercise faith which was dependent upon their testimony. He ardently loved his Lord, but jealousy and unbelief took possession of his mind and heart.

The upper chamber was the home of a number of the disciples, and every evening they all assembled in this place. On a certain evening Thomas decided to meet with his brethren; for notwithstanding his unbelief, he cherished a faint hope, unacknowledged to himself, that the good news was true. While the disciples were partaking of their usual meal, and meanwhile canvassing the evidences of the truth of their faith which Christ had given them in the prophecies, "then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you."

He then reproved the unbelieving who had not received the testimony of those who had seen him, and, turning to Thomas, said, "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing." These words showed that he had read the thoughts and words of Thomas.

The doubting disciple knew that none of his companions had seen Jesus for a week, and therefore could not have told the Master of his stubborn unbelief. He recognized the person before him as his Lord who had been crucified; he had no desire for farther proof; his heart leaped for joy as he realized that Jesus was indeed risen from the dead. He cast himself at the feet of his Master in deep affection and devotion, crying, "My Lord and my God."

Jesus accepted his acknowledgment, but mildly rebuked him for his unbelief: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Jesus here showed Thomas that his faith would have been more acceptable to him if he had believed the evidence of his brethren, and had not refused to believe until he had seen Jesus with his own eyes. If the world should follow this example of Thomas, no one would believe unto salvation; for all who now receive Christ do so through the testimony of others.

Many who have a weak and wavering faith, reason that if they had the evidence which Thomas had from his companions they would not doubt as he did. They do not realize that they have not only that evidence, but additional testimony piled up about them on every side.

Many who, like Thomas, wait for all cause of doubt to be removed, may never realize their desire as he did, but gradually become entrenched in their unbelief, until they cannot perceive the weight of evidence in favor of Jesus, and, like the skeptical Jews, what little light they have will go out in the darkness which closes around their minds. To reject the plain and conclusive evidences of divine truth hardens the heart, and blinds the understanding. The precious light, being neglected, fades utterly from the mind that is unwilling to receive it.

Jesus, in his treatment of Thomas, gave his followers a lesson regarding the manner in which they should treat those who have doubts upon religious truth, and who make those doubts prominent. He did not overwhelm Thomas with words of reproach, nor did he enter into a controversy with him; but, with marked condescension and tenderness, he revealed himself unto the doubting one.

Thomas had taken a most unreasonable position, in dictating the only conditions of his faith; but Jesus, by his generous love and

consideration, broke down all the barriers he had raised. Persistent controversy will seldom weaken unbelief, but rather put it upon self-defense, where it will find new support and excuse. Jesus, revealed in his love and mercy as the crucified Saviour, will wring from many once unwilling lips the acknowledgment of Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

"TO MY FATHER, AND YOUR FATHER"

[This chapter is based on Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-12.]

After the meeting of Jesus with the brethren, at Galilee, the disciples returned to Jerusalem; and while the eleven were gathered together in the city Jesus met with them, and again led their minds out into the prophecies concerning himself. He deeply impressed upon their understanding the necessity of thoroughly studying the ancient prophecies regarding Messiah, and of comparing them with the facts of his life, death, and resurrection, in order to establish their fulfillment in himself.

They were to diligently trace link after link of sacred truth revealed by the prophets, in types and figures representing the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. He lifted the veil from their understanding, concerning the typical system of the Jews, and they now saw clearly the meaning of the forms and symbols which were virtually abolished by the death of Christ.

The Saviour of the world, as a divine Conqueror, was about to ascend to his Father's throne. He selected the Mount of Olives as the scene of this last display of his glory. Accompanied by the eleven, he made his way to the mountain. The disciples were not aware that this was to be their last season with their Master. He employed the time in sacred converse with them, reiterating his former instructions. As they passed through the gates of Jerusalem, many wondering eyes looked upon the little company, led by one whom a few weeks before the priests and rulers had condemned and crucified.

They crossed the Kedron, and approached Gethsemane. Here Jesus paused, that his disciples might call to mind the lessons he had given them while on his way to the garden on the night of his great agony. He looked again upon the vine which he had then used as a symbol to represent the union of his church with himself and his Father; and he refreshed the memory of his followers by repeating the impressive truths which he had then illustrated to them. Reminders of the

unrequited love of Jesus were all around him; even the disciples walking by his side, who were so dear to his heart, had, in the hour of his humiliation, when he most needed their sympathy and comfort, reproached and forsaken him.

Christ had sojourned in the world for thirty- three years; he had endured its scorn, insult, and mockery; he had been rejected and crucified. Now, when about to ascend to his throne of glory--as he reviews the ingratitude of the people he came to save--will he not withdraw his sympathy and love from them? Will not his affections be centered on that world where he is appreciated, and where sinless angels adore him, and wait to do his bidding? No; his promise to those loved ones whom he leaves on earth is "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." Before his conflict, he had prayed the Father that they might not be taken out of the world, but should be kept from the evil which is in the world.

At length the little company reach the Mount of Olives. This place had been peculiarly hallowed by the presence of Jesus while he bore the nature of man. It was consecrated by his prayers and tears. When he had ridden into Jerusalem, just prior to his trial, the steeps of Olivet had echoed the joyous shouts of the triumphant multitude. On its sloping descent was Bethany, where he had often found repose at the house of Lazarus. At the foot of the mount was the garden of Gethsemane, where he had agonized alone, and moistened the sod with his blood.

Jesus led the way across the summit, to the vicinity of Bethany. He then paused, and they all gathered about him. Beams of light seemed to radiate from his countenance, as he looked with deep love upon his disciples. He upbraided them not for their faults and failures; but words of unutterable tenderness were the last which fell upon their ears from the lips of their Lord. With hands outstretched in blessing them, and as if in assurance of his protecting care, he slowly ascended from among them, drawn heavenward by a power stronger than any earthly attraction. As he passed upward, the awe-struck disciples looked with straining eyes for the last glimpse of their ascending Lord. A cloud of glory received him out of their sight, and at the same moment there floated down to their charmed senses the sweetest and most joyous music from the angel choir.

While their gaze was still riveted upward, voices addressed them which sounded like the music which had just charmed them. They turned, and saw two beings in the form of men; yet their heavenly

character was immediately discerned by the disciples, whom they addressed in comforting accents, saying, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into Heaven." These angels were of the company that had been waiting in a shining cloud to escort Jesus to his throne; and in sympathy and love for those whom the Saviour had left, they came to remove all uncertainty from their minds, and to give them the assurance that he would come to earth again.

All Heaven was waiting to welcome the Saviour to the celestial courts. As he ascended he led the way, and the multitude of captives whom he had raised from the dead at the time when he came forth from the tomb, followed him. The heavenly host, with songs of joy and triumph, escorted him upward. At the portals of the city of God an innumerable company of angels awaited his coming. As they approached the gates of the city, the angels who were escorting the Majesty of Heaven, in triumphant tones addressed the company at the portals: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!"

The waiting angels at the gates of the city inquire in rapturous strains, "Who is this King of Glory? The escorting angels joyously reply in songs of triumph, "The Lord, strong and mighty! The Lord, mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of Glory shall come in!" Again the waiting angels ask, "Who is this King of Glory?" and the escorting angels respond in melodious strains, "The Lord of hosts! He is the King of Glory!" Then the portals of the city of God are widely opened, and the heavenly train pass in amid a burst of angelic music. All the heavenly host surround their majestic Commander as he takes his position upon the throne of the Father.

With the deepest adoration and joy, the hosts of angels bow before him, while the glad shout rings through the courts of Heaven: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing!" Songs of triumph mingle with music from angelic harps, till Heaven seems to overflow with delightful harmony, and inconceivable joy and praise. The Son of God has triumphed over the prince of darkness, and conquered death and the grave. Heaven rings with voices in lofty strains proclaiming: "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever!"

He is seated by the side of his Father on his throne. The Saviour presents the captives he has rescued from the bonds of death, at the price of his own life. His hands place immortal crowns upon their brows; for they are the representatives, and samples, of those who shall be redeemed, by the blood of Christ, from all nations, tongues, and people, and come forth from the dead, when he shall call the just from their graves at his second coming. Then shall they see the marks of Calvary in the glorified body of the Son of God. Their greatest joy will be found in the presence of Him who sitteth on the throne; and the enraptured saints will exclaim, My Beloved is mine, and I am his! He is the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely!

The disciples returned to Jerusalem, not mourning, but full of joy. When last they looked upon their Lord, his countenance shone with heavenly brightness, and he smiled lovingly upon them. Those hands that had so often been stretched forth in the act of blessing the sick and the afflicted, and in rebuking demons--those hands which had been bruised by the cruel nails, were mercifully extended, as though in the disciples they embraced the whole world, and called down a blessing upon all the followers of Christ. Beams of light seemed to emanate from those dear hands and to fall upon the watching, waiting ones.

The most precious fact to the disciples in the ascension of Jesus was that he went from them into Heaven in the tangible form of their divine Teacher. The very same Jesus, who had walked, and talked, and prayed with them; who had broken bread with them; who had been with them in their boats on the lake; who had sought retirement with them in the groves; and who had that very day toiled with them up the steep ascent of Olivet,--had ascended to Heaven in the form of humanity. And the heavenly messengers had assured them that the very same Jesus whom they had seen go up into Heaven, should come again in like manner as he had ascended. This assurance has ever been, and will be till the close of time, the hope and joy of all true lovers of Christ.

The disciples not only saw the Lord ascend, but they had the testimony of the angels that he had gone to occupy his Father's throne in Heaven. The last remembrance that the disciples were to have of their Lord was as the sympathizing Friend, the glorified Redeemer. Moses veiled his face to hide the glory of the law which was reflected upon it, and the glory of Christ's ascension was veiled from human sight. The brightness of the heavenly escort, and the opening of the

glorious gates of God to welcome him, were not to be discerned by mortal eyes.

Had the track of Christ to Heaven been revealed to the disciples in all its inexpressible glory, they could not have endured the sight. Had they beheld the myriads of angels, and heard the bursts of triumph from the battlements of Heaven, as the everlasting doors were lifted up, the contrast between that glory and their own lives in a world of trial, would have been so great that they would hardly have been able to again take up the burden of their earthly lives, prepared to execute with courage and faithfulness the commission given them by the Saviour. Even the Comforter, the Holy Ghost which was sent to them, would not have been properly appreciated, nor would it have strengthened their hearts sufficiently to bear reproach, contumely, imprisonment, and death if need be.

Their senses were not to become so infatuated with the glories of Heaven that they would lose sight of the character of Christ on earth, which they were to copy in themselves. They were to keep distinctly before their minds the beauty and majesty of his life, the perfect harmony of all his attributes, and the mysterious union of the divine and human in his nature. It was better that the earthly acquaintance of the disciples with their Saviour should end in the solemn, quiet, and sublime manner in which it did. His visible ascent from the world was in harmony with the meekness and quiet of his life.