

"This Is My Beloved Son"

"Remember me" has been the request of many a dying man, but only one after expressing the wish has been raised from the dead to witness the faithfulness of his friends toward it. And that one is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is alive, and can say, "*I know thy works*," and this applies to all who claim to be his friends.

Although his person and work are grossly misunderstood, yet nevertheless they are the theme of adoration and praise throughout the world, for people exhibiting the widest diversity of creed and character acknowledge his authority and claims, showing that his influence is by no means a spent force. Rather it widens and deepens with the advance of the years, and we can all profitably ask ourselves this question—"*What think ye of Christ? Who is he?*"

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Our present objective is to focus attention upon his trial and crucifixion—truly a sad and touching picture to contemplate.

That he was a being just like ourselves is abundantly testified in the Scriptures—"bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh"—yet he had that glorious distinction of being in character without sin.

"God, sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

Though it may be easy for us to use these words without much thought, yet we should rather deeply meditate upon all that is written concerning him while in sin's flesh, that we may enter more and more deeply into the feelings of this just person in the trials that he bore, and the victory that he gained.

The Scriptures tell us that he hungered, he thirsted, he was faint and weary, sad and sorrowful, persecuted and despised. In such experiences Jesus was like unto his brethren; yet though like them he was also *unlike* them, for while his life presents many impressive comparisons it also exhibits unique and significant contrasts.

No display of miracle distinguished his actual birth from all similar domestic events, yet the child so born presents the unparalleled features of a perfect, stainless life, as from youth to manhood he was about his Father's business. Not that in his early years his wisdom and knowledge were complete, for his mental development kept pace with his physical growth, the record being:

"And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

He grew in wisdom—his growth was like the unfolding of a perfect flower, or like the soft radiance of the dawn which expands into the effulgence of the noontide. In his life there was nothing to correct or amend. There was a character to form, but he knew no remorse and required no penitence.

Yet truly he knew the struggle of the flesh and Spirit, for he was tempted in all points like unto his brethren, but never sinned. He needed no pardon or reconciliation in his character. He presents the one and only example of a spotless, perfect life which in every act of every hour was altogether lovely, so that the voice of God was heard to say—

"This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mat. 3:17).

Jesus' face is now henceforth set toward Calvary and the cross, yet how often as he trod the vale of tears must the thoughts of that Voice have encouraged him in his journey along that dark and bitter path.

Even in the midst of his enemies he could ask (John 8:46)—

"Which of you convinceth (RV: convicteth) me of sin?"

Let us think of him as he goes forth preaching the Gospel; as he healed the sick, caused the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, and even raised the dead. Yet with all his goodness his enemies were ever present, watching his every move and word. How pathetic are the words of John—

"He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

Christ is that glorious, perfect character that we all do well to copy, though his beauty is not such as would answer to the world's ideal—moral, artistic or religious. Yet he is more than kind, he is holy; he is more than forgiving, he is just and with wickedness is angry; he is more than gentle, he is exacting of supreme affection; he is more than good, he is zealous of the Father. As Paul wrote—

"For the joy set before him, he endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2).

True it was of Jesus in his ordeal that, had he so desired, he could have called for legions of angels, as he gently told Peter (Matt. 26:53), but rather his faithful decision was—

"Not my will, but Thine, be done."

Let us then "*Consider him*," meditating deeply upon all the elements of his beautiful and perfect character, which constitute him one by himself in all the history of the world. Yes, he stands alone. In his great and towering dignity of holiness, his intense and single-minded earnestness for the things of his Father, and his unwearying patience in his submission to his Father's will, he has shed a great light upon the world already.

Yet infinitely greater will be that light when he returns to this earth to "see the travail of his soul, and be satisfied." How stirring is the prospect presented by these prophetic words of Isaiah concerning the rejected Messiah! The prophet says that on account of his sadness his countenance was marred more than any man's. And we know the reason for the sadness which made him "*a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*." It was the realization of the gravity and responsibility of his mission, the great weight of evil and misery in the world, the great shadow of distress and disease and death—which he alone was to overcome and remove, and he himself under the burden of the weak, sinful nature of mankind.

"Touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and in all points tempted like as we are"
(Heb. 4:15).

His mental and physical sufferings are referred to by David—

"Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none."

As it is written: "*They all forsook him and fled*."

Christ's life was one of incessant distress, by the cruelties of enemies and the lack of faith and discernment on the part of friends. Day by day he encountered wicked and hypocritical men in reputation who sought to catch him in his words, as they plotted and schemed to destroy his Divine

influence and to murder him. Yet in spite of all his sympathetic heart was wrung by the sight of weak and erring human nature. At the grave of Lazarus he was overwhelmed, and wept.

What a depth of meaning there is in the words of Matt. 8:20—

"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."

Thus dark, awful and crushing must have been the shadow of the cross, for the ordeal of Calvary seems to have been always present with him—

"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straightened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50).

On another occasion he said—

"The Son of man must be lifted up."
"I lay down my life for my sheep."

And sometimes he spoke very plainly, as when he said—

"The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and scribes, and they shall condemn him to death."

Such then was his life—a life of bitter trial and anguish; but he did it not for himself alone, but for his brethren—

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Christ put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and became the Author of eternal salvation to all that might believe in His Name. As the supreme moment neared the intenseness of his grief can be gathered from what is written (Matt. 26:37-38)—

very "And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me."

Jesus then went a little farther on from his disciples, and prayed to his Father, and the sorrow of his soul is apparent in the earnestness of the prayer that he spoke—

"O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!"

The cup of grief and pain almost beyond endurance, still he said:

"Nevertheless not as I will but as Thou wilt."

And how vividly and deeply the anguish of Christ's suffering is again seen in what Luke records (22:44)—

"And being in agony he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground."

"Gethsemane, can we forget, or there thy conflict see, thine agony and bloody sweat, and not remember thee?" For did ever man suffer like Christ, bearing the sorrows of all the world? What resignation, what patience, what unselfishness, what nobility of mind, what a confidence in God his Father!

"And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified him" (Luke 23:33).

Such is the record of the awful climax of the Lord's suffering and trials, and the name of the spot is known around the world, in all languages, and through all ages. Never was a head like his laid low in death; the noblest of the sons of men, the purest, the greatest, the meekest of all the sons of Adam.

Jesus was the highest type of the human race that ever lived. His words have enriched the literature of the world as none others have or will, for they are the precious words of eternal life. His teachings are the most elevating of any that can be found.

Yet his life was violently taken away, and he—the "light of the world"—was hidden away in the darkness of the tomb. And what a death!—cruel, shameful and unjust in the extreme.

Think of the guilt of those who compassed his destruction—through whose streets he had walked, pitying their miseries, healing their diseases and sharing their sorrows. Yet, alas, they clamored for his blood. No wonder at his death the sun refused to shine or shed a ray of light upon the scene; no wonder that the earth quaked and the rocks were rent, and an unnatural darkness turned day into night over all the land.

And so he died, amid the scoffs and jeers and blasphemies of those whose good he had ever sought and whose highest interests he had tried to serve.

In the feast of memorials that Christ has left us to observe, the apostle Paul warns us against crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting him to an open shame. Let us note that *he warns the professed believers against following a course that will put them—in God's eyes—in the same category with the murderers of Jesus*. Let us beware lest by worldliness we fall into this class.

In the vivid picture that is before us, and the anguish and suffering that can well nigh be felt, what a call there is for us to take up his cross and follow him. The apostle Paul fellowshiped and participated in the sufferings of Christ, as he says (Phil. 3:8)—

"Yea, doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."

Paul speaks of his own sufferings as—

"Filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24).

And Paul's experience applies in a measure to ours, and although Christ was called upon to endure so much more than we, still we are not to be exempt. We are members of Christ's body, and as with the Head, so with the members—suffering and patience must precede the promised glory.

Let us then brace up our minds to the fact that Christ was victorious, and he overcame as the result of struggle and endurance and seeking earnestly for help and strength from God. If we would share the fruits of his conquest, we must be prepared to suffer patiently in the smaller work that God has given us to do.

As in our Lord's case, so in ours—the momentousness of our mission, coupled with the disabilities and limitations of our evil nature, makes it at times very sad, yet it is no new or strange experience, for many have been the afflictions of the righteous.

Still, "for the joy set before us," let us never grow despondent because we often fail and come below the standard of our Lord's setting; let us not forsake our duty for ease and comfort, but press onward—looking forward to that time when the redeemed of the Lord shall be endued with almighty strength, wisdom and power. Let not our hearts be troubled, neither let us be afraid.

Christ suffered and died, yet how sweet the calm of that resurrection morning, as the angel said to the visitors at his tomb—

"Why seek ye the **living** among the **dead**?"

Jesus steps forth from the grave into that sweet morning air; his trials are now over; his many sorrows are at an end. Let us rejoice with him at the empty tomb, at the angelic declaration—

"He is risen! He is not here! Behold where they laid him."
—at the bodily appearances of Jesus to his disciples after his resurrection, showing them his hands, his feet, and the spear-mark—

"Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the firstfruits of them that slept"
(1 Cor. 15:20).

The burden of the apostolic testimony was *the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus*—a testimony not based upon hearsay or "cunningly-devised fables," for they had been eye-witnesses to the fact that Jesus had risen from the dead—a fact confirming and fulfilling the abundance of testimony in the Old Testament Scriptures concerning the coming, rejection, and final glorious victory of the long-promised Messiah of Israel and great work among the Gentiles unto the ends of the earth.

So truly we have no need to be "troubled or afraid in heart," but rather to continually "Sing praise, for the tomb is void where the Redeemer lay!" For when Jesus made known unto John what is written in the Revelation, he said—

"I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (1:18).

And the apostle wrote to the Roman brethren (6:9)—

"Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."

In the same place Paul brings the lesson home to us (v. 4)—

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."

Thus we have the searchlight of truth turned on ourselves, for—

"**IF** we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection" (v. 5).

How much depends upon that little word "if"! There *must be* the dying to the world and the flesh, and the walking in "newness of life," if there is to be the glorious likeness to his resurrection. To such Jesus said—

"*Because I live, ye shall live also.*"

—W.J.P. Taken from Dec. 1955 Berean