

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

F. W. Krummacher

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

THE INSCRIPTION

LET US LIFT UP OUR EYES to the inscription, which beams from the cross of the divine Sufferer. We there read, "**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews,**" written in three different tongues - Greek, Latin, and Hebrew - the three theological languages, that all the world may read and understand. Pilate had so ordered it, induced partly by an obscure and reverential presentiment, and partly in order to give the hated Jews a final blow.

No sooner had the latter read the inscription, than they angrily hasten to the governor, and say to him in an imperious tone, "It must not be as thou hast written. Down with that inscription from the cross of the blasphemer. Write that He presumptuously said that He was the King of the Jews." But Pilate briefly and resolutely replied, "**What I have written, I have written!**" And thus, Pilate, it ought to be. What thou didst write was not from arbitrary choice, for Another guided thy hand. Thou has prophesied as did Balaam of old; and with thy inscription, art ignorantly and involuntarily become a witness for the truth.

Wilt thou behold the King of Israel? Come, friend, and follow me to Calvary's bloody hill. Seest thou that Man on the cross, dying the death of a malefactor? "What?" sayest thou, "Is this a King?" Do not shake thy head, but know that thou art wanting in discernment, not He in majesty.

- Retrace the ancient Levitical service, and behold in the sacred songs and prophetic language of the Old Testament that which shall throw light upon the appalling scene.

- Light thy torch in the Psalms of David, in which thou hearest a great King say, "**They pierced my hands and my feet. They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink**"; and yet He remains a King.

- Listen to the prophet Isaiah speaking of One who though He was "**bruised for our iniquities,**" yet "**the government was upon his shoulder, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.**"

- Read the words of Zechariah, "**Awake, a sword, against the man that is my fellow!**"

- Hear the forerunner in the wilderness, exclaiming, "**Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world!**"

Return with these lights to Calvary, and say if thou art still so much astonished at finding the inscription on the cross, which stands between the other two, bearing the words, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews?**"

A cloud of holy witnesses adoringly surround the cross-venerable figures, tried saints, patriarchs and seers, poets and prophets, kings and priests. The figure of the bleeding King did not mislead them. Reverentially, and far from starting back with surprise, they read the inscription, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**"

Dost thou inquire where is the majesty of this King?

Be not offended at the gloomy cloud which frowns around Him. The eye of faith penetrates through it, and perceives a rainbow-garland of angels' heads and seraphic faces. And who, in the further distance of the heavenly world, compose the brilliant host that, sunk in adoration, lie on their faces beneath the trees of life?

They are the saints of God, who inherited the kingdom before the Lord of Glory descended to the earth. They now behold him paying the promised ransom for them and supporting the blissful abodes they inhabit with the pillars of justice. And look still further in spirit. The multitudes of people out of every age and nation, their eyes attentively directed to the cross, and their faces expressive of sacred peace and silent blessedness - who are they, who, in the interminable circles, surround the fatal hill? It is His Church, His redeemed people, including the best and noblest of mankind in every age. See the censers in their hands. They desire only to hear and know respecting the Lamb that was slain.

Such are the sights which faith beholds. And on beholding such a representation, the cross before it changes to a throne, the crown of thorns about the brow of the dying Man becomes a diadem, and Pilate's inscription is read with reverence and adoration, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!**"

Yes, it is He! Thou mayest recognize Him by the victories He achieves, even on the fatal tree.

He is assailed by powerful temptations which rise up in the shape of the scornful revilings of the people, who exclaim, "**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,**" a powerful assault of the wicked one. How much did the taunting advice to come down correspond with the necessities of His suffering human nature!

If He had followed it, not only He Himself would have been delivered at once from His torment, but the host of blaspheming adversaries would have been driven from the field in an unexampled manner, convinced of His divinity almost more plainly than was afterward the case by His resurrection from the dead.

Alluring thought, at one blow to strike the raging multitude dumb, and bend their knees in the dust! But far be such an idea from Him! It is a snare, a trap of the artful fowler, a rock under water, to wreck the project of the atonement just before its final accomplishment. Jesus surveys the infernal toils, and says in spirit, "Get thee behind me Satan; I will not come down, but bleed, sacrifice myself, and pay the wages of sin."

In sublime silence He rejects the call and bears the torment; nor did He deviate from His path a single moment. Come, let us interweave an olive-branch in His crown of thorns and wreath about with the laurel of victory the inscription, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**"

Yes, while hanging there, He is still a royal conqueror. Thou mightest think that no one was more overcome than He. But the prospective glass of faith will show thee something different. A conflict of desperation has commenced, and the human race is its object. The hostile parties are the captain of the Lord's host and the infernal powers, How the demons of the pit rage and struggle! The prey is to be taken from them and the captive delivered; the scepter to be wrested from their hands, and the right they had acquired over us by the divine decision again torn from them.

And it is the Man in the crown of thorns who threatens their dominion, and is trying to overturn it. Nothing in the arsenal of hell is left untried, which may afford any hope of victory. The Lion of the tribe of Judah bleeds; but His blood is the enemy's overthrow. He falls into the hands of His adversaries; but this is the means of rescuing us out of their hands. He suffers Himself to be fettered by the bands of Belial; but His chains beget our liberty. He empties the cup of wrath; but only that He may fill it with blessings for us. He suffers Himself to be wounded in the heel, but at the same moment breaks the head of the old Serpent, and conquers the enemy, like Samson, by His fall.

Such are the achievements of the dying Jesus. To us He would not seem more glorious were He to descend in majestic splendor from the Cross amid the music of angelic harps, than He appears to us yonder in His bleeding form. We see Him decked with victorious insignia, and while sounding the trumpet of triumph, we exclaim, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!**"

A third victory is gained at the cross, the greatest and most wonderful of all. I call it the victory of the lawgiver over the law.

There was no want of wish and will in heaven to save us. They existed abundantly; but the right to undertake the great work was wanting. The holy and inviolable law was the bolt which fastened the door of the treasury of divine mercy. The law put in its protest against our redemption. Its language was, "No salvation for sinners till their guilt is expiated;" and even eternal Majesty felt bound by the protestation.

But divine wisdom was able to loose their fetters. The Eternal Son descended upon earth to change the negative of the law into an affirmative. He suffered Himself to be "**made under the law,**" and fulfilled it, as our representative, in such a manner as to enable Him to stand forward, and say, "**Which of you convinceth me of sin?**" But this did not remove the barrier from the sluices of divine mercy. The curse had to be endured, to which we had become subject by a breach of the law. He submitted to this likewise and drank the cup of wrath. Did a drop remain? "Not one," was the law's decision. And when the voice of mercy was heard from heaven, the law had nothing to object. Divine Justice resigned the scepter to its august sister, Love, without infringing its glory in the slightest degree. We admire the victory over the law in the way of justice, and adoringly read the inscription, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**"

Yes, He is a King! But where is His kingdom?

He is founding it while hanging on the cross. The drops of blood which trickle down, are the price He paid to ransom His people, and the dying groans which issue from His breast, the joyful peal which announces the birthday of His Zion.

He did not found His kingdom when gathering the people around Him, and addressing them from the mount of the beatitudes. Nor when He cast out the spirits of darkness, and by His miraculous aid won the eternal gratitude of hundreds of the weary and heavy-laden.

Had He left the world after these triumphs, all would have remained upon earth as before, and He Himself have been without a kingdom and a people. Teaching, preaching, and example could not effect it. The new city had to be founded on the blood of the covenant; and it was done.

The hands that were nailed to the cross overcame the world, and founded, in the midst of the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of light and peace. O wonder beyond compare! What Pilate wrote remains forever true, "**Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.**"

The Jews did not imagine it was He. They ventured to cry, "**His blood be upon us and upon our children!**"

You know that their imprecation was fulfilled in the manner they desired.

"Woe!" exclaimed the blood, and cried to heaven for vengeance upon them.

Behold the result!

- A heavy storm gathers over Jerusalem.
- The torch of war is lighted in the land.
- A forest of hostile lances begirds the holy city.
- The temple sinks in flames.
- The walls fall down.
- Not one stone remains upon another,
- The blood of the children of Abraham flows in torrents.

Those who escape the sword must flee into the wide world, far from their beloved hills and the graves of their forefathers, into the barren and inhospitable waste. And Israel remains to this day a subjugated people.

In their wretchedness they are a lasting memorial that He, whose blood they had invoked over them, was and is a King, and does not suffer Himself to be mocked with impunity.

But we wait for a time in which the Lord will make it evident in another and more gratifying manner in these His ancient covenant people that He is their real and true King.

When they shall eventually come with weeping and lamentation and He shall gather them out of the land of the north, and lead them in a plain path by the rivers of water, and shall say to them, **“I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my first-born;”** then the most obstinate unbelief shall no longer rebel, but reverently fold the hands on reading the inscription, **“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”**

Yes, He is our King! He reigns from the cross. From thence to this hour He carries on the government in the city of peace.

True, He no longer hangs there, but when He presents Himself to the eye of faith, He appears, as before, in His bleeding form, and hanging on the tree. It is from thence He takes the spoil from the strong, and produces repentance in the sinful. From thence He humbles the lofty looks, and melts the stony heart in the fire of His love. From thence He comforts the anxious soul, and dries the weeping eyes of the contrite.

O how variously does He daily make it manifest that He, as the crucified Jesus, is the true King of Israel! Yes, in His crown of thorns, He governs the world of spirits and of hearts; and the greatest marvels by which He glorifies Himself upon earth, He performs with His pierced hands. Hence Calvary continues to be the place where we pay our homage, and where we cease not adoringly to cry, **“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!”**

Thus, in fact, no human hand ever wrote anything more true and well-founded than the inscription which Pilate, under divine direction, wrote and placed on the cross. Yet a little while, and signs from heaven, angelic appearances, falling stars, and graves opening at the trumpet’s sound will confirm it.

My friends, the time is at hand when we shall no longer read it on the cross, but in the radiant letters on the flowing robe of the returning Conqueror.

O that then none of us may be forced to say to the rocks, **“Fall on us,”** and to the hills, **“Cover us!”** but each of us meet Him with joyful acclamations, and hail Him Lord of all!

~ end of chapter 43 ~

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