

# THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE SUDDEN ASSAULT

AFTER coming off victorious from His spiritual conflict in Gethsemane, the divine Sufferer prepares to enter upon the thorny path of bodily affliction. His being taken prisoner, His being brought before the bar of judgment, His condemnation by the Sanhedrin, and His passage to the cross, are only symbolical representations of infinitely more exalted events, which were behind the veil, in the relations of the Mediator to God, the supreme Judge. He who is unable to regard the individual scenes of our Lord's passion from this point of view does not penetrate through them, and will never find his way in the labyrinth of the history of our Saviour's sufferings.

We imagine ourselves still enveloped in the darkness of that eventful night, in which our Lord said, in a tone of serious warning, to His disciples, and which may still be uttered to thousands in the present day, "**All of you shall be offended because of me this night.**"

Scarcely has the Saviour risen up from the ground when a new cause of alarm awaits Him.

Before His disciples are aware, lanterns and torches are seen glistening amid the gloomy bushes of the valley, and a murderous band, armed with swords, staves, and spears, is seen approaching along the banks of Kedron. The powerful preparation made for this occasion is partly in order to serve as a mask, as if they were banded together for the purpose of seizing a dangerous conspirator and rebel; and partly in consequence of a secret fear and apprehension that they might probably meet with some unexpected opposition. It is truly an infernal host with which we have to do - the bodyguard of Satan.

*We first perceive the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary.*

What accusation have they to bring against Jesus? This - that He is undermining their proud hierarchy, stripping them of their false glory, snatching from their hands the scepter of despotism over the consciences of the poor people, diminishing their tithes and resources, and intimating to them, that they ought to place themselves in the ranks of publicans and sinners.

All this was intolerable to these proud and domineering servants of mammon, and hence their hatred of the Lord of Glory.

*Near the priests we behold the Pharisees.*

Those blind leaders of the blind, the representatives of the delusive idea of individual merit, and hence, also of repugnance to a doctrine which affords a hope of salvation only by grace, and even to the most pious leaves nothing but the freely bestowed righteousness of Another. It is easy to understand how these men were offended at a Teacher who set up regeneration as a vital condition for all: whose language was, "**The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,**" and who testifies of Himself saying, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me.**"

Let us here ask ourselves, whether, until the Spirit enlightens our darkness, we are willing to be nothing, and that grace should be everything?

*In the scribes, who appear next in the band, we see the expression of a spurious wisdom, accompanied by spiritual ambition.*

No wonder, therefore, that such characters are also met with among the conspirators against Jesus. They, the learned among the people, were told that they must take their places at the feet of the Rabbi of Nazareth. They, the masters in Israel - were they to submit to this? How could such an idea fail to rouse and enrage conceited men to the utmost?

There was also a latent vexation at the numerous defeats and mortifications they had sustained in the face of the people, as often as they had ventured to assail Him. How victoriously had He always driven them from the field! How had He caught them in their own craftiness! How had He taken them captive in the very snares they had laid for Him, and then openly disgraced and triumphed over them! These were the things for which they could not forgive Him.

*Under the command of the ringleaders above mentioned, we observe the servants of the high priests.*

Those blind instruments of their superiors, who, though less guilty, are anything but guiltless; and then also, the mercenaries of the Roman temple guard. For the most part, they know not what they are doing. More reprobate than they, appears the despicable troop who, for money or favor, have voluntarily joined the band. These cowardly flatterers and men-servers carry their baseness to such a point that they dispose of their independent judgment for the most miserable price in the world. Woe to such worthless characters!

Who is it walks at their head, with a gloomy face and confused look? Who is the man, muffled up in a cloak, and bearing the impress of a forced, rather than of a natural bravery in his mien? Ah, we recognize him! It is the son of perdition, of whom it was written a thousand years before: "**He that did eat of my bread hath lifted up his heel against me.**"

It is the wretched man who wears the garb of discipleship only as the poisonous adder is clothed in its glistening skin; the hypocrite, who conceals himself in his Apostolical office, like the murderous dagger in its golden sheath. Sin is perfected in him, and condemnation ripened to maturity. In darkness and bitterness, he now hates Jesus as the darkness hates the light.

He has got beyond the period when he might have broken with Jesus with indifference, and then have gone on his way without troubling himself any more about Him. But he has now given way to all the feeling of an infernal revolt. He is furious against Him, as though the meek and lowly Jesus were an implacable Judge, by whose holiness, purity, and love, he feels himself condemned for his Own treachery, hypocrisy, and malice. He had long felt painfully uneasy in the company of Jesus. How could it be otherwise? A bird of night cannot bear the light of the sun. Think not that the lure of the thirty pieces of silver was a sufficient cause for his treachery. It was infernal in its nature, and must be sought much deeper. The unhappy disciple had already imbibed that furious spirit, which incessantly stings the lost in hell to curse and blaspheme Him who judged them, and of whom they are obliged to testify, that all His judgments are just.

**“Rise, let us be going. Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me!”**

From whence resounds this courageous and resolute call? From the same lips, out of which the cry of pressure and distress had only just before ascended to heaven, **“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!”**

But now, behold the glorious Conqueror!

He emerges from the horrible conflict in Gethsemane, as if steeled both in body and soul. His whole bearing breathes self-possession, manliness, and sublime composure. No Sooner was He aware who it was that presented the cup to Him in Gethsemane, than He willingly emptied it, and knows henceforth that the terrors and horrors which may be in reserve belong to the indispensable conditions with which the completion of His great mediatorial work is connected. This consciousness enables Him to take firm steps on the path of suffering. He dearly sees that whatever of evil awaits Him, is the result of His Father’s counsel.

When the Lord says to His disciples, **“Rise, let us be going!”**

He does so in order to show them His altered state of mind, and because He was desirous that they should all be present at His arrest, that, as eye-witnesses, they might afterward inform the world how their Master had voluntarily delivered Himself up into the hands of His enemies, and not as one who was vanquished by them.

But see what occurs?

Before the multitude that came against Him has reached the place, He proceeds several paces toward them with a firm step. In opposition to the conduct of our progenitor in paradise, who, on the inquiry, **“Adam, where art thou?”** sought concealment, our Lord approaches the armed band and asks them the simple question, **“Whom seek ye?”**

The world was to learn that the Lord was led to the slaughter, not by mistake, but intentionally, because He was the Just and Holy One of Israel; and it was for this reason also, that the Saviour asked, **“Whom seek ye?”**

The answer of the armed band was clear and decisive: **“Jesus of Nazareth,”** say they. After thus making known their object, the Lord, with the sublime composure of the divine Mediator, who not only knew all that should befall Him, but was also dearly conscious of the cause, results, and final consequences of it all, said to them, **“I am He!”** Great and significant expression! It was never uttered by the Saviour without being accompanied with the most powerful effects (John 8:58, 59).

What occurs on His making use of the words on the present occasion? On hearing them the whole band of officials start, give way, stagger backward, and fall to the ground as if struck by an invisible flash of lightning, or blown upon by the breath of Omnipotence.

That which thus powerfully affected them was, undeniably, the deep impression of the Deity of Jesus, by which they were for a time overpowered. His majestic, though simple declaration, called forth in them, in its full strength, the conviction of His superhuman glory. But this mental emotion would not alone have sufficed to stretch the whole troop bodily, as by magic, in the dust, if an act of divine omnipotence had not accompanied it.

The Lord overthrew them, in order, in the most forcible manner, to force upon them the conviction of His divine superiority, as well as to leave the world an actual proof that it was not through compulsion or weakness, that He became a sacrifice for it, but in consequence of His free determination.

The murderous band lie at His feet, prostrated by a single expression from His lips.

What would have hindered Him from walking triumphantly over them; and, after fixing them to the ground, departing uninjured and uninterrupted? But He only aims at displaying His supremacy and independence, and after attaining this object, He permits them to rise again from the ground. Their prostration in the dust before Him points out to unbelievers the situation in which they will one day be found. The homage which they refused to Jesus here below, He will in due time compel them to render Him. The knee that would not bow to Him in voluntary affection, will at length be constrained to do so by the horrors of despair.

After the armed band, by the Lord’s permission, had again raised themselves up, He repeats the question to them, **“Whom seek ye?”** accompanied this time by an overwhelming irony.

As though one who had been mistaken for a vagrant and arrested as such, should suddenly display to the view of his captors the royal star on his breast, and should calmly say to them, **“Whom did ye think to catch?”** So here, likewise, with our Lord’s question, **“Whom seek ye?”** only that here is more than an earthly king.

**“Jesus answered, I have told you that I am He. If, therefore, ye seek me, let these go their way.”**

How sweet and full of promise are these sounds! O how well the Lord was able to preserve the most perfect self-possession in every situation, however terrible; and, with His anxiety for the completion of the work of redemption, to mingle the minute and inconsiderable with the stupendous and sublime.

While girding Himself for His mysterious passage to the cross, He does not forget, in His adorable faithfulness, to rescue His disciples from the approaching storm; **“If ye seek me,”** says He, **“let these go their way.”** The evangelist adds, **“that the saying might be fulfilled which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.”**

**“If ye seek me, let these go their way.”** An expositor has very judiciously remarked on these words, that there was a delicate propriety in Christ’s not saying, “These my followers,” or “These my disciples,” but only indefinitely, while pointing to them, **“these.”** For had He applied either of the previous appellations to them, it would have been construed by the armed band as meaning “my partisans.”

In other respects, the simple expression, **“Let these go,”** uttered with emphasis, was all that was needed for the safety of His disciples. It was not a request, but a royal command, and at the same time, a hint to the disciples as to what they had to do. It was a signal for their temporary retreat from the scenes of His suffering. It would have been well for Simon Peter had he obeyed His Master’s faithful hint. At that period they were unable to cope with such a **“fight of afflictions,”** and would certainly, for a time, have all of them suffered shipwreck as regards their faith, if they had followed their Master further on His path of humiliation, not to speak of the danger which would besides have threatened their liberty, and even their lives. Christ bore upon His heart the welfare and safety of His followers, and so graciously provided for their security during the approaching storm.

But do not let us overlook the rich consolation for believers in every age, which this act of our Lord’s includes.

For He has uttered the words, **“If ye seek me, let these go their way,”** to other bands than those at Gethsemane, on our behalf. In their more profound and general sense, He spake them also to hell, earth, and the devil, for it was He whom they really sought, laid hold of, and brought low. But as regards His believing people, they have forever exhausted their power upon Him, and have left in Him their sting. And as far as these hostile powers seek in the present day anything more than to sift or try the followers of Jesus, an insuperable barrier is placed before them by these words. They can never destroy those who are in Christ. In the words above mentioned, we have a passport which insures us a safe escort across the frontier into the heavenly Jerusalem. Let us therefore honor this document, for the seal of God rests upon it.

~ end of chapter 14 ~

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