

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of CHRIST

By

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CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

THE LEGACY OF LOVE

A PLEASING SCENE presents itself to our view beneath the cross. He who was "**fairer than the children of men**" does not die unlamented. In the midst of rage and fury, love stands near Him in His dying moments and lifts up to Him its tearful and affectionate eye. Look at the little mournful group yonder, and behold a lovely little company in the midst of the bands of Belial - a hidden rosebud under wild and tangled bramble-bushes, a splendid wreath of lilies around the deathbed of the Redeemer.

It is thus that the cross is surrounded even to this day.

Though the infuriated hosts of hell rage around it, yet it is still encircled by the most estimable of the earth. For if we seek for sacred grief, for love which has emanated from heaven, for patience which never tires, and gratitude, which gives up everything - where do these beautiful and heavenly flowers flourish except beneath the cross?

We know the faithful company there, who form a living commentary on the words of the Song of songs. "**Many waters can not quench love, neither can the floods drown it.**" What do they care about hazarding their lives! Their life was the Man on the cross. What do they trouble themselves about the scorn and contempt of the world! They desire nothing else and nothing better from a world which crowned their King with thorns. Had they been nailed to the cross with Him, they would have pushed away the earth from them as a rotten and worthless plank, and have triumphantly cast their anchor in the clouds.

Look at the courageous group a little more closely. Of whom does it consist? Strangely enough, with one exception, all of them are women. The strong are fled - the weak maintain their ground; the heroes despair - the timid, who did not presume to promise anything, overcome the world.

This was because they poured out their hearts before GOD, saying, "Hold thou us up, and we shall be safe!" and speaking thus, they leaned firmly on the divine arm. GOD's strength was then mighty in their weakness.

Among the beloved women beneath the cross there is one who especially demands our sympathy.

It is the blessed one who bore the Man that bleeds on the cross - the deeply stricken Mary. Though it was grievous for Eve to stand at the grave of her favorite son Abel, and still more so for the patriarch Jacob to behold the bloody garment of his son Joseph, yet what was their grief compared with that of the mother of our Lord at the foot of the cross?

O think where she is standing, what is the cause of her grief, and who it is she mourns! Think what a Son, and what a kind of death! One thing, however, we may be assured of, that the deeply wounded Mary did not despair. Even through this, her night of weeping, the words of her Son respecting the necessity of the sufferings that awaited Him, and the glory that should follow, gleamed like some distant light.

Although leaning on the disciple whom JESUS loved, she still stands upright under the cross, and only a gentle shower of tears bedews her cheeks, but no cry of agony proceeds from her lips. Her earthly Son dies, with all the earthly connection in which she had hitherto stood toward Him, as well as the earthly ideas of Him and His kingdom.

In opposition to these, she has now to receive CHRIST by faith, as from His ashes, in a very different capacity - as One hitherto not known by her - as a Lord and Prince of Peace of an incomparably higher kind and order than human; nor did she attain to this without great pain and conflict.

At Mary's side, and serving as her support, the Apostle John meets our eye. He sees himself surrounded by problems which he is unable to solve. But where his understanding beholds only an empty desert, he has, nevertheless, an inward presentiment of infinite and hidden riches. He again introduces himself here, as he is so gladly wont to do, as "**the disciple whom Jesus loved.**" In these words he indicates to us what was his pride, his crown, and his highest boast. At the same time, they point out to us the source from whence he derived all his consolation, all his hope, and all his strength. This source was love - not the love with which he embraced the Lord, but that with which the Lord embraced him. Nor do I know anything more precious or desirable than the lively, fresh, and well-founded consciousness of the Saviour's love and affection. He who with John can sign himself the disciple whom JESUS loves, has, in this appellation, a sure guaranty for all that he needs, and for all that his heart can desire.

While the little company stand mourning together below the mighty Sufferer hangs silent and bleeding on the cross. He is in the sanctuary performing His high-priestly office, while bearing upon His heart the sinful race of Adam. "Oh," might the mourning Mary think, "if he would but once more open His gracious lips to me, and give me one parting word!" But in the sublime situation He is now occupying will He still be able to attend to what is passing at the foot of the cross? Scarcely should we think it possible.

But what occurs? O when did anything happen more generous and affecting than this? Truly, till the end of time His filial tenderness will be spoken of. In the midst of His dying agonies the divine Sufferer all at once directs His eyes to the little faithful group below; and he that is able to read in His eyes reads a sympathy and a degree of consoling, cheering, and encouraging love, such as the world till then had never beheld.

However much He may have to think of and attend to, He never loses sight of His children for a moment. However great and boundless may be the objects of His supervision and vigilance in His government, yet there will never be a moment when the eye of His love will not rest upon every individual whom the Father has given Him. They are His primary care, although in number and outward appearance, in comparison with what He has otherwise to superintend and provide for, they may be as the drops in the wide rolling ocean, and as flowerets in the immense and gloomy forests in which they stand.

The Lord first fixes His eyes on His beloved and sorely-trying mother. By means of the words He had spoken to the malefactor respecting being with Him that day in paradise, He had elevated her looks and thoughts above death and the grave. Yet still she would have to remain for a season alone in the world, which had now become so desolate to her, and lo! for this consideration, the Man of Sorrows on the cross still finds room in His heart, amid His anxieties for the world's redemption. He looks, in the kindest manner, at the weeping Mary, opens His mouth, and says in sublime tranquility, self-possession, and serenity, referring to the disciple on whom His mother was leaning, "**Woman, behold thy son!**" and then to John, "**Behold thy mother!**"

Though the words are few, yet who is able to exhaust the fullness of tender affection which is poured into them? How consoling must it have been to Mary's grieved heart, the almost cheerful manner in which her dying Son made His last bequest. The sound of His voice and the peaceful look which accompanied His words were as much as to say, "Mary, thy Son is not lost. He is only returning to His Father's happy abode in order to prepare a place for thee." And then the contents of the words themselves - how tenderly did He clothe in them His last farewell to His beloved parent! How delicately did He arrange it that by the hint given to John, she who had been so severely tried, should not also be a witness of His last and hardest struggle! And how providently does He enter at the same time into all, and even the most trifling necessities of His bereaved mother for the residue of her life upon earth! Truly when was ever the divine command to honor father and mother so deeply and comprehensively fulfilled as it was on Calvary?

It has been considered strange that the Saviour, in speaking to Mary, should have made use of the distant word, "**Woman,**" instead of the tender name of mother. In reply to this, it is certainly true that He did so, partly because He would not still more deeply wound her bleeding heart by the sweet title of mother, and likewise lest He should expose His mother to the rudeness of the surrounding crowd, But the chief reason why He used the more general term "**Woman,**" lies much deeper, both in this and the well-known scene at the marriage in Cana. He certainly meant His mother to understand that henceforward His earthly connection with her must give way to a superior one. As though He had said, "Thou, My mother, wilt from this time be as one of My daughters, and I thy Lord. Thou believest in Me, and shalt be blessed. Thou layest hold of the hem of My garment, and I appear in thy stead.

"Thou adorest Me, and I am thy High Priest and King. Mother, brother, and sister, henceforward, are all who swear allegiance to My banner. The relationships according to the flesh and the manner of the world have an end; other and more spiritual and heavenly take their place."

It was this that the Lord intended to suggest to Mary's mind; and hence the word "**Woman**," which at first sounds strange, instead of the more tender and affectionate term, "Mother". If while endeavoring to elevate Mary's mind above the sphere of merely human conceptions into a higher region, He does not forget either that He is her Son, or that she is His dear and sorely-tried mother.

The Lord is desirous, in His filial forethought, and as far as is practicable, to fill up for Mary the void which His decease would leave in her life, and give her, instead of Himself, a son to assist her, in whom she might place entire confidence, and on whose shoulders she could lean in all her distresses, cares and sorrows.

And in this new son He bequeaths to her His favorite disciple, the faithful and feeling John. It was thus He loved to the end; thus delicately does He provide for all the necessities of those He loves. And as He formerly did, so He does still. He is to this hour the compassionate High Priest. He enters most feelingly into the wants of those who confide in Him, so that everyone, whether they be widows, orphans, poor and infirm, or to whatever class of the weary and heavy-laden they belong, they may rely on His providential care.

After saying to Mary, "**Woman, behold thy son!**" He says to John, "**Behold thy mother!**"

O what a proof does the Saviour here give His disciple of the affection and confidence which He reposes in him! He imposes a burden upon him, but He knows that John will regard it as the highest honor and felicity which could be bestowed upon him on earth. Nor is the Saviour mistaken in His disciple. John understands his Master's wish, looks at Mary, and his whole soul says to her, "My Mother!"

"**From that hour**," we are informed, "**that disciple took her unto his own home.**"

John possessed therefore a house of his own, doubtless in Jerusalem, which Mary did not. Joseph had evidently already fallen asleep.

The expression, "**That disciple took her into his own home**," implies, however, according to the language, much more than that he only took care of her in his habitation. He received her into his heart. It may easily be supposed what love he felt toward her from that time, and with what tenderness and fidelity he accompanied her through life. And because John's love was in reality no other than a sacred spark from JESUS' own breast, Mary was beloved by John, as before, with the love of her divine Son.

"**Woman, behold thy Son!**" "**John, behold thy mother!**"

O attend carefully to these words.

They contain nothing less than the record of the institution of a new family fellowship upon earth. In this fellowship CHRIST is the Head, and all His believing people form unitedly one great, closely-connected family.

Begotten of the same seed, endued with the same spirit, they are all called to one inheritance, and eventually, though now scattered abroad through the world, one city with shining walls will embrace them. They soon know each other by their similarity of sentiment, bias, speech, and joyful hope, and love each other with one love - that love which overflowed into them from the heart of CHRIST their Head. As long as they linger here below, their habitation is under the cross, and their daily bread the Word of GOD; their breath, prayer, and the peace of GOD the atmosphere in which they freely and blissfully move. The inmost and most essential family feature of this spiritual fraternity is, that self in them is crucified, and CHRIST is the center of all their doing and suffering.

Let him who would envy John the pleasing task of being a support to the mother of JESUS know that the way to the same honor lies open to him. Let him reflect on a previous expression of our Lord's, **"Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? and stretching forth his hand toward his disciples, he said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my mother, and sister, and brother"** (Matt.12:48-50).

If thou art really desirous of the privilege enjoyed by John, thou now seest it may be thine. Be, from love to the Lord, a faithful help to His children; feed the hungry, give drink to him that is thirsty, and especially visit pious widows in their loneliness, and thou wilt perform a service which is well-pleasing to Him. Apply to the heavenly Prince of Peace to open thine eyes that thou mayest recognize His household; and even as He will then say to the latter, who constitute His spiritual Church, while suing for their love to thee, **"Woman, behold thy Son!"** so He will also say to thee, with reference to some troop of weary and heavy laden beloved ones, **"Behold thy mother!"**

Think what it would be if everyone exhibited a living mirror of **"the fairest of the sons of men,"** and loved GOD and the brethren as He did.

~ end of chapter 46 ~

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