# Luke - Commentaries by James Lampden Harris

Present Testimony Papers, Three Crowns, The

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"Ought not Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into His glory." (Luke 24:26)

Such was the order of the divine counsels. If the Son of God humbled Himself to take the form of a servant, and to be found in fashion as a man, and to become obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross -and all this for the wondrous end of displaying the grace of God -His name of humiliation becomes His name of exaltation; and throughout the range of heaven and earth, and even that which is beneath it, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. "For the suffering of death, Jesus is crowned with glory and honor, that He by the grace of God might taste death for every one." It is thus that the worth of the humiliation of Jesus is not only to be estimated as that by which God is glorified; but the worth of His obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross, is also manifested in the royal and priestly dignity, into which those are brought who make confession unto the Crucified One, as Savior and Lord. It is by the blood of Jesus that they are made kings and priests unto God and His Father. They enter into glory upon the sole ground of His precious blood-shedding. To Him as the Lamb they ascribe exclusively their redemption. "Thou art worthy, for thou wast slain, and halt redeemed us to God by thy blood."

But besides the common regal and priestly dignity so graciously secured to the believer, we find mention made in the New Testament of specific crowns -"the crown of righteousness," "the crown of life," "the crown of glory." These are held out as encouragements to the saint under special circumstances of trial which meet him in his path; and it will be interesting to trace the connection between the circumstances, and the particular crown held out as an encouragement under them. To be curious where God has been silent, or to attempt to shape divine revelation to human thought, is at all times prejudicial to the soul; but not to weigh the connection of Scripture, or to rest in vague generalities where the word of God is definite and precise, is to deprive ourselves of much comfort, as well as of profitable instruction.

At the close of his active and eventful ministry, the Apostle Paul thus expresses himself: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

Whatever were the hardships and sufferings of his ministry, and the humiliating position in which he was placed by it in the eyes of men, the Apostle felt its true dignity. He was "set for the defense of the Gospel," the noblest service in which it was possible for a man to be engaged; for it was no less than vindicating the honor of Christ. His deep anxiety of soul for the preservation of the faith, as that in which the welfare of the Churches was involved, was in his estimation more than all the pressure from without -"besides that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the Churches." He had no respite from warfare. "The faith" was assailed on every side, and from the most opposite quarters. It was equally endangered by Jewish ordinances and Gentile philosophy, slothful ignorance and prying curiosity. The saints for the most part were not alive to the importance of contending for "the faith." They did not perceive that by so doing they were favoring the "righteous cause" of Christ. Such a principle is needed in order to contend heart and soul for the faith once delivered to the saints. But the saints themselves are often impatient of either being roused to activity, or of being disturbed from their ease. Hence the facility with which "the faith" has been corrupted. Some have passively listened to teachers, "whose word will eat as doth a canker." Some would follow in the more liberal school of such teachers as Hymenaeus and Alexander, and "putting away a good conscience, make shipwreck concerning the faith." Some, instead of receiving by faith that which it had pleased God to reveal, were always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Others again openly controverted, and even with bitter animosity, the teaching of the Apostle, as Alexander the copper-smith. The Apostle was as it were the teacher of one single idea -yet how high, how vast, how comprehensive an idea, "Jesus Christ and Him crucified." He would not allow this grand idea to be either overlaid or undermined. On the eve of his departure, he was able to say, "I have fought a good fight; I have kept the faith." He had allowed no inroad on the faith from any quarter. He dealt with its depravers indeed very differently; but he never allowed the thought of charity to interfere with his most uncompromising defense of "the faith," whether it was endangered by the vacillating conduct of an Apostle, or the avowed opposition of a coppersmith. "The faith," in the estimation of the Apostle, involved something far beyond the question of individual salvation; an invasion on its integrity was an attack on the rights of Christ. It is this which gives its value to "the faith." In human estimate, the welfare of man is the point; but in the estimate of God, and of those who are born of Him, the first and last point is the glory of Christ. "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent Him." What is "the faith" but the present assertion of the dignity of the person of the Son, and all the titles, styles, honors, and offices which belong to Him as "the Christ of God?" The Church is set here as a witness to Him in that which He essentially is, as well as all His given glory. All this will be manifested in due time, and there will be no room for gainsaying them. But the rejection of Christ by the world has raised the question, on the ground of righteousness, whether Christ or the world is right. It is on this ground that we find the crown of righteousness connected with keeping the faith. Christ has been unrighteously deprived of His honor by the world, and His honor has not yet been publicly vindicated by judgment. In the meanwhile, those who are taught of God to know Him, live only for one end as their highest object, and that end is to assert His rights. It may be but in very feeble testimony -it necessarily must be with personal humiliation, and real denying of self; but they only who are living for such an object will be found in the right when Christ is publicly manifested. Such have renounced all that men esteem valuable for Christ, and have asserted His honor when the assertion of His honor brings no present advantage; and this, in God's estimate, is righteousness. Hence the encouragement to fighting the good fight of faith. When Jesus appears, He will own those who have stood up for His honor as having been on the side of righteousness. The question has been raised by the Lord Jesus Himself, as to whether He or the world is right. It is a question of righteousness. "O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee: but I have known Thee, and these have known that Thou hast sent Me." The Father hath vindicated the righteous cause of His Son, by raising Him from the dead, and giving Him glory -leaving the world (in righteous retribution) under the wicked one, until the rights of the Son are publicly vindicated by judgment on the world. If we take part with Christ,

while His rights are actually unvindicated by judgment on the world, we are on the side of righteousness; and the crown of righteousness, when Christ's title shall be fully vindicated, is held out as our encouragement in the confession of Him before men. If we side with the world, then are we classed with those who believe not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness. The crown of righteousness is held out to all that "love the appearing" of Jesus; for His appearing makes manifest to all, that which the Holy Ghost has manifested to His disciples now, and which they have confessed unto before men.

There is an interesting connection between this passage of the apostle in his Epistle to Timothy, and the address of the Lord Himself to the Church of Philadelphia. "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name." In all its feebleness, this Church had stood up for the honor and dignity of Christ. They did not measure the value of the name of Jesus by their own conscious weakness. This they, maintained; and the exhortation to them is, still to maintain it. "Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast; that no man take thy crown." The Lord regarded them as already crowned. They were on the side of righteousness: and the danger was lest the crown should be taken from them by their ceasing to confess the name of Jesus. "Behold, I come quickly"; and then the crown with which He saw them already invested, would be publicly seen by others -a Crown of Righteousness. So the apostle, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me; and not to me only, but to all who love his appearing." Those who keep His word, and deny not His name, may well love His appearing; even as it is said of the faithful remnant of Israel in a yet future day: "Hear the word of the Lord, ye that tremble at His word: Your brethren that hated and cast you out for my name's sake, said, Let the Lord be glorified; but He shall appear to your joy, and they shall be ashamed." "The Crown of Life." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." This crown is held out as encouragement, under the peculiar and characteristic temptation to which the saint is exposed by "loving his life in this world." The Lord presents Himself, as knowing His own worth, as the one absorbing object of our affections; on the other hand, the god of this world, either directly or indirectly, presents some present object of advantage or interest. Hence the temptation. Is the present object of Christ most precious to us? It is as though the Lord Himself addressed us individually in the person of Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" whatever the object may be. The crown of life is given to those "who love Him," even as the crown of righteousness is given to those who "love His appearing." This line of doctrine of the value of the Lord Jesus Himself as a paramount object, is thus presented to us by the Lord Himself: "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me; for whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for My sake, shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? for the Son of Man shall come in the glory of the Father, with His angels, and then He shall reward every man according to his works." The Lord alone is a worthy exchange for the soul; everything else is worthless to give the soul for (give for his soul}. How wise, how rich, how blessed is that man who has exchanged himself for Christ! Man can give nothing in exchange for his soul; but Christ presents Himself to be received, in the conscious knowledge of His own value.

The life which Jesus gives to them who receive Him, is a life only nourished by faith in Him, feeding on Him who gave it. It finds no aliment from anything in this world; all here is contrary to it, and it has to struggle its way all the time we are here through opposing obstacles. It is endurance unto the end; and this endurance is characteristic. It is alike in contrast with Israel in the land under David and Solomon, and with Israel restored in the millennium under David's Son. In both these instances there is no "patience of hope," but actual possession. But now the life communicated from the risen and glorified Head in heaven, to the individual members on earth, necessitates trial. The life thus communicated does not, as it were, breathe its native air: for this it longs. What freedom what expansiveness it will have when Christ who is our life shall appear, and we also appear with Him in glory {Col. 3:4}. But so long as the life so communicated is here, it is characterized by endurance. "To them who by patient continuance in well-doing." "Tribulation worketh patience." "They bring forth fruit with patience." Patience or endurance is, practically, the key-word to us. We have to do with the God of patience; and we are strengthened according to His glorious power unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness. There are indeed special temptations to which as individuals we are liable, but present circumstances of themselves become a trial to the saint, because he is a saint. We are in the world, and the world is under the Wicked One {1 John 5:19}; and we know very experimentally the difference between quietly floating down the stream, and being set against its course. All of the world which once we thought to be for us, is now felt to be against us. The world, and all in it -whether conventionally had or good, moral or immoral, religious or irreligious -was set against Jesus, because He was not of it, and this, His living testimony against it that its deeds were evil, was acutely felt by it. His gracious word to His disciples is "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed me."

It is with respect to temptations of this kind that we are exhorted to run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, who for the joy set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame All the temptations of the blessed Jesus arose from the contrariety of that which was around Him, to that which He was in Himself. "The Prince of this world came, and had nothing in Him." "He was tempted like as we are, yet without sin. " All the pressure of circumstances was let loose against Him, and He suffered under the pressure; but nothing ever turned Him aside from dependence on God, or made Him swerve from His purpose of doing the will of God. He carried His obedience to death, even the death of the Cross; He endured the Cross, "and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God." In Him we see what life crowned really is, and He holds out to us the crown of life to cheer us in running with patience the race set before us.

"Without sin" -one difference; but an amazing one. "In Him was no sin" -no lust to correspond with the cunningly-devised temptation. Pressure of all circumstances from without must necessarily cause the saint suffering. Such a character of temptation is acutely felt, because of its contrariety to that which the saint is as born of God; but, alas! they know painfully the amazing difference between themselves and Jesus in this very respect -they cannot say "without sin." They know to their sorrow that there is that in them which is ever ready to correspond with the temptation, from whatever quarter it comes. "Every man is tempted when he is drawn aside of his own lust and enticed." The life communicated by the Spirit is thus subject to constant pressure, and exposed to constant hindrances; but even then it turns to us for a testimony that the life is there, by reason of the temptations being so sorely felt. We naturally desire the removal of the temptation, but it pleases the Lord to allow it, in order to show the sufficiency of His own grace. The temptation may increase upon us, so as almost to shut us up in hopelessness, but it only tends to prove the faithfulness of God. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." In every temptation the turning point will be, whether the Lord or ourselves is the object nearest to our hearts. This is the point which the Lord regards. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive," etc. "When he is tried" surely means after having endured the temptation, without yielding to it. What a blessed difference between life suffering and struggling for its very existence, and life crowned, and in that sphere where its energies have unhindered scope, and where there is nothing to distract its affections from the one object which at once draws them forth and satisfies them.

We find the like connection between the crown of life and present trial in the message of the Lord Himself to the Church in Smyrna "I know thy tribulation." "Behold, the Devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." "The Crown of Glory." "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed; feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind: neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock; and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." There is something exceedingly touching in this, coming as it does through one now matured in the school of Christ. God has His heritage here, and it is exposed to waste. God has His flock here, and it is exposed to present danger. It is very difficult indeed for us to get our thoughts into the channel of God's thoughts, so as to become interested in that which belongs to Him, because it belongs to Him. It is a thought too large for selfish man to entertain, to be interested in the flock of God, so that the elders themselves were in danger of falling back on the littleness of their own hearts, so as to care for the sheep, not because they belonged to God, but as though they belonged to themselves. Hence the danger of lording it over God's heritage. The actual state of the Church painfully proves the total disregard of the Apostolic admonition. There is a present reward in taking the oversight, or feeding the sheep of Christ as a congregation. It tends to produce much reciprocity of kindness and sympathy. But the human element so predominates, justified as it is supposed by necessity, and unquestioned from its generality, that the accidents of locality and of congregations have become the essentials of pastoral care; so that even the th ought of caring for the flock of God is scarcely entertained. We are all great losers by this. The attempt to care for Christians as the flock of God appears almost hopeless and chimerical; so much so, that if a servant of God is led of the Spirit to act simply for the flock of God, he is regarded either as a suspected person or a disturber of peace and order.

The flock of God has ever been "a little flock." It is of little consequence in the estimation of men, and, has its only claim to be cared for, that it belongs to God. But what a claim this is; and how happy, as well as honorable, any service rendered to "the poor of the flock" on such a claim. It is the thought of the value and preciousness of the flock to the chief Shepherd which gives such an interest to any present care of them. Who can estimate the sheep as He does, who says, they are "my sheep;" "I lay down my life for the sheep" -"My Father gave them me?" He is responsible for bringing every sheep safe to the Father; and among His many crowns, His Shepherd crown will not be the least, when He shall say -"Of those which thou gavest me, I have lost none." It will be His crown of joy and glory too, that not one of the feeblest of the flock -not one of the most erring, has, through His vigilant and tender care, been plucked out of His hand. True pastoral care may perhaps appear more rare than it actually is, because its exercise is often most unobtrusive. There are, however, occasions when the watchful Shepherd sees the wolf coming, when the sheep are unsuspecting, and even dislike to be alarmed. Nothing short of the deep persuasion that the sheep of Christ are to be cared for because they are His, and because His affections and interests are occupied with them, can lead either to efficient oversight or diligent feeding. It is the lack of this essential element -namely, responsibility to Christ, in caring for that which belongs to Christ -which so enfeebles pastoral ministry in our day. The true genius of such ministry is that the flock of God is of more consequence than the individual who tends it. The present glory of the Christian Shepherd is thus expressed: "Your servant for Jesus' sake." To watch over the flock, to warn of coming danger, and if the wolf is coming boldly to meet him, is not to lord it over God's heritage, but to act in duty to Christ. The glory of Christ personally, and care for the sheep as being His, are inseparably connected; but when the thought of man having propriety in the sheep is introduced, so that they are regarded as "his flock" or "his people," the glory of Christ often becomes secondary to the desire of keeping the flock together, and Christ's own sheep are cast out. When the Shepherd of Israel Himself visited His people, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and "were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." The shepherds of that day "fed themselves, and not the flock." "They had trodden down the pastures and fouled the waters." When one sheep heard the voice of the chief Shepherd and followed Jesus, the accredited shepherds "cast him out" (John 9). It is a mournful spectacle when the honor of Christ is sacrificed professedly for the care of the flock; for true care for the flock of God cannot exist without a paramount regard to the honor of Christ Himself. Jesus was forced to lead out "His own sheep" from that fold which was maintained against His own honor, and to set up a new fold in heaven, because the old earthly fold afforded no longer any security for His sheep (John 10). In heaven He is now known, as "the great Shepherd of the sheep brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant"; and His own sheep on earth own Him in the same blessed title. He not only exercises His Shepherdly care, and oversight, as risen and glorified, but as having laid down His life for the sheep, the sheep being thus His own by purchase {and redemption}, as well as by distinct gift of the Father. What deep interest, what loving care must He necessarily take in the sheep; and now, as "seen of angels," what glory must be His, in not losing sight of the feeblest saint, and in counteracting all the power and wiles of the adversary. Faith now owns Him as "the good" and "the great Shepherd," and will He not be manifested as the crowned Shepherd? And Israel will then know their rejected Shepherd, whose heart yearned with compassion over the multitudes, as the only true Shepherd-King. "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God I Behold the Lord God will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him: behold His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He shall feed His flock like a Shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." How perfect is the order of divine teaching! It is Peter the Elder who speaks to the elders. He had been a witness of the sufferings of Christ, when He laid down His life for the sheep. He duly estimated the value of those sufferings, and could speak with divine certainty on such a ground, as about himself to partake of the glory to be revealed. But he knew how closely connected that glory was with the flock of God. It was after he had witnessed the sufferings of Christ, and had seen the Lord alive from the dead, that he had learned how dear to the heart of Christ were His sheep. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? he saith unto Him; Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs He saith to him again, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto Him, Yea Lord, thou knowest that I love Thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And He said unto Him, Lord, thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep." Peter thus learned the value and preciousness of the sheep of Christ to Christ Himself. He could very feelingly associate the flock with the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow; and how suitable for him who had received the thrice repeated commission to feed the flock, to say to the elders with his own eye on the glory, "Feed the flock of God. " How suitable, also, for him, in the deep knowledge of the value of the sheep to Christ Himself, to connect the humble service of tending the flock with the crown of glory. It was the shepherd lad whom his father thought not of bringing before the prophet, on whom the Lord had set his eye. "He chose David, also, his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds; from following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands." The humble office of tending the flock was the suited preparation for the crown of royalty. David, the shepherd, becomes the Lord's anointed king, -true picture of the great and good Shepherd King! And where can the varied grace of Christ be so deeply learned as in tending the sheep of Christ? No trial, no sorrow, no temptation, no feebleness has escaped His forethought; and tending the flock is the application of the manifold grace of God in Christ, to the manifold need of His sheep. Such ministry may be very unobtrusive, and one which brings no present honor; its proper sphere is by no means necessarily

one of publicity. Public ministry has its honored place; but tending the flock will lead a great deal more into private and individual ministry. An elder physically disabled for the active ministry of public testimony, may still find an honorable retirement in watching over the flock of God; warning of coming danger, comforting the feeble-minded, restraining the impatience of youth, rectifying disproportioned truth. If an elder be indeed "a father," he knows "Him that was from the beginning"; having learned, by long experience, his own need of all that Christ is, he will be jealously alive to His glory, and will often see a danger unperceived by others, of some passing subject of interest displacing Christ. How many once absorbing objects, even in the Church of God, have passed away; how many fond expectations have been disappointed. The interest in Christ's sheep, in that which they were to the elder himself, has been superseded by the more healthful interest in them as belonging to Christ; and the crown of glory which fadeth not away is held out as an encouragement. A pet-lamb often grows to be mischievous, while the flock, which has had the common care of the shepherd, are gentle and docile. Christians have been injured almost as much by being petted as by neglect. They often think of their pastor, to the practical forgetfulness of Christ Himself being the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, and that His under-shepherds are responsible to Him for the care of His sheep. For the most part, pastoral care has too much in it of the human element; personal regard for the man himself is more prominent than esteem for his work's sake. Hence pastoral care has often much present reward -so as not to render needful the encouragement of the crown of glory. If pastoral care is bestowed on Christ's sheep, because they belong to Christ, it will feel and value such a blessed encouragement.

It is interesting to notice how inseparably these crowns are associated with the appearing of Jesus Himself. He is the Giver of the crown; and what would any crown be if it was not His gift, that we might wear it or cast it down in His own immediate presence? Does the apostle speak of a crown of Righteousness? He says, "which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing." It is said, "he shall receive the Crown of Life, which the Lord has promised to them that love Him." "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory." And, lastly, it is written, "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a Crown of Glory that fadeth not away." The thought of personal or official glory can never displace in the soul the more blessed thought of seeing Jesus as He is, being like Him, and enjoying His immediate presence forever. "Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Presbutes

The Present Testimony 2:72-85 (1850).

Believe and Live, Necessity of Love, The

“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 be 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 he preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.” Luke 24:44-51.

“And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel: which also said, 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.” Acts 1:10-11.

Most people, no doubt, are aware that the Acts of the Apostles comes from the same pen as the Gospel of Luke. Acts is an appendix to the narrative of the Lord’s history on earth. In Luke you get Him going up to heaven; in Acts you get the further truth, that He who has gone up will so come in like manner as He went up. He went up in the clouds; He will return again in the clouds. From earth He was seen to go up; to earth will He be seen to come again. I am not speaking now of the intermediate blessed fact that He is coming into the air for His people, before He is seen from the earth at all, because now I am addressing those who are not His people—those who have not received into their hearts this Savior, the blessed Jesus. On such I want to press this passage in Luke 21. “Thus it behooved Christ to suffer.” Here is the Lord just before He goes off the earth leaving this company, who had known and loved Him, to be His witnesses and to tell this tale, that thus it behooved Him to suffer. And oh, if it behooved Him thus to suffer, is there not something that behooves you, my reader?

Does it not behoove you to repent and believe, in order to the remission of your sins? If there is an absolute necessity that He should suffer and die, is there no necessity laid on you? What was Christ’s necessity? Why did it behoove Him to suffer? On the one hand, because of the glory of God; on the other hand, because of His deep love to you and me. Was He under sentence of death? Did He need to suffer because of that? Far be the thought. There was no necessity beyond the necessity that love knows, and the necessity of love is, that it can give itself no rest till it has its object in the place love would have it in.

It was love brought Christ down, love made Him suffer, love made Him die: it was love, and love alone, infinite love to you and to me. He loves, too, to put on your heart and on mine the weight of His love; and knowing that nothing but suffering could meet our case, He comes down willing to suffer, prepared to suffer. Why? Because you could not be saved if He did not; because I could not he saved if He did not; because if you suffer for your own sins, you must suffer for all eternity: for what mere mortal could exhaust the judgment of God in respect of sin? None! None but an Infinite Being could do so, and Jesus was that.

None but God could know what sin really is, and what the judgment due to it is; and Jesus is God, and He, as God, knowing what God’s thought was—what the judgment was, came down and bore the judgment Himself. There was the necessity of love, He says, that I should suffer, for they never could be saved if I did not. And when He has borne sins, drained the cup of wrath to the very dregs, and risen up out of all the suffering, He says, Go and tell everyone that it behooved Me to suffer that forgiveness right be preached to the whole world. And where does this forgiveness commence? At the guiltiest spot in the whole world— i.e., pardon begins at the very spot where they killed Him. Now let me ask you, Are you forgiven yet? Forgiveness and life eternal are the fruits of the Savior’s blood, and who may have them? All, all who believe.

Oh, careless man, careless, worldly woman, you who have only lived for pleasure, you who have thought of nothing but pleasure here, have you ever thought of the sufferings of the Savior? Have you ever thought that He took that fearful woe that you and I might have weal for eternity, that He took sorrow that you and I might have joy for eternity? Have you ever thought of Him, of Jesus? Has it ever bowed your heart to think of what it cost Him to rescue such as you and me?

Pause and think one moment now. Cast a backward look at His wondrous history, with its close of agony and of shame. Oh, is it nothing to you that for such as you and me, He, the Lord of glory, gives Himself up to be sold for the price of the meanest slave — that He is willing to pass through anything if only He may carry out the deep purpose of His heart, meet the claims of God, burst the bonds of the grave, annul death, break the devil's power, and save you? Yes, save you; that was the deep purpose of His heart. Have you ever thought of it?

Behold Him in the garden! With torches and weapons his enemies draw near to take Him. How easily might He have escaped; for when He asked the question, "Whom seek ye?" and followed it with "I am He," they go backward, and fall to the ground. He might have escaped, but what of His people? Listen again. "If ye seek me, let these go their way" — that is, He says, "You may have Me, but you must not have Mine, you shall never have Mine." Ah, Jesus will give up anything and everything, give up Himself if He may only save you. And this is my Jesus, mine own Savior, my Lord, my blessed Jesus—mine. Oh, would you not like to be able to say of Him too, "Mine, my Jesus"?

What won my heart was this, "He gave His back to the miters." He suffered everything; and was left alone in His grief, for He looked for comforters and found none. And at that moment —when everyone had forsaken Him. and He turned to God—at that moment, when comfort from God would have been the more grateful to His heart, broken by reproaches, that is the very moment that God takes to show His hatred of sin, to turn away even from Him when it was laid upon Him, so that He cried in His depth of unfathomable agony, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

There the magnificent depths of His affection came out, for He was willing, I may say, willing even for God to forsake Him, that He might vindicate God's honor, and save you and me. Heaven, and earth, and hell witnessed a stupendous struggle that day—a struggle between life and death, between love and hatred; but love is more than conqueror, and Jesus, dying, leaves this precious legacy to every poor sinner, "It is finished!" The want is finished that sets the poor sinner free. Heaven rejoiced with loud hosannas, and hell, I believe, trembled and was dismayed. And what shall earth do? What shall you and I do? Take those words and believe them, and rejoice in them, too, shall we not? Have sympathy with heaven's joy, shall we not? I will, at any rate, and I counsel you to do the same.

But there is more. He who died has risen again. Angels came down, and rolled away the stone from that tomb where they had laid Jesus. Why did they roll it away, think you? Was it for Him to rise? Far be the thought! No, no! They rolled away the stone that you and I might look in and see that He has risen, see that He is free. Who is free? The sinner's substitute; your Substitute, if you will take Him as such—the One who, I can say, bore my sins. Can you say that too? He bore my sins, but now He is free, and so am I.

My sin brought in death, but Christ's death put away my sin; and now the resurrection of Christ is the evidence from God of the value of the work which Christ has accomplished, and which God has accepted, and by virtue of which the sinner is accepted too.

No arch can rest save on two pillars; and what stupendous pillars we have for the arch of faith to rest upon—Christ's death and Christ's resurrection! And what about your feelings, do you ask me? I will tell you. My feeling is one of absolute security, resting on such mighty pillars.

But "Repentance" as well as "remission of sins" was to be preached.

What is repentance?

It is a man judging himself before God. It is not like so many steps you have to climb up in order to be saved; but if you have given heed to God's testimony, listened to His word, and you have been living in pleasure and sin all your days, you will find you cannot but repent. The Prodigal Son when he turned round and thought of his father, found that he had misspent his life; and, whoever you are, I challenge you, Have you not misspent your life? Oh, answer this question now between your heart and God; or at the great white throne you will have to answer it, yea, have there to own-I misspent my life, my life was one great mistake. My heart was not God's, my life was spent in distance from God. I knew not God's Son; He had no place in my affections or my thoughts.

Is this true of you, dear friend? Oh, how you need forgiveness! for you have lived in a so-called Christian land, possibly have professed to be a Christian too, and have been a hypocrite as well as a sinner, for you have been professing to have what you have not got. To find out "I am not worthy," that is repentance. The moment I wake up to find what my life has been, I cannot help judging it; that is repentance.

Look at the thief on the cross. Too bad for earth, on the road to hell, he spends his last hours in abusing Christ! Look at it! Hear him abusing Christ. But listen! Jesus is heard to speak. Hearken to what He says: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." And the man says to himself, "Why I have been taunting Him, and He is praying for me; what a wretch I am!" And then his neighbor, the other thief, speaks again, and says, "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us." And this one says, "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation, and we indeed justly?" He learns his own case in the presence of Christ, and judges himself, and then he turns to Jesus, with, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." And Jesus says, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

A few more hours roll away, and this same man, who had taunted and reviled Christ, enters heaven—enters that scene of glory in company with Christ! Too bad for earth, he is just the one for a Savior to pick up and save. You will find when a man really sees his sin and guilt, that you have no need to preach repentance to him, for he judges, he condemns himself.

And what is the effect of repentance? It is this: If in repentance I condemn myself, I take that work out of God's hands. Why will a man be condemned by-and-by? Because of his sin. Why will a believer never be condemned? Because he has condemned himself already, taken, as it were, the work out of God's hands. You must repent, or be judged by God; and if judged by God, be damned. He who says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," says also, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

"Oh," you say, "but I do not believe in being damned." But Jesus did, and suffered to save us from it.

"But I do not believe in everlasting punishment." But Jesus did, and underwent the wrath of God that we might never undergo it.

There is repentance on the one hand, and remission of sins on the other. And oh, my friend, will not you take the pardon, the forgiveness, He proclaims, take the life eternal He will give? Decide for God and His Christ; repent, turn round to Jesus! You may not have another day in which to decide this eternally-important matter. Yet another hour, another moment, and He may have come back in the cloud for His people. Jesus had taken His own out as far as to Bethany, and lifting up His hands, He blessed them; and while He blessed them He was parted from them, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. He was taken up; and they, with their eyes still fixed, are told, “This same Jesus shall so come in like manner.”

And what is the next thing in the world’s history? The Jesus they have despised and slain, the Jesus they have cast out of this world, shall come back to it, and every eye shall see Him. Would you like Him to come now? “No,” says the unconverted man. Why not? Because you are unprepared, unready, unwashed, unforgiven. My friend, you had better make haste. God says, “Now is the accepted time;” and you had better not put off any longer the grave matter, the eternally-important matter, of your soul’s salvation. Oh, trust Jesus with it now, and know the sweetness of His pardoning grace! Oh, gaze on Him, and know that sweet, sweet sense of the remission of sins! For, if you trust Jesus, I can tell you this, God delights to honor those who trust Jesus. How sweet to stand between His first coming and His second! His first coming has made us meet to be where He is; His second coming will place us where He is. His first coming took my sins away; His second coming will take me away. The Christian stands between His first coming and His second. What a thing it is to be a Christian! Who would not belong to Christ? Oh, my friend, will you not decide for Him just now, and take the eternal life He offers?

W. T. P. Wolston

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