

"THEY WATCHED HIM THERE"

"And sitting down they watched him there." Matthew 27:36.

Every scene from the life of Christ is vitally interesting to true Christians. Between Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's cross He encountered much opposition. He was betrayed, arrested, forsaken, tried and condemned. Even though he could not find any fault in Christ, Pilate yielded to the blood-thirsty mob that was clamoring for His crucifixion. The Roman soldiers took Christ into the palace, stripped Him, put a robe on Him, placed a crown of thorns on His brow and pressed it down, placed a reed in His hand and then mocked Him. They spat on Him and smote Him on the head with a reed. Then, they removed the robe from Him and re clothed Him with His own attire. From the pile, which lay close by, they selected a cross and laid it on His shoulders. The procession then passed along the most frequented streets of the city.

From the scene of Christ's trial to the place of crucifixion was nearly a mile. Each condemned man had to carry the cross on which he was to be executed. We see Christ as He was leaving Pilate's judgment hall and starting to Calvary, bearing His own cross. He did not bear it very far until His strength failed. The sleepless nights, the severe scourgings, the painful crown of thorns, the agony of Gethsemane and the weight of the cross were too much for Him. Tradition says that He fell under the weight of the cross. There was nothing to do except to transfer the heavy cross to the shoulders of another. When the soldiers had laid the ghastly burden on Simon, they proceeded a short distance from the city wall to a skull-shaped hill.

Upon their arrival at Calvary, they stripped Christ, His garments falling to the executioners, and laid Him on His back on the cross, which was lying on the ground. They drove the cruel spikes through the palms of His hands, fastening them to the two ends of the cross-piece. They nailed His feet to the upright piece. While the blood was flowing, a hole was prepared in the ground, the cross was lifted on end and dropped with a thud, leaving Him to suffer a lingering and painful death as the blood dripped from His head, His hands and His feet.

This job of crucifying Jesus Christ was all in a day's work for the Roman soldiers. When they had performed their official duty, and the condemned men were hanging on their crosses in full view of the multitude, the soldiers sat down with a sigh of relief and fastened their eyes on the central figure, Jesus Christ, who had been the subject of so many remarks during the previous three years. Why did they watch Him? They did so to prevent His friends from taking His body down from the cross, and thus preserve His life. They were there to see that the death sentence was carried out.

When the Roman officers sat down and watched Him there, what did they see? They saw a defenseless man die without a complaint or a criticism of any kind. That was enough to fill them with a wondering awe. They had never seen anybody die like Christ died.

"And sitting down they watched him there." Could any language suggest more than the words "Him there" in conjunction? To me these words suggest three things:

I. A Person.

This word "Him" applies to a person. That Person is Christ. The more we know about Him, the more we wonder that He was there. We certainly ought to fix our thoughts upon Him. The thoughts of the Christian should be occupied with the Saviour.

1. Think of what Christ said.

"Never man spake like this man." How did Christ speak?

(1) Christ spoke profoundly.

Most people speak profoundly occasionally, but Christ never spoke in any other way. Always and everywhere He was talking about the big things, such as God, man, sin, salvation, righteousness, truth, justice, love, life now, life hereafter, etc. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have listened to Him?

(2) Christ spoke authoritatively.

Our Lord never guessed, surmised, hesitated, or submitted anything for the consideration of others with the hope that they would reach the right conclusion. He spoke with authority. He said something tremendous and there was a note of finality about it.

2. Think of what Christ did.

"He went about doing good." He did nothing else. None of us can make that claim. We help others and we hinder others. Christ never made it easier for anybody to do wrong, or harder for anyone to do right. He never increased anybody's load, but He helped to carry it instead. His whole ministry was beneficent. Behind everything that He did was the motive of love. He did not do anything for popularity, position or praise. He exercised unstinted generosity to all classes out of pure love.

3. Think of what Christ was.

What Christ was accounts for what He said and did.

(1) He was human.

His humanity was real. He was born. He grew up in the natural way from baby-hood to childhood. He played. He learned His lessons. He developed from childhood to manhood. He worked. His humanity was perfect and not faulty. He never had an evil thought, motive, desire, word or deed.

(2) He was divine.

God said of Him, "This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." Peter said of Him, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Christ was truly man and very God.

II. A Place.

"There"—Where? He was on Calvary, that mound outside the city wall of Jerusalem on which the vilest offenders were put to death. It was a place of abject shame. It was the common execution ground for felons and outlaws. It was a place of desolation and horror. It was a place of horrible death, and yet, Christ was there.

When they crucified Christ, the nails were driven through the parts of His hands and His feet which were full of nerves and tendons, and that created the most exquisite anguish. The unnatural position and the violent tension of His body caused a painful sensation from the least motion. In the distended parts of the body more blood flowed through the arteries than could be carried back into the veins. Therefore, too much blood found its way from the aorta into the head and stomach, and the blood vessels of the head became pressed and swollen. The general obstruction of circulation caused an internal excitement, exertion and anxiety more intolerable than death itself. To all of the inexpressible misery and lingering anguish was added a burning and raging thirst.

III. A Purpose.

1. To disclose the criminality of sin.

Sin is a spot man cannot erase, a disease he cannot cure, a burden he cannot remove,

a bondage he cannot escape, a cord he cannot sever, an idol he cannot dethrone and a fiend that is dragging him down the sloping stairway into the regions of destruction. Sin is deceit, disorder, devastation and death in any place. It is the darkest fact, the most fearful reality, God's enemy and man's destroyer. When you see "HIM THERE" you can understand something of how dreadful sin is.

2. To redeem from sin.
The only hope of redemption from sin is in Jesus Christ, "the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sin of the world." This message is the only one I have, the only one that people need, and the only one that will result in saved souls and transformed lives.
3. To declare the inflexibility of righteousness. Christ was there to prove that there is a standard of righteousness, and that there is a difference between right and wrong. By His death He met and discharged the exacting demands of the law. His death is the charter of our pardon. It secures our acceptance with God and our heirship into the glories of His household. On the cross He accomplished perfect atonement for us.
4. To display the sovereignty of love.
When you see "HIM THERE" you will realize that God loved you without stint or reservation. Nowhere else can you ever learn the truth of God's love for a sinner. His cross is the very academy of love. Love exuded from Him in every drop of His shed blood.

"See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down:
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."

To see "HIM THERE" causes me to want to give Him my very best as long as I live.