

"BEHOLD THE MAN!"

"Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!" John 19:5.

Pilate sought to accomplish by stratagem what he should have insisted upon as a simple matter of right. He tried the expediency of reminding the people that it was the custom of the governor to grant a free pardon to some prisoner at the time of the feast of the passover. That stratagem was a colossal failure. Instead of asking for the release of the Lord Jesus Christ, as Pilate hoped they would, the mob clamored for Barabbas. Pilate then tried the expediency of inflicting on Christ Jesus a punishment short of the death penalty for which the priests and people cried in the hope that when they saw the effect of the lesser punishment their hatred would be satisfied.

In preparation for the scourging, the arms of the victim were tied to a post near the ground. In that position lashes were inflicted on the bare shoulders, head and face with a whip of leather thongs loaded at the extremity with lead or bone. Scourging was such a brutal punishment that people frequently died under it. The soldiers, coarse and callous as they were, were not content with the scourging. They made cruel sport of the Saviour. They had heard that the charge against Him was that He claimed to be a king. To add insult to injury, the soldiers, in mocking imitation of the royal robes of state, mantled His bleeding form with a faded purple garment, and for a crown they pressed a torturing wreath of thorns upon His head, and it pierced deep into His lovely brow. Then they made a pretended obeisance in rude mockery. Instead of a salute, each one spit in His bruised face. It was a carnival of fiends wreaking their vengeance. But, even with all their insults He had the carriage, poise and power of the Son of God. He bore it all with patience and ineffable love. His doing so placed Him on the throne of eternal memory and universal dominion.

After our Lord had been scourged and mocked and while He was still wearing the crown of thorns and the faded purple robe, Pilate led Him out before the mob. He appealed to them saying, "Behold the man!" Perhaps Pilate thought that the sight of this tortured and mangled form would appeal to their sympathy. Likely he thought that, blood-thirsty as the people were, their vengeance would be satisfied at the sight of their victim in this extremity of suffering and misery, and they would then say, "Let Him go." But, they did not do so. Like a wolf which has tasted blood, they were insatiable, and the very sight of His emaciated form, stained all over with the streaming gore, did but kindle more deeply their hatred and cruelty. It caused them to cry more loudly, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!"

In presenting Christ Jesus to the crowd with the words, "Behold the man!" Pilate was saying far more than he knew. Did he know that he was dealing with the Man of all men? Did he know that this was the Man Who was to make the earth to tremble and the kingdoms to shake? His manhood is more sublime than the Himalaya heights with all their grandeur. He is the earth's loftiest specimen, the effulgence of God's greatest glory. He is unique in history. His glory blazes like a conflagration across the centuries. He is both God and man.

Why did Pilate say, "Behold the man!"? Quite likely it was the first time in his experience that Pilate hesitated about the crucifixion of a helpless victim of popular fury. One would have thought that Pilate's chief inducement would have been to please the Jews by crucifying one who was the object of

their bitter hatred. Yet, he hesitated; for he had never looked on a prisoner like this One, Who was helpless in his hands, without weapon to defend Himself, and without a friend to speak for Him. He had never looked upon such a man. Even in His hour of shame and agony, the Christ, Who was the victim of the hatred of the people He came to save, towered above them in majesty. Moreover, the completeness of Christ struck Pilate very forcefully. He had seen bits of men before, but for the first time he had been privileged to see a full and complete man. He was complete in the matter of character. In Him all virtues combined and blended. He was complete in that He belonged not to one era but to all ages. He transcends all limitations of time. He is not temporary but eternal.

I. The Ministry Of Christ.

Time permits me only to touch the marvelous and matchless ministry of Christ, so my remarks will be limited to that phase of it which was announced by the angels at His birth, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men" (Luke 2:14).

1. The principles of peace.

A mere declaration about peace will not bring it. Christ came to bring peace to mankind. Peace is lacking because the world has not recognized and followed the principles Christ enunciated. Peace cannot be legislated. It must grow out of the soil of right principles.

2. The price of peace.

Christ proved that peace is costly. See Him in Gethsemane, before the unjust tribunals of His day, and dying on Calvary! Our nation is an example of the fact that peace is expensive. The colonists suffered, sacrificed and died for peace in America. Behold Washington and his half-clad men at Valley Forge! Trace them by the blood from their wounded feet, and you will see how costly peace was to America.

Salvation is ours because of the price the Master paid. His sacrifice is the only remedy for our sin, the inspiration of our present life and the foundation of our future bliss.

Behold Him as they crucified Him! Note the droppings of His gore. See the thorny crown upon His head. Note the scars of misery upon Him. Perceive the unutterable anguish which He suffered. It would have been impossible for us to have known Christ's love in all its heights and depths if He had not died. If you would know real love, retire to Calvary and see the Man of Sorrows on the cross.

"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?"

Rightly beholding the cross of Christ will excite the emotion of ardent love.

"But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do!"

3. The Prince of peace.

There are two kinds of peace--national and personal. Christ came to bring both. The world may be torn asunder, but amidst it all the heart that trusts Christ will have "peace, sweet peace." If people would turn to Christ, "The Prince of Peace," and acknowledge Him as King of kings and Lord of lords, peace would prevail throughout the world.

II. The Mastery Of Christ.

1. Over nature.

Nature is so vast, but God holds it in the hollow of His hand. Christ walked upon the water as if it were a pavement because He was mightier than nature.

2. Over sin.

Sin is a black, ugly, hideous and ravenous monster. It blasted and withered Eden. It deluged the earth and drowned the living creatures. It burned Sodom and Gomorrah. It has sent its horrors along every street to the march of the funeral dirge. It has made and filled the gloomy chambers of hell. Yet Christ Jesus masters sin and saves sinners.

3. Over death.

Christ raised Lazarus from the grave, brought to life the dead damsel and declared, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore." When people come to die whose faith is in Christ, they can say farewell to tears, troubles, poverty, sin, suffering and death.

III. The Mystery Of Christ.

Some say they will not accept anything that cannot be explained. They vow that they will not accept anything that is a mystery. Christ is a mystery. In fact, there is mystery everywhere. It is a mystery how a man eats food and it becomes brains, blood, flesh, tissue, muscle, hair, bone and nails. It is a mystery how a cow eats grass and it grows hair, makes flesh and milk; a goose eats grass from the same field and it makes feathers; a sheep eats some of the same kind of grass and it becomes wool. It is a mystery how God could preserve Jonah for three days and nights in the belly of the fish. It is just as great a mystery that mere man can make a submarine and live in it for days on the bottom of the ocean. It is a mystery how God carried Elijah to heaven in the chariot of the clouds. It is a greater mystery that man has perfected a machine that can carry great tonnage through the air at 600 miles an hour. It is a mystery how God could hang out the sun and moon and stars, but it is more of a mystery that man has made an incandescent light to illumine entire cities. It is a mystery that water came forth from the rock when Moses struck it, but it is a greater mystery how man can drill a well 10,000 feet into the bowels of the earth, put tile in it as he goes down, and extract oil from it when it is finished. It is a deep mystery how God could put Adam to sleep, take a rib from his side and make a woman; but it is a greater mystery how a surgeon can cut a man open, take parts out, sew him up and the next day he is on his feet again.

1. Christ's birth is a mystery.

How God could become flesh I cannot explain, but that He did I unequivocally accept. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1-2, 14). "But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:20-21).

"I know not how that Bethlehem's Babe
Could in the Godhead be;
I only know the Manger Child
Has brought God's life to me!"

2. Christ's death is a mystery.
It is a mystery how His death on Calvary's cross saves souls. Paul wrote, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (I Corinthians 1:18).

"Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved, to sin no more."

Yes, mystery shrouds Christ's death. We cannot explain.

"I know not how that Calvary's cross
A world from sin could free;
I only know its matchless love
Has brought God's love to me."

3. Christ's resurrection is a mystery.
How Christ could come forth from the tomb, robed in the dazzling garments of the resurrection, is a mystery. We listen to Him as He says, "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." He wore the shroud of death and lay dead in a tomb, but He arose therefrom.

"I know not how that Joseph's tomb
Could solve death's mystery;
I only know the living Christ,
Our immortality!"

Before this Wonderful Man we stand amazed.

"Wonderful Man of Galilee,
Wonderful Man of Galilee;
He's dearer than all the world to me,
This Wonderful Man of Galilee!"

Christ Jesus is the only hope of the world. On Him your salvation depends. Having beheld Him, won't you now receive Him as your personal Saviour?