

FACING THE CROSS WITH A SONG

"And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." Mark 14:26.
Matthew 26:30.

It is very remarkable that Jesus Christ is the only great character of whom there had been left no portrait, either in painting, or in word-painting. We do not know whether He was tall and slender, His brow broad and ample, or what the color of His eyes, or the manner of His countenance. Yet, this is not difficult to understand. If there had been such a portrait, man would have worshipped the material instead of the spiritual. As it is, certain learned gentlemen today are magnifying the human side of Christ above the divine side.

I. The Divine Portrait.

1. Have seen Him as the social Christ.

At Cana of Galilee, He was the center of attraction at the marriage feast. The idea that He never smiled is unworthy of consideration. Wherever He went little children thronged Him. One of the sweetest pictures in Jesus with a little child on His knee smiling its innocence and confidence up into His blessed face. A child reluctantly looks into a face that never smiles. It is a calamity when one gets the liver complaint and mistakes it for religion. A human being is the only creature on earth that can smile. A frown is a poor advertisement for a holy religion. When God made the human face He put into it twenty muscles for smiling to one for frowning, and must have meant that we smile twenty times to frowning one. There is strength and vitality in a joyous religion. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." The weak Christian is the one who has lost his joy.

2. Have seen Him as the sympathetic Christ.

How close He comes to the heart of humanity at the grave of Lazarus. He was not ashamed to point out to us the place where He wept at a grave. Not only with Mary and Martha did He weep; those were tears of sympathy for a sorrowing humanity. When you laid your heart's treasure in the grave, and went back to your desolate home trying to summon up courage to begin life's battle again, His great loving heart felt it all, He understood, and the secret strength that enabled you to overcome was from Him.

3. Have seen Him as the sorrowing Christ.

He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." No incident in His life so clearly bears out the words of the prophet as when on Olivet He wept over Jerusalem. His sorrow was not just because they had refused to receive Him but because they had closed the doors against themselves in sin. His heart still knows sorrow, and we Christians need to feel something of the sorrow that is in His heart over the lost.

4. Have seen Him as the severe Christ.

Too often have the painters portrayed only His gentleness. He has the gentleness of the lamb, but He has the wrath of the lion also. Recall His rebuke to the Pharisees. "Blind guides," "serpents," "Whited sepulchres," full of rottenness, are the words of a nature that can be severe when occasion demands. And we see it again in the Temple, when He overturned the tables of the moneychangers, and scourged the desecrators of His Father's house into the street. I wonder what would happen if He should come along when some of our people are in the midst of some of the modern church affairs.

5. Have seen Him as the suffering Christ.

We have heard the shout of the mob before Pilate's judgment hall, "Away with Him! Crucify Him!" We have heard His cry of despair on Calvary as the Father turned His face from Him, and have seen Him die amid rocking earth, veiled sun, wondering heaven, and astonished hell. His was not only the suffering of a body, rent and torn by spear, nail, and thorn, but the suffering of a spirit that had become sin, the thing most loathed and hated in the heart of God. He who knew no sin became sin that sinners might be saved. I call you to loyalty to such a Saviour.

6. Now, we see Him as the singing Christ.

This picture of Him, in text, has been overlooked by painter, sculptor, poet, and expositor alike. Text -- portrait sublime!

II. The Song.

1. It had a heart-throb in it.

A song with a heart-throb in it always grips us. Jenny Lind sang in Castle Garden, N. Y., as never before songstress had sung the sublime compositions of the masters, and was greeted with round after round of applause, when suddenly the Swedish Nightingale thought of her distant home, and plumed her wings for higher flight: --

"Mid pleasures and palaces though I may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home;
A charm from the sky seems to hallow us there,
Which sought through the world is not met with elsewhere."

It was her goodbye to a people and country who had won her heart. The notes trembled with a gentle pathos that melted the hearts of 20,000 people, who, with moistened eyes, and throbbing hearts, walked silently away.

2. It had a heart-break in it.

They say the swan sings but once, and then more sweetly than ever the song-bird sang, but that is just before its death. I do not know whether the Saviour had ever sung before. I think He had, but this was His swan-song. I wonder what song they sang in that Upper Room. I wish it has been preserved, words and music, that we might sing it after Him. I think we can find the words without difficulty, and I fancy we shall find the music preserved in heaven.

Infidelity has no song. When Judas left the Upper Room to betray the Lord, He had the scowl of hell on his face; when Jesus left that room, He had a song on His lips. The best way to meet our suffering is with a song. Wellington said, "A band of music is equal to five regiments in winning a battle." As the Titanic was slowly sinking, the musicians played "Nearer My God To Thee, Nearer To Thee."

In Psalm 118, one will find the song. The disciples sang it in ignorance, for they could not understand that He was going to die. Jesus sang in glorious triumph, for with Him the victory was already won. This song was the doxology of the great Hallel, sung by the Jews at the Passover.

The song at the Supper was: --

(1) A song of faith.

"The Lord is on my side." The world was against Him. Satan was. His own people. When Hamlin and Goodell went to Constantinople as Christian missionaries, the sultan issued a decree that they must leave Turkey within two weeks or forfeit their lives. Hamlin said, "Well, we have made a long trip in vain. We will have to pack up and go." "But," replied Goodell, "We have no consulted the sultan of the skies." They spent the night in prayer. The next day the sultan dropped dead in his palace, and that decree has not been heard of since. As a monument to the faith of these two men of God, there stands Roberts College, crowning the heights of the beautiful Bosphorus, a light for God in all that benighted land. "The Lord is on My side." That is the kind of faith that batters down stone walls with naked fists. That is the kind of faith that laughs at impossibilities, and enables Jesus to go to the cross with a song.

(2) A song of boldness.

"I will not fear: what can man do unto me?"

When Chrysostom was ordered by his emperor to cease preaching the Christian doctrines, he refused. The emperor replied, "Then, I will imprison you." He answered, "But if the Lord hath made me free, I am free indeed." "I will banish you." "If I should take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me." Enraged, he said, "I will put you to death." "But your majesty forgets that my life is hid with Christ in God." Boldness! It was that which sent Luther before the Diet of Worms.

(3) A song of gladness.

"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it." When the Puritans came to America seeking religious liberty and later had so many trying experiences in Virginia because they decided to become the custodians of the consciences of others, Elder Waller, a Baptist preacher, was placed in jail in Culpeper County. He wrote brief messages on scraps of paper and handed them out through the prison bars - always headed them "My Palace, Culpeper County Jail." He was expressing the truth of that grand old hymn

"How tedious and tasteless the hours
When Jesus no longer I see!
Sweet prospects, sweet birds, and sweet flow'rs,
Have all lost their sweetness for me.

While blest with a sense of His love,
A palace a toy would appear,
And prisons would palaces prove,
If Jesus would dwell with me there."

(4) A song of praise and adoration.

"Thou art my God, and I will praise thee; thou art my God, I will exalt thee." In the days gone by, when Christians were drowned in the sea, burned at the stake, hanged upon gibbets, and tortured in various ways, the following incident was recorded of Ridley and Latimer: As Ridley complained when the flames began to burn his body, Latimer said, "Let us be of good cheer, for today we are lighting a fire by the grace of God that will shine around the world." And that light is still shining, to the praise of the Lord.

(5) A song of sacrifice.

"Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar." Oh the picture! Jesus calmly singing of his own death. In the City Hall in New York City is a statue of Nathan Hale, the young Patriot of the Revolutionary War who was captured and hanged by the British. Before being executed they asked him if he had anything to say. With shoulders thrown back, chest forward, eyes flashing, and chin lifted, he said. "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Jesus died willingly for a lost world. Mystery profound! Truth amazing!

(6) A song of victory.

"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." He saw death, but death slain. He saw the grave, but the grave plundered. He saw judgment silenced, and hell vanquished. That which men call death, He has made the gateway to life, to life abounding.

III. The Application.

1. It was a song of sorrows, sweetened by memories of the homeland.

Jesus must often have been homesick. Here in a world made by Him, and upheld by the Word of His power, He had not a roof to shelter Him, nor a pillow on which to lay His head. How He must have longed for the glory which He had with the Father before the foundation of the world.

The Armies of the North and South were on opposite banks of the Rappahannock River in Northern Virginia. The Northern band played "Yankee Doodle," and the Southern band played "Dixie." They longed to meet each other in spiteful fury of battle. Down the river a lone fifer played "Home, Sweet Home." The Northern band chimed in, the Southern band entered in refrain. In less than minute all were playing "Home, Sweet Home." Soon the soldiers began to sing it.

2. It was a song of uncomplaining submission from heart wrung by bitterest agony.

Paul and Silas were in a prison-service of prayer and praise -- God shook the jail -- the jailer was converted before daylight.

3. It was a song of dread and fear that drew itself upon the almightiness of God.

A religious group on an excursion boat gliding down the river. One man started a song; another was interested in it -- sacred memory brought back. "Were you in the Civil War at such a place?" "Yes, and it was of a thing that happened there that I was thinking as we were singing. I was stationed in a lone wood, and somehow I felt I was in imminent danger. I thought of home, wife and babies, and oh, how I wanted to see them again. I was praying to God to protect me, and my prayer drifted into this song; when I came to the stanza:

"All my trust on Thee is staid,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head,
With the shadow of Thy wing."

All sense of fear left me, and I felt secure." Then, the other said, "I was there in the same wood, and had my rifle trained on you. But somehow I could not shoot you. Finally when I determined that duty should be done and lifted my gun to fire, I heard those words, 'Cover my defenseless head,' my gun dropped from my hands, and I said that I would die before I would kill that man."

4. It was a song of comfort for all who must tread the pathway of sorrow.
If your heart is broken, remember God's heart was broken too.
5. It was a song of faith, triumphant in the last hour.

From that Supper with its song of victory, the Master went out to lay His hand to the throat of Death; to set His heel on the devil's neck; to destroy the grave and conquer hell. And I think it was then that heaven took up the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.