

WATCHING JESUS ON THE CROSS

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

Every scene and circumstance connected with the life of the Lord Jesus is very interesting to those of us who are Christians. Between Bethlehem's manger and Calvary's cross He encountered much opposition. He was betrayed, arrested, forsaken, tried and condemned. Even though he found no fault in Christ, Pilate yielded to the blood-thirsty mob that was clamoring for His crucifixion. The Roman soldiers took Him 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 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.

Not far from the city gate the Saviour's strength utterly failed. Tradition says He fell under the weight of the cross. There was nothing to do but to transfer the heavy cross to other shoulders. The soldiers laid the ghastly burden on the shoulders of Simon, a Jew from Cyrene. They proceeded a short distance from the city to a place called Golgotha, which was a skull-shaped hill overlooking Jerusalem. They stripped Him, 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.

"And sitting down they watched Him there." Could any language suggest more than HIM THERE in conjunction? To me these words suggest three things--a person, a place, and a purpose.

I. A Person.

"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 consider Him. "Consider" implies an earnest, fixed, prolonged attention of the mind. It means to notice, think, reflect on, fix the mind upon, or ponder. Consideration is not a hasty glance at an object. But a deliberate exercise of the mind. It means to give undivided attention: to fix your thought upon. Therefore, let us gather our thoughts in and set them upon Christ. Consider Him earnestly, intensely, habitually. Make the study of Him the main interest and business of life. We must consider Christ if we are to know Him, love Him, be grateful to Him, obey Him, serve Him, imitate Him, and become like Him. The thoughts of the Christian should be occupied by the Saviour. Take time to contemplate Christ.

1. What He said.

We think of some great men and the things which they said. The absolute claim was made for Christ, for the record states, "Never man spake like this Man." How did He speak?

(1) Profoundly.

Most people speak thus only occasionally. Christ never spoke in any other way. Always and everywhere, He was talking about the big things--God, man, sin, righteousness, truth, justice, love, life now, life hereafter, etc. Read the record. He was the greatest thinker of all the ages. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have listened to Him?

(2) Authoritatively.

He never expressed an opinion, guessed, surmised, halted, hesitated, or submitted something for consideration with a hope that people would reach the right conclusion. He spake with authority and "not as the scribes." He said something tremendous and there was a note of finality about it. His teaching was original, revolutionizing, and unarguable.

2. What He did.

"He went about doing good." Each does sometime. He did nothing else. None other can make that claim. We have helped and we have hindered others. He never made it easy for anyone to do wrong, or harder for anyone to do right. He never increased anybody's load. He helped to carry it instead. His whole ministry was beneficent. Behind it all was the love motive. He did nothing for popularity, praise, or place. He exercised unstinted generosity to all classes out of pure love. He showed people how to love their enemies.

3. What He was.

This accounts for what He said and what He did. What He said and what He did are explained on the basis of what he was.

(1) He was human.

His humanity was real. He was born, His mother nursed Him, He grew up in the natural way from babyhood to childhood. He played. He learned His lessons. He developed from childhood to manhood. He worked. His humanity was perfect and not faulty. He was sinless. He never had an evil thought motive, desire, or deed. Our humanity is a distortion.

(2) He was Divine.

He said, "Before Abraham was I am." God said, "This is My beloved Son." Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

He was truly man and very God.

II. A Place.

"There"—Where? He was on Calvary or Golgotha, which was one half mile or less outside the city wall of Jerusalem. It was on a mound where the vilest of offenders were put to death. It was a place of abject shame. All the festering wounds of sin were exposed there. There one could see separating evil, dripping iniquity, pitiless cruelty, and the cauterization of all sensibility. It was the common execution ground for felons and outlaws. It was a place of desolation and horror. It was a place eminent for the publication of shame. This hill of death and of dead bones was polluted and impure. It was a place of horrible death. Yet, He was there.

So were two robbers, the rough wooden crosses, and the soldiers. They stripped Him, laid Him on His back on the cross which was lying on the ground, nailed His hands to the two ends of the cross-piece, nailed His feet to the upright piece, and while the blood was flowing, the hole was prepared, then the cross was lifted on end and dropped into the hole with a thud, thus suspending between heaven and earth the body of the Son of God, leaving Him to suffer a lingering and painful death as the blood dripped from His head, His hands, and His feet.

The unnatural position and violent tension of the body caused a painful sensation from the least motion. The nails were driven through parts of the hands and feet, which are full of nerves and tendons, and yet at a distance from the heart, and they created the most exquisite anguish. In the distended parts of the body more blood

flowed through the arteries than could be carried back into the veins: and hence 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. There was the inexpressible misery of gradually increasing and lingering anguish. To all this was added burning and raging thirst.

III. A Purpose.

1. To disclose the criminality of sin.

There are those who tell us that sin is merely a shadow where the light should be, or a disagreable hindrance to the smooth ongoing of the social machinery. But, sin is a spot one cannot erase, a disease one cannot cure, a burden one cannot remove, a bondage one cannot escape, a cord one cannot sever, an idol one cannot dethrone, and a fiend that is dragging man down the sloping stairway into the regions of destruction. It 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. See HIM THERE and know 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. I preach it because it is the only message I have, the only one that men need, and the only one that will result in saved souls and transformed lives.

3. To declare the inflexibility of righteousness.

He was there to prove that there is a standard of righteousness; 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 heriship into the glories of His household. On the cross perfect atonement was completely accomplished.

4. To display the sovereignty of love.

See HIM THERE and 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. That cross is the very academy of love. Love exuded from Him in every drop of His shed blood.

"When I survey the wondrous cross,
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord! that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God:
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His 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.