

A PLEA FROM THE CROSS

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A SERMON
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“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34

TO the godly heart there is a brighter light on Calvary than anywhere else beneath the sun. He who often resorts to Golgotha, if his spirit be right, must be wise. It is the University of Saints. He who would know sin—its heinousness, its penalty—must see the Son of God making expiation for it by His death on the accursed tree. He who would know love—the love which many waters cannot quench, and which the floods cannot drown—must read it in the Savior’s face, or if you will, written in crimson lines in the Savior’s heart, pierced with the spear.

He who would know how he may get his sin forgiven, must resort to the cross. There, and there only, is seen the way by which sin can be pardoned and the sinner accepted with God, and he who, finding pardon there, would seek to be useful to his fellow men and bring them into the like condition, must himself keep near that cross, that he may speak much of it, and in the power of it, may be able to persuade and to prevail with the sons of men. Abide at the cross, beloved, there is no air so healthy and quickening as that which is breathed there. There was the birthplace of your hope, there its native air, there must be on earth the climax of your joy. Live upon a crucified Savior as you live by a crucified Savior.

And now this word which we hear at Calvary, the first word of our Savior after He had been fastened to the cross—this word I shall not attempt to fathom, or go into the depths of it, but shall rather touch the surface of it, skimming it, and uttering a few such sentences, as it were, one after the other that have arisen to my mind while listening to the voice of our Lord in this His plaintive cry, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

I will suppose that I have here, and I fear I need not make it a supposition, many that as yet are unpardoned, unreconciled to God. Will you come with me and make a pilgrimage to Calvary? Will you see your Savior? He has just come up the hill of doom, they have thrown Him upon His back. There is the cross, the executioners have stretched out His hands and His feet, they have taken the nails, they have driven them through His hands and feet. He is fastened to the wood, and now as they are lifting Him up, before it jars into the ground, again you hear Him cry, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” I want you to learn a few lessons out of this. And the first shall be, see here—

I. THE SAVIOR’S LOVE TO SINNERS.

It is His last hour, but He thinks of them. He had searched for them in His health and strength, He went about doing good, He came to seek and to save the rebellious, and He had spent His active life in their service. He is about to die, but the ruling passion is strong in death. He is seeking sinners still, and if He can preach no more, yet He can pray, and if He will not speak to them, yet He can speak to God for them, and so He continues still to show which way His heart runs, by the prayer for those that nailed Him to the wood, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

He had been thirty years in their midst, and His holy soul had been much vexed by them. He had endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself, but you see He has not cast them off, He has not turned His love to wrath, He is not weary of them, but still He pleads, “Father, oh! forgive them.” What love is this! One would suppose that the pain which He then felt might have distracted His mind from

others, and His prayer might have been for Himself, that patience might be given, that strength might be sustained, but no, oblivious of Himself, His only care is still for those He seeks—the sinful sons of men. Just as an arrow from a bow shot forth with such force that it speeds onward to its target, His whole strength and soul speeds onward to the mark of the salvation of the sons of men. One thing, one thing only, does He do—He seeks still their good, and I say again, if not now by active ministering to them, yet by ministering for them, He prays “Father, forgive them.”

It is one thing to love persons at a distance, and to have philanthropic desires for their good, it is quite another thing to live with them, and still have the same fondness towards them, and another thing by far to receive bad treatment from them, contumely, and scorn, and a worse thing even than that, to be about to receive your death from them, and still to pray for them. But such is the perseverance of Jesus’ love that it cannot be turned aside.

They have spit into His face, but still He prays for them; they have scourged Him with their cruel lashes, they have hounded Him along the streets, they have at last pierced His hands and feet, and stripped Him, and they now hang Him up upon the gibbet between heaven and earth, but still nothing can diminish the flame of His love, nor turn aside His heart’s desire from them, it is still for them He lives, for them He dies. “Father, oh! forgive them,” is the sign and proof that He is holding still to the one great work He undertook.

Now I would, O sinner, I would that you would learn this lesson. Herein is love, behold what love! Will you not come and share in it? What keeps you back? Can you hold your heart from Immanuel? Can you refuse to love such a dear lover of the sons of men? I think if our hearts were not adamant or worse, they must be melted at the sight of the pleading love of Jesus upon the tree.

Come, soul, have done with your hardness, let a drop of Christ’s blood melt that heart of yours. Have done with your carelessness, let a spark of love set your heart on fire towards Him. Are you afraid to come, afraid of Him that dies for sinners, afraid of love, terrified at mercy? Oh! be not so, but come and welcome, and put your trust in Him who, with His dying breath, proves the strength of His Almighty love by pleading for His foes. Let that stand for the first remark, here is the strong love of Christ. Here, next, we see—

II. HOW LOVE SHOWS ITSELF.

How did Jesus prove His love in this last great moment? It was *by prayer*. Love shows itself in prayer. Prayer alone would not be a sufficient proof of love, but He who dies and prays, whose life is a prayer, and whose death is a prayer, proves His love by adding to His life and death the vocal utterance of both in this cry, “Father, forgive them.” If Jesus Christ would prove His love to you, He does it by praying for you.

Observe, then, the extreme value of prayer. It is a ripe fruit of the cross, it is, if I may call it, a golden apple of the cross—intercessory prayer. See, sinner, the need there is for you to pray then. If Jesus prays and proves His love by prayer, and if the saints on earth who love you pray for you, depend upon it, prayer is no light thing. Bend that knee of yours, lift that eye of yours to heaven, and let a prayer go up from the depths of your spirit, “Father, forgive me. Your Son has prayed, so pray I. He says, ‘Father, forgive them,’ and I pray, ‘Father, forgive me.’” Ought not this to bring every sinner to his knees? Would it not, if men were in their senses? Would not the sight of a dying Christ pleading for the guilty make the guilty plead?

Oh! who can restrain prayer for himself when Jesus leads the way? When He says, “Forgive them,” will you not say, “Amen”? Oh! deserve you not right well to perish if you cannot join your assent to the divine intercession of the pleading Savior? Sinner, I beseech you now, in the secret of your soul, to pray, “Father, forgive me.” “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Is there no woman, is there no man, that could pray that now? You need not speak, let but your lips move. But oh! since Jesus Christ tonight is set forth before you in the delightful attitude of an intercessor praying for the guilty, I implore you pray for yourselves, and may God send you this night an answer of peace, may your pardon be signed and sealed to the comfort of your spirit.

And now leaving that observation, we pass to the next. We see the love of Jesus, we see how that love shows itself in prayer. See next—

III. WHAT IT IS THE SAVIOR ASKS.

He asks *forgiveness*, “Father, forgive them.” If the Savior should pray for all of us here present, He need not amend that prayer. It was suitable to those who nailed Him to the tree. They needed pardon for the murder of their Savior. It was suitable to the clamoring multitude, who had said, “Crucify him, crucify him.” They needed forgiveness for that blood which they then brought upon themselves, but it is equally suitable to each one here present, “Forgive them.”

May I ask you to look back upon your past lives? Have you been kept from grosser sins? Thank God for it, but your sins of heart, of mind, of tongue, your sins of omission—what, are these nothing? God grant you may feel them to be something, and may you feel tonight that what you want is even as if you had been an open offender—you want forgiveness, and if perchance there be some here who have gone into open sin with a high hand and an outstretched arm, yet my brother, yet my sister, this prayer needs no enlargement to suit you, “Father, forgive them.”

“Father, forgive them,” forgiveness covers all. A man receipts a bill, he puts his name at the bottom. If that bill were for ten thousand pounds or ten pence, it is the same, the receipt has covered all, and Jesus’ hand, when He puts it with the nail prints bloody red upon the great record of our sins, draws a red line down the page and blots out the whole, and leaves not a single sin on the page. “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be whiter than snow.”

Oh! the greatness of that word, “forgiven”! Blessed be the Lord Jesus for praying such a prayer as that. Do you know, I do not think it need be altered for the best man and the best woman here, for even our best things need forgiveness. When you have prayed the best prayer you ever prayed, you might well ask God to forgive it to you. If you have preached the best sermon you ever preached, you may ask to be forgiven it, for some sin has mingled with your holiest action, so forgiveness is wanted at best, and evermore wanted at the worst—wanted today, tomorrow, and all through life, and wanted when the breath leaves the body—ever wanted that blessed prayer that sweeps the compass of mortal existence—that comprehends so much—“Father, forgive them.” This is the great thing love asks, for the forgiveness of those for whom she pleads. But passing on you will observe—

IV. FOR WHOM IT IS THAT OUR SAVIOR IN THIS CASE OFFERED THE PETITION, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Now that little word “them,” is a great word because it is so little. “Father, forgive *them*.” The Savior is explicit, He does not mention the names of the four soldiers who pierced His hands and feet. No, He meant them, but He meant more. He does not mention the names of those in the crowd who were gazing upon Him with insolent stare—He meant them. He does not mention those that had cried, “Crucify him, crucify him”—He had meant them.

He does not say, “Father, forgive them; for they knew not what they *did*”—for that would look as if He only prayed for sins that had already been committed. He does not say, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they *shall*,” for that would look as if He only prayed for sins that would be committed, but He says, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they *do*.” And putting it thus in the present, it seems as though the petition had one hand to reach out to the past sins of mankind before He died, and another hand to the sins to come of mankind after He had offered the sacrifice.

“They know not what they do.” It is put so indefinitely, the “them” and the “do,” the tense of the verb and the pronoun, they are so indefinite that I bless God for the wide extent of their range. “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Who, then, is included in that word “them”? I venture to say every man that is willing to be included—every man that feels he is included. Did you slay Christ? Have your sins caused Him to die? Do you know tonight that your sins fastened Him to the cruel tree? Could you join in the hymn we sung just now? Then, when Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they

know not what they do,” He included you in that prayer, and me in that prayer, and tens of thousands besides in that word, “them.”

Yet, yet you will observe in that word He put it specially. He does not exclude any, but He does include some more peculiarly than others, for His prayer is for those who knew not what they did. Can I get in there? I think I can, I believe that most here present can, I do not think all the sons of men can—Judas, for instance, I fear he did know what he did, and deliberately sold his Lord and Master. I am half afraid that Pilate to a great extent knew what he did, and there are some of whom it is written, “There is a sin unto death.” I do not say that you shall pray for it. A great doctrine, but it is in the Word—a terrible doctrine, but there it stands.

You know how Peter put it in that first sermon. He said, “I wot, my brethren, that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers”—as if he felt that had they known what they did, their sin had been unpardonable. And the apostle Paul himself, speaking of his own persecution, says, “Because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief.”

There is a deliberate crucifixion of Christ as Christ, knowing what you are doing—doing it out of sheer malice to the Christ of God—out of intense hatred to Him, to Him personally—which is unpardonable, for this reason, that the man who commits it never repents. Could he repent, the pardon were sure, but the capacity to do that argues incapacity ever to be made penitent, the man is given over, hardened—he perishes in his sin.

But the Lord Jesus in this prayer felt that those round Him did not know what they were doing, the most of them did not know He was God’s Son. They would not have crucified Him had they known—they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. They did know—most of them knew—that He was a righteous man, and they must have felt they were doing very wrong in putting Him to death, but they did not recognize Him as the Messiah and as the Son of God—else had the most of them held back their hand.

Now, though I have sinned against light and knowledge, and you have done the same, my brethren, yet in our past sin we did not deliberately intend to put Christ to death. We did not, like Satan of *malice propense*, desire to overthrow the kingdom of God and Christ. Blessed be God, He saved us from that. We went far, very far, horribly far, but restraining grace kept us back from that, and the Savior puts it there—makes such the object of His prayer.

I do not say He excludes those who did it knowingly, but He does include peculiarly those who did not know what they did—whose sin to a great extent as to its far-reaching heinousness was wrapped in ignorance, He says, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Then the prayer of love is offered for a vast company of sinners in darkness and ignorance, who have sinned, but who have not been suffered utterly, knowingly, willfully, viciously to crucify the Son of God and put Him to an open shame.

Now I want you to notice what this prayer of love admits. There is something in it that ought never to be forgotten. “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” You see, then, this prayer, even of a patient, loving, gentle Savior, who wishes to plead all He can on the behalf of those for whom He prays—this prayer admits that *they need to be forgiven who have sinned ignorantly*. Some people have thought, “If I did not know it to be sin to the full extent, then it was not sin.” Ah! not so! It was sin, for Christ asks to have it forgiven.

If I, doing what I did not fully understand, yet did wrong, I am not excused the wrong because I did not know to the fullest extent how wrong it was. I am just as guilty as if I did know, from some points of view, though not from others, and from any point of view, I need still to be forgiven. Ignorance of the law does not prevent the guilt of him who breaks it.

As you know, my brethren, human law, the law of the land—for instance, never takes ignorance of the law as a complete excuse for the breach of the law. The laws of England always assume that every man knows the law. The law is made, it is a public law, and he who breaks it cannot go before the Magistrate and say, “I did not know it was the law, you must discharge me.” The Magistrate may, as a

man, say, “Well, if you did not know it was law, there is some excuse for you,” as a Magistrate, he must not say that, for the law judges the man on its own self as publicly known, and does not allow of the excuse of not knowing the law.

If the Savior, in His infinite mercy said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” it was a plea—of course, not a plea of law. Sinai has no room for that excuse, for Sinai says, “If you don’t know, you ought to know,” and in this particular case especially, if they did not know Christ to be God, they ought to have known it.

The prophecies were so clear, the person of Christ so exactly fitted in to every type and every prophetic declaration, that it was “a willful blindness that had happened unto Israel.” They ought to have known it. One sin is never an excuse for another sin. It was a sin for them not to know, that sin, therefore, did not excuse them for committing the other. It is only sovereign grace that brought that in as a plea, it is not justice, it is not law, it is the heart of mercy that pleads that.

What I want you to notice now, then, is though I did not know when I sinned as a child and as a young man all that was meant by sin, though I especially did not know that I was crucifying Christ, yet the guilt is just the same as before God, and I need to be forgiven for it, or else it will be laid to my charge, and I shall be punished as surely as God’s law stands fast. Do you think the Savior would say, “Father, forgive them,” if it were not a wrong? He never prayed a superfluous prayer, the prayer “Forgive” is a sentence in itself, teaching us that sins of ignorance are sins.

Oh! my dear hearers, there are none of us that know to the full extent the sin of our sin. The most tender heart here does not know the blackness of its sin. I have sometimes talked with persons under conviction who have told me what dreadful sinners they were, and they have looked a little surprised when I have said, “But you are ten times worse than you think you are.” Nay, they scarcely thought that could be possible, yet I would venture to say that to the most tender hearted penitent that ever lived—you have no idea, my friend, of the aggravation of your sin, nor is it possible you should have, nor do I know that it is desirable. So long as you know enough of your sin to hate it, and to flee to Christ for the pardon of it, that will suffice.

But oh! the scholarship that would be needed to understand all the depths of sin, ’twere the scholarship of the cross over again, you would have need to die like Christ to know what sin means in its infinite, its boundless guilt. Do not ask to know that, but do pray now, that the Lord would search you and forgive you your sins. You did not know of pardoned sins you have committed, sins manifold that have passed by your notice, that you have not observed, and consequently could not have confessed in particular. Beseech the Savior, whose cry is, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do,” to pray for unknown mercy by His unknown agony for your unknown sin. It is a wondrous prayer this, we cannot stay much longer on it.

We make yet another remark, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

V. THIS PRAYER WARNS US.

I have felt intense pleasure in thinking it over, but at the same time that pleasure has been mingled with great bitterness. There is such a warning there, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” It does not say, as I have already said, that if they did know, Christ would not pray for them, but it does seem to hint that. In the background I see a something—not that every sin committed against light is unpardonable, God be thanked that is not so, but some sins committed against light and knowledge so harden the heart that the man never repents, never will, he will go to hell case-hardened like steel, and I am afraid some of you are in great likelihood of committing it.

Those that have not heard the Gospel cannot very readily commit this, unless their conscience has been desperately violated, but some of you that have been hearers often, and perhaps were once professors, that have knowingly chosen the wrong path, and have deliberately sacrificed your character for drink or gain or lust—I will not say that you have passed that boundary, but I do tremble as I hear the booming of that text, “There is a sin unto death; I do not say that ye shall pray for it,” even as I hear the Master’s words, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

But these persons knew what they did, did it deliberately, did it over again and again, and again, perhaps went to the Lord's table and deliberately went to their uncleanness again, stood up in public it may be, and then went to their filthiness again, deliberately, or they listened to the sermon on Sunday and they said, "I'll do better," and then went on Monday to their drunken companions again, deliberately.

Oh! man, you may have stood in the street, perhaps, and said to yourself, "Now, which shall it be? I feel as if I were called to serve God, but yet how can I give up such-and-such a darling lust?" There is a point in men's lives wherein, if they deliberately choose the wrong, knowing it is wrong, with the light shining on their eyeballs, they deliberately give up Christ, heaven, pardon, they choose hell and their own delusions, and I fear me that with many from that hour the wax is cooled upon their death warrant, and it will never be reversed, for this text, though it gently flows from the Savior's lips and drops like dew, has about it the lightning flash, a thunderbolt that startles, "Father, forgive them—they know not what they do."

But *there are some who know what they do*, and take the hammer and nail Christ up to the cross, and take a spear and pierce His side, and do it knowing what they are at, and all the while talking glibly of religion, taking the Bible to make jokes out of it, taking the very ministers they once professed to love and making scoff of them, taking the doctrines of the Gospel and making these a cloak for their sins—these men what will I say of them? God have mercy upon them, but I fear me, I fear me, that He never will, for they will never seek it, and He will never grant it. Could they seek it, He would give it. While a man can seek, he shall find, while a heart can melt, God will pity. There is never a contrite soul but what God looks with love upon it, but here is the mischief, for these men, who know what they do, repent not, but are seared as with a hot iron, they become wandering stars, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

But I must not close here. This shall be a closing word. At the same time, you see the text woos. It warns, but it woos. How it woos the ignorant, especially! "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Oh! some of you have dropped in here tonight who, perhaps, don't often listen to the Gospel. You have been living a life of sin, you knew it was sin, you knew it was sin, but you did not know that you were nailing Christ to the cross. You sought your own pleasure, you sought your own gratifications. You have been very guilty, you have lived a careless, Godless, Christless life, but still you did not mean to sin against God so as to crucify Christ. You see you have done so, now you feel you are guilty of it, but you had not that light that you now have. Then Jesus says, "Come to Me, come to Me, My prayer goes up to heaven for you, you ignorant one"—sinful, but without light, Jesus intercedes.

Oh! join your prayer with the prayer of Jesus and say, "Father, forgive Your ignorant child, Your sinful, wayward child, I do not plead, 'I knew not what I did,' but Christ pleads it for me. I plead that Jesus died. Oh! for His sake, have pity. Hear His blood as it drops from His hands and feet, hear it and plead for me, 'Father, forgive them.'"

Oh if you will seek the Lord, you shall have Him, if you will but turn your eye to Him upon the cross, you shall live. Whoever among you in this house will but trust Him, shall find Him able and willing to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him. Oh! come and welcome, come and welcome, and may God grant that you may come tonight.

*"But if your ears refuse
The language of His grace,
And hearts grow gross like stubborn Jews,
That unbelieving race.
The Lord in vengeance dressed
Will lift His hand and swear,
'You that despised My promised rest
Shall have no portion there.'"*

God bless you. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 27:32-49

Verse 32. *And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to bear his cross.*

Perhaps they were afraid that Christ would die from exhaustion, so they compelled Simon to bear His cross. Any one of Christ's followers might have wished to have been this man of Cyrene, but we need not envy him, for there is a cross for each of us to carry. Oh! that we were as willing to bear Christ's cross as Christ was to bear our sins on His cross! If anything happens to us by way of persecution or ridicule for our Lord's sake, and the Gospel's, let us cheerfully endure it. As knights are made by a stroke from the sovereign's sword, so shall we become princes in Christ's realm as He lays His cross on our shoulders.

33-34. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull, they gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.*

Golgotha was the common place of execution for malefactors, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of Jerusalem, outside the gate of the city. There was a special symbolical reason for Christ's suffering without the gate, and His followers are bid to "go forth unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb 13:11-13).

A stupefying draught was given to the condemned, to take away something of the agony of crucifixion, but our Lord came to suffer, and He would not take anything that would at all impair His faculties. He did not forbid His fellow-sufferers drinking the vinegar mingled with gall ("wine mingled with myrrh," Mark 15:23), but He would not drink thereof. Jesus did not refuse this draught because of its bitterness, for He was prepared to drink even to the last dreadful dregs the bitter cup of wrath which was His people's due.

35. *And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.*

There is a world of meaning in that short sentence, "and they crucified him," driving their bolts of iron through His blessed hands and feet, fastening Him to the cross, and lifting Him up to hang there upon a gibbet reserved for felons. We can scarcely realize all that the crucifixion meant to our dear Lord, but we can join in Faber's prayer—

*"Lord Jesus! may we love and weep,
Since Thou for us art crucified."*

Then was fulfilled all that our Lord had foretold in chapter 20:17-19, except His resurrection, the time for which had not arrived.

The criminals' clothes were the executioners' perquisite. The Roman soldiers who crucified Christ had no thought of fulfilling the Scriptures when they parted His garments, casting lots, yet their action was exactly that which had been foretold in Psalm 22:18. The seamless robe would have been spoiled if it had been rent, so the soldiers raffled for the vesture, while they shared the other garments of our Lord. The dice would be almost stained with the blood of Christ, yet the gamblers played on beneath the shadow of His cross. Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. Beware of it in any form! No games of chance should be played by Christians, for the blood of Christ seems to have bespattered them all.

36. *And sitting down they watched him there;*

Some watched Him from curiosity, some to make sure that He really did die, some even delighted their cruel eyes with His sufferings, and there were some, hard by the cross, who wept and bewailed, a sword passing through their own hearts while the Son of man was agonizing even unto death.

37. *And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS.*

What a marvelous providence it was that moved Pilate's pen! The representative of the Roman Emperor was little likely to concede kingship to any man, yet he deliberately wrote, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews," and nothing would induce him to alter what he had written. Even on His cross, Christ was proclaimed King, in the sacerdotal Hebrew, the classical Greek, and the common Latin, so that everybody in the crowd could read the inscription.

When will the Jews own Jesus as their King? They will do so one day, looking on Him whom they pierced. Perhaps they will think more of Christ when Christians think more of them, when our hardness of heart towards them has gone, possibly their hardness of heart towards Christ may also disappear.

38. *Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

As if to show that they regarded Christ as the worst of the three criminals, they put Him between the two thieves, giving Him the place of dishonor. Thus was the prophecy fulfilled, "He was numbered with the transgressors." The two malefactors deserved to die, as one of them admitted (Luk 23:40-41), but a greater load of guilt rested upon Christ, for "He bare the sin of many," and therefore, He was rightly distinguished as the King of sufferers, who could truly ask—

"Was ever grief like mine?"

Verses 39-40. *And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

Nothing torments a man when in pain more than mockery. When Jesus Christ most wanted words of pity and looks of kindness, they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads. Perhaps the most painful part of ridicule is to have one's most solemn sayings turned to scorn, as were our Lord's words about the temple of His body, "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself." He might have saved Himself, He might have "come down from the cross," but if He had done so, we could never have become the sons of God. It was because He was the Son of God that He did not come down from the cross, but hung there until He had completed the sacrifice for His people's sin. Christ's cross is the Jacob's ladder by which we mount up to heaven.

This is the cry of the Socinian today, "Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice, and we will be Christians." Many are willing to believe in Christ, but not in Christ crucified. They admit that He was a good man and a great teacher, but by rejecting His vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as these mockers at Golgotha did.

41-43. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.*

The chief priests, with the scribes and elders, forgetting their high station and rank, joined the ribald crew in mocking Jesus in His death pangs. Every word was emphatic, every syllable cut and pierced our Lord to the heart. They mocked Him as a Savior, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." They mocked Him as a King, "If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him." They mocked Him as a believer, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him." They mocked Him as the Son of God, "For he said, I am the Son of God."

Those who say that Christ was a good man, virtually admit His deity, for He claimed to be the Son of God. If He was not what He professed to be, He was an impostor. Notice the testimony that Christ's

bitterest enemies bore even as they reviled Him, “He saved others,” “He is the King of Israel” (R. V.), “He trusted in God.”

44. *The thieves, also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.*

The sharers of His misery, the objects who were crucified with Him, joined in reviling Jesus. Nothing was wanting to fill up His cup of suffering and shame. The conversion of the penitent thief was all the more remarkable because he had but a little while before been amongst the mockers of his Savior. What a trophy of divine grace he became!

45. *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.*

Some have thought that this darkness covered the whole world, and so caused even a heathen to exclaim, “Either the world is about to expire, or the God who made the world is in anguish.” This darkness was supernatural, it was not an eclipse. The sun could no longer look upon his Maker surrounded by those who mocked Him. He covered his face, and traveled on in tenfold night, in very shame that the great Sun of Righteousness should Himself be in such terrible darkness.

46. *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

In order that the sacrifice of Christ might be complete, it pleased the Father to forsake His well-beloved Son. Sin was laid on Christ, so God must turn away His face from the Sin-bearer. To be deserted of His God was the climax of Christ’s grief, the quintessence of His sorrow. See here the distinction between the martyrs and their Lord, in their dying agonies they have been divinely sustained, but Jesus, suffering as the Substitute for sinners, was forsaken of God. Those saints who have known what it is to have their Father’s face hidden from them, even for a brief space, can scarcely imagine the suffering that wrung from our Savior the agonizing cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

47. *Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calls for Elias.*

They knew better, yet they jested at the Savior’s prayer. Wickedly, willfully, and scornfully, they turned His death shriek into ridicule.

48-49. *And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him.*

A person in such agony as Jesus was suffering might have mentioned many pangs that He was enduring, but it was necessary for Him to say, “I thirst,” in order that another Scripture might be fulfilled. One of them, more compassionate than his companions, ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, from the vessel probably brought by the soldiers for their own use, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink.

It always seems to me very remarkable that the sponge, which is the very lowest form of animal life, should have been brought into contact with Christ, who is at the top of all life. In His death the whole circle of creation was completed. As the sponge brought refreshment to the lips of our dying Lord, so may the least of God’s living ones help to refresh Him now that He has ascended from the cross to the throne.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.