

OUR LORD'S LAST CRY FROM THE CROSS NO. 2311

A SERMON
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*“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands
I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.”
Luke 23:46*

THESE were the dying words of our Lord Jesus Christ, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” It may be instructive if I remind you that the words of Christ upon the cross were seven. Calling each of His cries, or utterances, by the title of a word, we speak of the seven last words of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me rehearse them in your hearing.

The first, when they nailed Him to the cross, was, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Luke has preserved that word. Later, when one of the two thieves said to Jesus, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom,” Jesus said to him, “Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.” This also Luke has carefully preserved.

Farther on, our Lord, in His great agony, saw His mother, with breaking heart, standing by the cross and looking up to Him with unutterable love and grief, and He said to her, “Woman, behold thy son!” and to the beloved apostle, “Behold thy mother!” and thus He provided a home for her when He Himself should be gone away. This utterance has only been preserved by John.

The fourth and central word of the seven was, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?” which is, being interpreted, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” This was the culmination of His grief, the central point of all His agony. That most awful word that ever fell from the lips of man, expressing the quintessence of exceeding agony, is well put fourth, as though it had need of three words before it, and three words after it, as its bodyguard. It tells of a good man, a son of God, *the* Son of God, forsaken of His God. That central word of the seven is found in Matthew and in Mark, but not in Luke or John.

But the fifth word has been preserved by John, that is, “I thirst,” the shortest, but not quite the sharpest of all the Master’s words, though under a bodily aspect, perhaps the sharpest of them all. John has also treasured up another very precious saying of Jesus Christ on the cross, that is the wondrous word, “It is finished.” This was the last word but one, “It is finished,” the gathering up of all His lifework, for He had left nothing undone, no thread was left a-raveling, the whole fabric of redemption had been woven, like His garment, from the top throughout, and it was finished to perfection. After He had said, “It is finished,” He uttered the last word of all, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit,” which I have taken for a text tonight, but to which I will not come immediately.

There has been a great deal said about these seven cries from the cross by divers writers, and though I have read what many of them have written, I cannot add anything to what they have said, since they have delighted to dwell upon these seven last cries, and here the most ancient writers, of what would be called the Romish school, are not to be excelled, even by Protestants, in their intense devotion to every letter of our Savior’s dying words.

And they sometimes strike out new meanings, richer and more rare than any that have occurred to the far cooler minds of modern critics, who are as a rule greatly blessed with moles’ eyes, able to see where there is nothing to be seen, but never able to see when there is anything worth seeing. Modern criticism, like modern theology, if it were put in the Garden of Eden, would not see a flower. It is like

the sirocco that blasts and burns, it is without either dew or unction. In fact, it is the very opposite of these precious things, and proves itself to be unblest of God and un blessing to men.

Now concerning these seven cries from the cross, many authors have drawn from them lessons concerning *seven duties*. Listen. When our Lord said, "Father, forgive them," in effect, He said to us, "Forgive your enemies." Even when they despitefully use you and put you to terrible pain, be ready to pardon them. Be like the sandalwood tree, which perfumes the axe that fells it. Be all gentleness, and kindness, and love—and be this your prayer, "Father, forgive them."

The next duty is taken from the second cry, namely, that of penitence and faith in Christ, for He said to the dying thief, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Have you, like him, confessed your sin? Have you his faith and his prayerfulness? Then you shall be accepted even as he was. Learn, then, from the second cry, the duty of penitence and faith.

When our Lord, in the third cry, said to His mother, "Woman, behold thy son!" He taught us the duty of filial love. No Christian must ever be short of love to his mother, his father, or to any of those who are endeared to him by relationships which God has appointed for us to observe. Oh, by the dying love of Christ to His mother, let no man here unman himself by forgetting his mother! She bore you—bear her in her old age and lovingly cherish her even to the last.

Jesus Christ's fourth cry teaches us the duty of clinging to God and trusting in God—"My God, my God." See how, with both hands, He takes hold of Him—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He cannot bear to be left of God. All else causes Him but little pain compared with the anguish of being forsaken of His God. So learn to cling to God, to grip Him with a double-handed faith, and if you do ever think that He has forsaken you, cry after Him, and say, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me, for I cannot bear to be without thee."

The fifth cry, "I thirst," teaches us to set a high value upon the fulfillment of God's Word. "After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst." Take you good heed, in all your grief and weakness, still preserve the Word of your God, and to obey the precept. Learn the doctrine and delight in the promise. As your Lord, in His great anguish said, "I thirst," because it was written that so He would speak, do you have regard unto the Word of the Lord even in little things.

That sixth cry, "It is finished," teaches us perfect obedience. Go through with your keeping of God's commandment. Leave out no command keep on obeying till you can say, "It is finished." Work your lifework, obey your Master, suffer or serve according to His will, but rest not till you can say with your Lord, "It is finished." "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

And that last word, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," teaches us resignation. Yield all things. Yield up even your spirit to God at His bidding. Stand still, and make a full surrender to the Lord, and let this be your watchword from the first even to the last, "Into thy hands, my Father, I commend my spirit."

I think that this study of Christ's last words should interest you, therefore let me linger a little longer upon it. Those seven cries from the cross also teach us something about *the attributes and offices of our Master*. They are seven windows of agate and gates of carbuncle through which you may see Him and approach Him.

First, would you see Him as Intercessor? Then He cries, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Would you look at Him as King? Then hear His second word, "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." Would you mark Him as a tender Guardian? Hear Him say to Mary, "Woman, behold thy son!" And to John, "Behold thy mother!" Would you peer into the dark abyss of the agonies of His soul? Hear Him cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Would you understand the reality and the intensity of His bodily sufferings? Then hear Him say, "I thirst," for there is something exquisite in the torture of thirst when brought on by the fever of bleeding wounds. Men on the battlefield, who have lost much blood, are devoured with thirst, and tell you that it

is the worst pang of all. "I thirst," says Jesus. See the Sufferer in the body and understand how He can sympathize with you who suffer, since He suffered so much on the cross.

Would you see Him as the Finisher of your salvation? Then hear His cry, "*Consummatum est*"—"It is finished." Oh, glorious note! Here you see the blessed Finisher of your faith. And would you then take one more gaze and understand how voluntary was His suffering? Then hear Him say, not as one who is robbed of life, but as one who takes His soul and hands it over to the keeping of another, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Is there not much to be learnt from these cries from the cross? Surely these seven notes make a wondrous scale of music if we do but know how to listen to them. Let me run up the scale again. Here, first, you have Christ's fellowship with men—"Father, forgive them." He stands side by side with sinners and tries to make an apology for them—"They know not what they do." Here is, next, His kingly power. He sets open heaven's gate to the dying thief and bids him enter. "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

Thirdly, behold His human relationship. How near of kin He is to us! "Woman, behold thy son!" Remember how He says, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He belongs to the human family. He is more of a man than any man. As surely as He is very God of very God, He is also very man of very man, taking into Himself the nature, not of the Jew only, but of the Gentile, too. Belonging to His own nationality, but rising above all, He is the Man of men, the Son of man.

See, next, His taking our sin. You say, "Which note is that?" Well, they are all to that effect, but this one chiefly, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It was because He bore our sins in His own body on the tree that He was forsaken of God. "He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin," and hence the bitter cry, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

Behold Him, in that fifth cry, "I thirst," taking not only our sin, but also our infirmity, and all the suffering of our bodily nature. Then, if you would see His fullness as well as His weakness, if you would see His all-sufficiency as well as His sorrow, hear Him cry, "It is finished." What a wonderful fullness there is in that note! Redemption is all accomplished. It is all complete. It is all perfect. There is nothing left, not a drop of bitterness in the cup of gall—Jesus has drained it dry. There is not a farthing to be added to the ransom price—Jesus has paid it all.

Behold His fullness in the cry, "It is finished." And then, if you would see how He has reconciled us to Himself, behold Him, the Man who was made a curse for us, returning with a blessing to His Father, and taking us with Him, as He draws us all up by that last dear word, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

"Now both the Surety and sinner are free."

Christ goes back to the Father, for, "It is finished," and you and I come to the Father through His perfect work.

I have only practiced two or three tunes that can be played upon this harp, but it is a wonderful instrument. If it be not a harp of ten strings, it is, at any rate, an instrument of seven strings, and neither time nor eternity shall ever be able to fetch all the music out of them. Those seven dying words of the ever-living Christ will make melody for us in glory through all the ages of eternity.

I shall now ask your attention for a little time to the text itself—"Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Do you see our Lord? He is dying and as yet, His face is toward man. His last word to man is the cry, "It is finished." Hear, all you sons of men, He speaks to you, "It is finished." Could you have a choicer word with which He should say "Adieu" to you in the hour of death? He tells you not to fear that His work is imperfect, not to tremble lest it should prove insufficient. He speaks to you and declares with His dying utterance, "It is finished."

Now He has done with you and He turns His face the other way. His day's work is done, His more than Herculean toil is accomplished, and the great Champion is going back to His Father's throne—and He speaks—but not to you. His last word is addressed to His Father, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." These are His first words in going home to His Father, as "It is finished," is His last word as, for a while, He quits our company. Think of these words and may they be your first words, too, when you return to your Father! May you speak thus to your Divine Father in the hour of death!

The words were much hackneyed in Romish times, but they are not spoilt even for that. They used to be said in the Latin by dying men, "*In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum.*" Every dying man used to try to say those words in Latin and if he did not, somebody tried to say them for him. They were made into a kind of spell of witchcraft—and so they lost that sweetness to our ears in the Latin—but in the English they shall always stand as the very essence of music for a dying saint, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

It is very noteworthy that the last words that our Lord used were quoted from the Scriptures. This sentence is taken, as I daresay most of you know, from the thirty-first psalm, and the fifth verse. Let me read it to you. What a proof it is of how full Christ was of the Bible! He was not one of those who think little of the Word of God. He was saturated with it. He was as full of Scripture as the fleece of Gideon was full of dew. He could not speak, even in His death, without uttering Scripture. This is how David put it, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth."

Now, beloved, the Savior altered this passage, or else it would not quite have suited Him. Do you see, first, He was obliged, in order to fit it to His own case, to add something to it? What did He add to it? Why, that word, "Father." David said, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit," but Jesus says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Blessed advance! He knew more than David did, for He was more the Son of God than David could be. He was *the* Son of God in a very high and special sense by eternal filiation and so He begins the prayer with, "Father."

But then He takes something away from it. It was needful that He should do so, for David said, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me." Our blessed Master was not redeemed, for He was the Redeemer, and He could have said, "Into thine hand I commit my spirit, for I have redeemed my people." But that He did not choose to say. He simply took that part which suited Himself and used it as His own, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Oh, my brethren, you will not do better, after all, than to quote Scripture, especially in prayer. There are no prayers so good as those that are full of the Word of God. May all our speech be flavored with texts! I wish that it were more so. They laughed at our Puritan forefathers because the very names of their children were fetched out of passages of Scripture, but I, for my part, had much rather be laughed at for talking much of Scripture than for talking much of trashy novels—novels with which (I am ashamed to say it) many a sermon nowadays is larded, ay, larded with novels that are not fit for decent men to read and which are coated over till one hardly knows whether he is hearing about a historical event, or only a piece of fiction—from which abomination, good Lord, deliver us!

So, then, you see how well the Savior used Scripture, and how, from His first battle with the devil in the wilderness till His last struggle with death on the cross, His weapon was ever, "It is written."

Now, I am coming to the text itself, and I am going to preach from it for only a very short time. In doing so, firstly, *let us learn the doctrine* of this last cry from the cross. Secondly, *let us practice the duty*. And thirdly, *let us enjoy the privilege*.

I. First, LET US LEARN THE DOCTRINE of our Lord's last cry from the cross.

What is the doctrine of this last word of our Lord Jesus Christ? *God is His Father and God is our Father*. He who Himself said, "Father," did not say for Himself, "Our Father," for the Father is Christ's Father in a higher sense than He is ours, but yet He is not more truly the Father of Christ than He is our Father if we have believed in Jesus. "You are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."

Believe the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God to His people. As I have warned you before, abhor the doctrine of the universal fatherhood of God, for it is a lie and a deep deception. It stabs at the heart, first, of the doctrine of the adoption, which is taught in Scripture, for how can God adopt men if they are all His children already?

In the second place, it stabs at the heart of the doctrine of regeneration, which is certainly taught in the Word of God. Now it is by regeneration and faith that we become the children of God, but how can that be if we are already the children of God? "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." How can God give to men the power to become His sons if they have it already? Believe not that lie of the devil, but believe this truth of God, that Christ and all who are by living faith in Christ may rejoice in the Fatherhood of God.

Next learn this doctrine, that *in this fact lies our chief comfort*. In our hour of trouble, in our time of warfare, let us say, "Father." You notice that the first cry from the cross is like the last—the highest note is like the lowest. Jesus begins with, "Father, forgive them," and He finishes with, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." To help you in a stern duty like forgiveness, cry, "Father." To help you in sore suffering and death, cry, "Father." Your main strength lies in your truly being a child of God.

Learn the next doctrine, that *dying is going home to our Father*. I said to an old friend, not long ago, "Old Mr. So-and-so has gone home." I meant that He was dead. He said, "Yes, where else should he go?" I thought that was a wise question. Where else should we go? When we grow grey, and our day's work is done, where should we go but home? So, when Christ has said, "It is finished," His next word, of course, is, "Father." He has finished His earthly course and now He will go home to heaven. Just as a child runs to its mother's bosom when it is tired and wants to fall asleep, so Christ says, "Father," before He falls asleep in death.

Learn another doctrine, that if God is our Father, and we regard ourselves as going home when we die, because we go to Him, then *He will receive us*. There is no hint that we can commit our spirit to God and yet that God will not have us. Remember how Stephen, beneath a shower of stones, cried, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit"? Let us, however we may die, make this our last emotion if not our last expression, "Father, receive my spirit." Shall not our heavenly Father receive His children? If you, being evil, receive your children at nightfall, when they come home to sleep, shall not your Father, who is in heaven, receive you when your day's work is done? That is the doctrine we are to learn from this last cry from the cross, the Fatherhood of God and all that comes of it to believers.

II. Secondly, LET US PRACTICE THE DUTY.

That duty seems to me to be, first, *resignation*. Whenever anything distresses and alarms you, resign yourself to God. Say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Sing, with Faber,

*"I bow me to Thy will, O God,
And all Thy ways adore.
And every day I live I'll seek
To please Thee more and more."*

Learn, next, the duty of *prayer*. When you are in the very anguish of pain, when you are surrounded by bitter griefs of mind as well as of body, still pray. Drop not the "Our Father." Let not your cries be addressed to the air. Let not your moans be to your physician, or your nurse, but cry, "Father." Does not a child so cry when it has lost its way? If it is in the dark at night, and it starts up in a lone room, does it not cry out, "Father." And is not a father's heart touched by that cry? Is there anybody here who has never cried to God? Is there one here who has never said, "Father"? Then, my Father, put Your love into their hearts and make them tonight say, "I will arise and go to my Father." You shall truly be known to be the sons of God if that cry is in your heart and on your lips.

The next duty is the *committal of ourselves to God by faith*. Give yourselves up to God, trust yourselves with God. Every morning, when you get up, take yourself and put yourself into God's custody—lock yourself up, as it were, in the box of divine protection—and every night, when you have unlocked the box, before you fall asleep, lock it again and give the key into the hand of Him who is able to keep you when the image of death is on your face. Before you sleep, commit yourself to God. I mean, do that when there is nothing to frighten you, when everything is going smoothly, when the wind blows softly from the south and the barque is speeding towards its desired haven—still make not yourself quiet with your own quieting. He who carves for himself will cut his fingers and get an empty plate. He who leaves God to carve for him shall often have fat things full of marrow placed before him. If you can trust, God will reward your trusting in a way that you know not as yet.

And then practice one other duty, that of *the personal and continual realization of God's presence*. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." "You are here; I know that You are. I realize that You are here in the time of sorrow and of danger, and I put myself into Your hands. Just as I would give myself to the protection of a policeman, or a soldier, if anyone attacked me, so do I commit myself to You, You unseen Guardian of the night, You unwearied Keeper of the day. You shall cover my head in the day of battle. Beneath Your wings will I trust, as a chick hides beneath the hen."

See, then, your duty. It is to resign yourself to God, pray to God, commit yourself to God, and rest in a sense of the presence of God. May the Spirit of God help you in the practice of such priceless duties as these!

III. Now, lastly, LET US ENJOY THE PRIVILEGE.

First, let us enjoy the high privilege of *resting in God in all times of danger and pain*. The doctor has just told you that you will have to undergo an operation. Say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." There is every probability that that weakness of yours, or that disease of yours, will increase upon you and that by-and-by you will have to take to your bed and lie there perhaps for many a day. Then say, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Do not fret, for that will not help you. Do not fear the future, for that will not aid you. Give yourself up (it is your privilege to do so) to the keeping of those dear hands that were pierced for you, to the love of that dear heart which was set abroad with the spear to purchase your redemption.

It is wonderful what rest of spirit God can give to a man or a woman in the very worst condition. Oh, how some of the martyrs have sung at the stake! How they have rejoiced when on the rack! Bonner's coal-hole, across the water there, at Fulham, where he shut up the martyrs, was a wretched place to lie on a cold winter's night, but they said, "They did rouse them in the straw, as they lay in the coal-hole, with the sweetest singing out of heaven, and when Bonner said, 'Fie on them that they should make such a noise!' they told him that he, too, would make such a noise if he was as happy as they were." When you have commended your spirit to God, then you have sweet rest in time of danger and pain.

The next privilege is that of a *brave confidence, in the time of death, or in the fear of death*. I was led to think over this text by using it a great many times last Thursday night. Perhaps none of you will ever forget last Thursday night. I do not think that I ever shall, if I live to be as old as Methuselah. From this place till I reached my home, it seemed one continued sheet of fire—and the further I went, the more vivid became the lightning flashes. But when I came at last to turn up Leigham Court Road, then the lightning seemed to come in very bars from the sky, and at last as I reached the top of the hill, and a crash came of the most startling kind, down poured a torrent of hail—hailstones that I will not attempt to describe, for you might think that I exaggerated. And then I felt, and my friend with me, that we could hardly expect to reach home alive.

We were there at the very center and summit of the storm. All around us, on every side, and all within us, as it were, seemed nothing but the electric fluid—and God's right arm seemed bared for war. I felt then, "Well, now, I am very likely going home," and I commended my spirit to God. And from that moment, though I cannot say that I took much pleasure in the peals of thunder, and the flashes of lightning, yet I felt quite as calm as I do here at this present moment—perhaps a little more calm than I

do in the presence of so many people—happy at the thought that, within a single moment, I might understand more than all I could ever learn on earth and see in an instant more than I could hope to see if I lived here for a century. I could only say to my friend, “Let us commit ourselves to God. We know that we are doing our duty in going on as we are going, and all is well with us.”

So we could only rejoice together in the prospect of being soon with God. We were not taken home in the chariot of fire—we are still spared a little longer to go on with life's work—but I realize the sweetness of being able to have done with it all, to have no wish, no will, no word, scarcely a prayer, but just to take one's heart up and hand it over to the great Keeper, saying, “Father, take care of me. So let me live, so let me die. I have henceforth no desire about anything. Let it be as *You* please. Into Your hands I commend my spirit.”

This privilege is not only that of having rest in danger and confidence in the prospect of death—it is also full of *consummate joy*. Beloved, if we know how to commit ourselves into the hands of God, what a place it is for us to be in! What a place to be in—in the hands of God! There are the myriads of stars. There is the universe itself. God's hand upholds its everlasting pillars and they do not fall. If we get into the hands of God, we get where all things rest, and we get home and happiness. We have got out of the nothingness of the creature into the all-sufficiency of the Creator. Oh, get you there. Hasten to get you there, beloved friends, and live henceforth in the hands of God!

“It is finished.” You have not finished, but Christ has. It is all done. What you have to do will only be to work out what He has already finished for you, and show it to the sons of men in your lives. And because it is all finished, therefore say, “Now, Father, I return to You. My life henceforth shall be to be in You. My joy shall be to shrink to nothing in the presence of the All-in-All, to die into the eternal life, to sink my *ego* into JEHOVAH, to let my manhood, my creature hood live only for its Creator, and manifest only the Creator's glory.

O beloved, begin tomorrow morning and end tonight with, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.” The Lord be with you all! Oh, if you have never prayed, God help you to begin to pray now, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 23:27-49, MATTHEW 27:50-54

Luke 23:27. *And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him.*

Their best Friend, the Healer of their sick, the Lover of their children, was about to be put to death, so they might well bewail and lament.

28-30. *But Jesus turning unto them said, Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For, behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.*

Our Saviour looked forward to the terrible siege of Jerusalem, the most tragical of all human transactions. I think I do not exaggerate when I say that history contains nothing equal to it. It stands alone in the unutterable agony of men, women, and children in that dreadful time of suffering.

31. *For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?*

If the Christ of God is put to death even while the Jewish capital seems vigorous and flourishing, what shall be done when it is all dry and dead, and the Roman legions are round about the doomed city?

32. *And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death.*

Every item of scorn was added to our Saviour's death, and yet the Scriptures were thus literally fulfilled, for “He was numbered with the transgressors.”

33-34. *And when they were come to the place, which, is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

Do you hear the hammer fall? "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Do you see the bleeding hands and feet of Jesus? This is all that is extracted by that fearful pressure, nothing but words of pardoning love, a prayer for those who are killing him, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

35. *And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.*

You know how mockery puts salt and vinegar into a wound. A man does not at any time like to be reviled, but when he is full of physical and mental anguish, and his heart is heavy within him, then ridicule is peculiarly full of acid to him.

36-37. *And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, and saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.*

These rough legionaries knew how to put their jests in the most cruel shape, and to press home their scoffs upon their suffering victim.

38. *And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew,—*

These were the three languages that could be understood by all the people round about.

38. THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.

And so He is, and so He shall be. He has never quitted the throne. The Son of David is still King of the Jews, though they continue to reject Him, but the day shall come when they shall recognize and receive the Messiah. "Then shall they look upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn."

39. *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.*

Matthew and Mark speak of both the thieves as railing at Jesus. We must take their expressions as being literally correct, and if so, both the malefactors at first cast reproaches in Christ's teeth.

40-41. *But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath, done nothing amiss.*

Not only has he done nothing worthy of death, but he has done nothing improper, nothing out of place, "This man hath done nothing amiss." The thief bears testimony to the perfect character of this wondrous Man, whom he nevertheless recognized to be divine, as we shall see in the next verse.

42-47. *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou, comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with, a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Now when the centurion, saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man.*

He was set there at the head of the guard, to watch the execution, and he could not help saying, as he observed the wonderful signs in heaven and earth, "Certainly this was a righteous man."

48. *And all the people that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.*

What a change must have come over that ribald crowd! They had shouted, "Crucify him," they had stood there and mocked Him, and now they are overcome with the sight, and they smite their breasts. Ah, dear friends, their grief did not come to much! Men may smite their breasts, but unless God smites their hearts, all the outward signs of a gracious work will come to nothing at all.

49. *And all his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things.*

Let “these things” be before your mind’s eye this evening, and think much of your crucified Lord, all you who are of His acquaintance, and who are numbered amongst His followers.

(As the Exposition is shorter than usual, an appropriate extract is added from Mr. Spurgeon’s *Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew*).

Matthew 27:50. *Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost.*

Christ’s strength was not exhausted—His last word was uttered *with a loud voice*, like the shout of a conquering warrior. And what a word it was, “It is finished.” Thousands of sermons have been preached upon that little sentence, but who can tell all the meaning that lies compacted within it? It is a kind of infinite expression for breadth, and depth, and length, and height altogether immeasurable. Christ’s life being finished, perfected, completed, He *yielded up the ghost*, willingly dying, laying down His life as He said He would, “I lay down my life for the sheep. I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.”

51-53. *And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

Christ’s death was the end of Judaism, *The veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom*. As if shocked at the sacrilegious murder of her Lord, the temple rent her garments, like one stricken with horror at some stupendous crime. The body of Christ being rent, the veil of the temple was torn in twain from the top to the bottom. Now was there an entrance made into the holiest of all, by the blood of Jesus, and a way of access to God was opened for every sinner who trusted in Christ’s atoning sacrifice.

See what marvels accompanied and followed the death of Christ, *The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened*. Thus did the material world pay homage to him whom man had rejected. While nature’s convulsions foretold what will happen when Christ’s voice once more shakes not the earth only, but also heaven.

These first miracles wrought in connection with the death of Christ were typical of spiritual wonders that will be continued till He comes again—rocky hearts are rent, graves of sin are opened, those who have been dead in trespasses and sins, and buried in sepulchers of lust and evil, are quickened, and come out from among the dead, and go unto the *holy city*, the New Jerusalem.

54. *Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.*

These Roman soldiers had never witnessed such scenes in connection with an execution before, and they could only come to one conclusion about the illustrious prisoner whom they had put to death, “*Truly this was the Son of God.*” It was strange that those men should confess what the chief priests and scribes and elders denied, yet since their day it has often happened that the most abandoned and profane have acknowledged Jesus as the Son of God while their religious rulers have denied his divinity.

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—296, 700, 875

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