

THE WHOLE BAND AGAINST CHRIST

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A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall
 and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers.”
 Matthew 27:27.*

I HAVE not observed that anyone has turned to account the fact that “the whole band of soldiers” gathered in the Praetorium, or common hall, for the purpose of mocking our Lord. That they did mock Him has often been noticed and preached upon; but that they should have gathered unto Him the whole garrison, that all should have been there, is mentioned both by Matthew and by Mark, and this being twice recorded cannot have been without some meaning and some lesson for us.

To begin, then, our blessed Lord, being condemned to die, was given over to the brutal soldiers who garrisoned Jerusalem. They lived in quarters round about the palace of the governor and when the Savior was delivered to them to be put to death, they made Him the center of their mockery and derision before they executed the terrible sentence upon Him. Does it not strike you that any man condemned to die ought to be protected against such usage as that? If he must die, some respect should be paid to one who is about to endure the death penalty. I think that there should be great indulgence shown in such a case; at any rate, nothing should be done or said to hurt the feelings, or to wound the sensibilities. Pity seems to say, “If the man must die, then so be it; but let us not, for a single moment make jest of him. Let there not be mirth; that is a brutality not to be thought of at such a time as this! And to make a man, about to die, the subject of scorn is a superfluity of cruelty and wickedness.” I think that even a devil might be ashamed of such savagery as this! But there was no law to protect the Savior from these soldiers. Every man’s heart seems to have been steeled against Him; the common dictates of the most ignorant humanity appear to have been violated. They said by their actions, if not in words, “He shall not only die, but He shall be stripped of all His honor; He shall be robbed of every comfort; He shall become the butt and target of all the cruel arrows of contempt that we can shoot at Him.”

Still, why is it said that, in order to make Him the object of derision, they gathered together, “the whole band”? I do not know how many soldiers constituted the garrison, or how many were barracked round about the governor’s palace, but they gathered together, “the whole band”; not merely a few of them who were on duty that day, but *all* were summoned to make a mockery of Christ! It was not because He needed to be guarded lest He should escape, for He had no desire to be set free. It was not because the soldiers would have needed to keep Him securely guarded lest the people should attempt to rescue Him, for the Jews did not want Him to be rescued. On the contrary, it was by their clamor that He was doomed to die. They had cried, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” He had no friends to stand up for Him, no band of disciples to come and force the soldiers away and set Him free. Therefore these soldiers did not guard Him with the whole strength of the band on that account.

Nor were they all needed to execute the death sentence. With a people eager for His death, four soldiers, a single quaternion, sufficed. He carried His own cross and they had but to drive the nails into His hands and feet and fasten Him to the tree. That could have soon done it to a Victim so defenseless, so inoffensive; it did not need that they should gather together, “the whole band,” and so we are told it as a remarkable circumstance which did not rise necessarily out of the narrative. It must have a meaning of its own, “They gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers.”

I shall speak thus upon it. First, it would appear that *the soldiers were unanimous in mocking their Prisoner*; secondly, *so are men united in opposing Christ*; and, thirdly, *what shall we say of both the facts of which we are to speak tonight?*

I. First, then, it is clear that THE SOLDIERS WERE UNANIMOUS IN MOCKING THEIR PRISONER.

Upon this, I remark, first, that *men are very apt to go together when they go wrong*. You notice, in a workshop, how the religion of Christ will be despised, and how certain men will lead the way in uttering calumnies against it. And then the rest will follow. When men go astray, they are like a flock of sheep; one gets through the hedge and all the rest go after it. We have heard of one sheep leaping the parapet of a bridge into a river; and the whole flock went after it and all were destroyed. Men are such curious beings, not only the creatures of their own habits, but the imitators of other men's example! I know not how it is, but persons who, alone and apart, would seem to have some good inclinations, will shake them all off when they get into evil company. At home, they will talk reasonably, but, in the crowd, they speak madly. At home and alone, they are amenable to rebuke and conviction. But when they got with other men, they will not hear a word of it; they shut their ears to anything like good teaching; and they run greedily to do mischief. I do not, therefore, so much wonder that when our Lord was given over to the soldiers, they gathered together the whole band, for it is so usual for men to go together when they go wrong.

Frequently, too, it will happen that *there is not one man to bear his protest*. Would you not have expected that, in a large band of soldiers, there would have been at least *one* man of noble spirit who would have said, "No, do not torture Him; He is about to die"? Would it have been at all amazing if one man had stood forward, and said, "This man has done nothing wrong. Our governor has said that he finds no fault in Him. Why, therefore, do you set Him in that chair and robe Him, and bow the knee in mockery, and spit upon Him?" It would not have been very surprising if there had been among the Roman soldiers some one or two who had espoused Christ's cause, for, truth to tell, those valiant men, although they grew brutalized by living amidst scenes of blood, were capable of deeds of high virtue. One has but to read the old Roman story to stand amazed, sometimes, that such fair flowers of virtue and benevolence could grow on such a dunghill as the Roman State was then. Yet you see that not one out of the whole band of soldiers would say a word for Christ, or absent himself from the ring when their comrades mocked Him.

Perhaps I address some men here who work together and who are in the habit of scoffing at the cross of Christ. I hope that there is not a workshop in London without one man, at least, who will stand forward and defend his Master's cause; but if I speak to one to whom that thought has occurred and yet he has said, "I dare not! I would be, myself, the subject of so much persecution that I could not stand forth alone," now, listen, sir, if a Caius, or a Fabius, or a Julius had stood forth alone to defend the Lord's cause, we would have had his name here! And if he had even suffered death for it, he would have been among the brightest of the martyr host! And you know not what honor you lose if you conceal your testimony. If you allow the whole drift of the talk to be infidel and atheistic and never put in your good word for Him whom you call Master and Lord, you dishonor yourself! But if you could have the courage and I hope that you may, to say, "He, of whom you speak thus ill, has saved my soul, snatched me from habits of vice and renewed my character"; if you could stand forward, and bear such testimony for Him; I know that it were a short road to glory, honor and immortality! It is not likely that you would have to suffer as the martyrs did, but suppose that you did? The more of suffering, the brighter that ruby crown which would be set upon your head in the day of your Lord's appearing! I hope that Christian men are still made of that grand old stuff which defied the Roman emperors and made them weary of slaughter, for they could not mow down the crops of the Church as fast as they grew! The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church; and the more copiously it was shed, the more the Church multiplied!

But, once more, *the number of those who thus mocked Christ made their conduct all the baser*. When you, young fellow, get in with 50 more, and in the workshop you mock at some solitary Christian youth. When you, each one, have your jibe; when you give him what you call, "chaff," which is sport to you, but cruel enough to be death to him; did it never occur to you that it was a most cowardly thing and altogether unworthy of you, that ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, should all set upon one? What if a man believes in religion? Has he not a right to do so if he likes? Some of you who talk so much about freedom are the biggest bullies in the world! You boast loudly of religious liberty, but to you it means liberty to be irreligious! Surely I have as much right to worship Christ as you have to despise Him; and if my views of religion should seem to you to be peculiar, yet, if peculiar, have I not as good reason to hold them as you have to reject them? I speak thus plainly because I know of many, many cases where, if

men were men at all, they would cease to persecute Christians, seeing that they persecute one or two wherever they can if they, themselves, happen to be in the majority. Think of this lot of howling dogs around this one gentle Lamb of God, the Christ who had never even a hard word for them, whose mightiest weapon was silence and patience! Think of Him surrounded by all these men of war from their youth up, these Roman legionaries with their imperial eagles! It was a cruel shame. The more there were of them, the meaner it was of them thus, as a whole band, to gather together to mock the Savior.

But I suppose that *their number accounted for the excess to which they went*. If there had only been two or three of them, they would not have thought of all the cruel things that they did to our Lord. To put an old cloak upon Him and to call Him the purpled Caesar is commonplace enough, but one cries, "Let us make a crown for Him," and they plait the thorns with cruel hands, piercing His temples with the sharp spines. Another says, "Fetch a scepter and put it in His hand. Set Him in that chair and let us bow before Him! Let us cry, 'Hail, King of the Jews!'" They would have stopped at that point had there not been so many of them. But, being so large a band, one coarse fellow must go still further and he spits into that blessed face—

*"See how the patient Jesus stands,
Insulted in His lowest case!
Sinners have bound the Almighty hands,
And spit in their Creator's face."*

I hardly think that one, two, three, or even half-a-dozen, by themselves, could have been guilty of such detestable, loathsome conduct to Christ! But the whole band being together, they thought of fresh insults.

Take heed of sinning in a crowd! Young man, abandon the idea that you may sin in a crowd! Beware of the notion that because many do it, it is less a guilt to any one of them. Remember that the broad way was always the *wrong* road and that it leads to destruction, none the less because many walk in it. "Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." Though you finish up the day's work of sin with three cheers for your noble selves, you shall find yourselves arraigned, each one, before the judgment seat of God; each one to give account for the deeds done in his body according to what he has done, whether it is good or whether it is evil. Oh, the pitiful story, a whole company of soldiers united against Christ, with not one to quit the ranks and say, "No, comrades! Do not do this!" But all wallowing in their cruelty, like swine in the mire!

II. That leads me to talk to you, secondly, about another point. As these soldiers were unanimous in mocking their illustrious Prisoner, **SO ARE MEN UNITED IN OPPOSING CHRIST.**

Like these soldiers, *many do not pass Christ by with neglect*. I should have thought that many a brave man of that Roman legion would have said, "Pshaw! I shall not go to taunt the poor Jew who has been hunted down by the priests. Nobody gives Him a good word; even His own followers have fled from Him. I heard one of them declare that He did not know Him, though I knew that man was a liar, for I saw Him in the garden with his Master. My comrades are going to the Praetorium to mock Him, but I shall not go. Such mirth is unworthy of a man, especially of a Roman." Instead thereof, they were all there! Curiosity fetched them up; they must all come to see this man of whom they had heard so much; and an evil conscience made them bitter against Him, for, because *they* were evil, His being good was a protest against their wicked deeds.

So they were all united against Him and *they came up, every one of them, to show their scorn*. It is a strange thing, but if Christ is fully preached, somehow men cannot be indifferent to Him. If they can get away and never hear of Him, they may be indifferent. But the true gospel either offends men, or else it charms them. I believe that you may preach a certain sort of gospel, from the first of January to the end of December, and everybody will say, "Yes, that is very good, very, very good, and perfectly harmless." Yes, a chip in the porridge, with no flavor in it. But if it is the real out-and-out gospel of a crucified Savior, there will be someone who will say, "Ah that is what I need! I like that," but there will be others who will grind their teeth, and say, "I will never hear that man again! I cannot bear his talk. I hate it." Do not be surprised when I say that, if I hear that So-and-So was very angry at one of my sermons, I state as my belief, "That man will go to heaven. I have the hook in that fish and I shall yet catch him!" But when I hear people simply say, "Oh, yes, we heard the sermon," and they make some trifling remark about it, and go their way, nothing good comes of it. It is better that a man should be in a downright rage against Christ than be utterly indifferent to Him! And where He really comes so that men are obliged to

see Him, they cannot long be indifferent. "That the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed," is one of the objects of His death.

The cross of Christ is the great detector of men. Fix it up and men straightway go to the right or to the left of it. It is the parter and divider of the ways. Jesus, Himself, said, "He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad." Men cannot pass by utterly with neglect after once hearing the story of the cross. They must gather up for Christ or against Him, and, alas, many of them do gather up to pour their scorn upon Him!

Many ungodly men *feel an inward contempt for Christ's claims*. "No," says one, "I have no such contempt for Christ." I would not wish to charge you wrongfully, but if you are not a believer in Him; if you have never accepted Him to be your Savior and your Lord, I venture to repeat the charge; you have an inward contempt for His claims, my hearers. Whether you are Christians or not, you are the subjects of King Jesus. God has put you into His hands and you will have to stand before His judgment seat at the last. The man, Christ Jesus, who died on Calvary and rose again, and went to heaven, will judge every one of you at the last great day; and He claims that you *now* should become His servants, and yield obedience to Him! Now, I know that you will say in your hearts, "We shall not do anything of the kind!" Just so, and have I not proved what I said? "The carnal mind is enmity against God," and that carnal mind may be in a man who always goes to church, or to chapel. If he has not been renewed, he does not believe in Christ as King and, as far as his heart is concerned, he mocks at the idea of his being a servant of Christ and Christ being Lord over him. In his very soul he thinks this to be a preposterous claim, that he should be obedient to Christ in everything. Besides, the mass of men do not seek to know what Christ's claims are. They are ignorant of His royalty and sovereignty; and it is in this way that their minds are filled with an indistinctly expressed, but still very powerful, contempt for Him.

And so it happens, in the next place, that *men invent different ways of showing their derision*. It is very curious that you find very learned men opposed to Christ and they go to work, usually, by destructive criticism, trying to get rid of this part of the Bible and that. But an ignorant man cannot do that, so he says that he does not believe in the Bible at all. Here you find a rich man despising Christ, sneering at "the common people," as he calls Christ's followers, and there you see another man who is very poor, despising Christ by wishing to overthrow all the rules of His sacred kingdom. Herod and Pilate hate one another till Christ comes; and then they join together in reviling Him.

These Roman soldiers, having all come together, found employment in mocking Christ. First, some of them stripped Him. Oh, have I not seen men at it in these days, stripping Christ of His Deity, stripping Him of His priesthood, stripping Him of His sovereignty, stripping Him of His righteousness, stripping Christ of everything that makes Him Christ? Is not that the way with many of the rich, the great and the "advanced" theologians of the present day? They show their hatred of Christ by stripping Him!

There are others who go to work the other way; they put a scarlet robe on Him. I have seen them do it; put other men's garments upon Him, make Him out to be what He never was; travesty the doctrines of grace, caricature the gospel and hold it all up to contempt, imputing to Christ the faults of all His followers and even laying at His door the sin of men who, like Judas, have betrayed Him! That is another method of showing enmity to Christ.

Then we see all around us men who mock at Christ's royalty. They crown Him with a crown of thorns by their harsh speeches against His people. By their persecutions of those who love Him, Christ is often crowned, again, with thorns. The husband has done it in his unkindness to his believing wife. Parents have done it in their objection to their children following Christ. The man or woman who has given the cold shoulder to a pious friend, has thus put another crown of thorns upon the Savior's head. And have we not seen them put the reed into His hand by representing Christ as being a mere myth and His doctrine as a dream, a holy fancy, a proper thing to keep the people quiet, but with no matter of fact or truth in it? So they put into His hand the reed-scepter to mock Him and He regards it as mockery. And thus, around the Christ, today, I seem to see, with eyes closed, but by the vision of faith, a multitude kneeling before Him and pretending to worship Him; hypocritical worshippers; those who even by their bedsides are hypocrites, repeating a form of prayer and yet never really praying! They are drawing near to Him with their lips, while their hearts are far from Him. Oh, how do sinners thus prove their unanimity of enmity to Christ! Even in their pretended worship, they do but show the opposition of their hearts to Him.

Here and there, also, I see one coarser than other men who spits upon Jesus and smites Him. You cannot live long in London without hearing from men who are opposed to the cross of Christ, expres-

sions that disgust you. I have given up all idea, now, that we are living in a Christian country. Believers in England are a band of Christ's soldiers who are holding the fort against deadly odds! Ours is a heathen country with an admixture of Christian people and a smear, a varnish of pretended religion, but still a heathen country! And every now and then some outspoken heathen, by his awful profanity, makes us wish that we could not hear at all! This is how they spit on Christ. One does it very politely with a bow. Another comes forward and abuses both the Christ and His cross. He has spat in His face and honestly lets us know where he stands. One will undermine the truth of God; another brings the battering ram, in open day, to beat down the citadel; but they are so united together that, with one accord, the whole band of soldiers is gathered against Christ.

Dear friends, if men attacked any one doctrine, you would find only one band of men opposing it, but when Christ, Himself, is the object of mockery, the whole band gathers round Him! If I preach some of the doctrines of Calvinism, I shall find men who are fatalists, and necessitarians and the like, who will agree with me. But if I preach the whole gospel of Christ, these very men who might have been my friends under one form of doctrine, will be my enemies against the whole of it! Only let Jesus appear, and Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, learned and unlearned; until they are renewed by grace; count His cross to be a stumbling block and His doctrine to be foolishness!

Now notice that men *who could mock Christ like this were capable of doing anything evil*. If they could revile Christ, it was no wonder that they cast lots for His clothes just at His feet when He hung on the cross. I am often astounded at things that I read about gamblers and what they have been known to do. It is 50 years ago since there was a story told by a policeman; and I do not doubt its truth; of two men at Hampstead who, having bet with one another all that they had, at last had a wager as to which should hang the other. And one of them did hang the other. The policeman came along just in time to save him, and when the man was cut down, what do you think he said? Why, he said that he would have hung the other man, if he could, to win the bet! That was thought to be very extraordinary, but it is not so very long ago since, at the laying of the first stone of a chapel, a friend of mine stood behind two gentlemen from Newmarket, and when one whom I know stood up to pray over the first stone, these two made a bet about how long he would be praying! Men will do anything for a wager. That mischievous vice which is becoming so common, nowadays, leads to an extraordinary hardness of heart beyond anything else! And I cannot so much wonder that men who were brought up as these Roman soldiers were, were capable of mocking Christ, and of anything else that was evil.

III. I have finished when I have asked and answered this question, WHAT SHALL WE SAY OF BOTH THE FACTS WHEREOF WE HAVE SPOKEN TONIGHT?

These cruel soldiers unanimously came together to see Christ as a prisoner and to put Him to extraordinary scorn; *yet out of this band Christ found witnesses*. Their chief officer, "the centurion, and they that were with him," as they stood and saw Christ die, said, "Truly this was the Son of God." And some of these soldiers, being appointed to watch the tomb of Christ, came and declared that He had risen from the dead. They were fine witnesses, were they not? Men who were too rough to lie to help a sect. They came forward to bear testimony to the Christ. O God, if there are any here who have blasphemed You, who have cursed Christ to His face, who have persecuted Christ's people, save them, tonight, and make them witnesses of Your power to bless! When such a man gets saved, he is a good witness for Christ. He says, "I know what Christ can do, for He has changed my heart; He has appeared to me by the way and manifested Himself to me; and I know and am sure of that which I testify, that, verily, this is the Son of God."

Next, learn another lesson. *All this mockery should rebuke the backwardness among Christ's friends*. When He was to be mocked, all the soldiers came up. Some of them were down in the canteen, but they left their wine and came up to mock Him. Some of the soldiers, perhaps, had furlough for that day, but they gave up their holiday to go to mock Christ. Now, then, brothers and sisters, if His enemies could gather together the whole band *against* Him, let us gather together the whole band *for* Him. Why, just look at some of you on the Lord's-Day! There are a few drops of rain that might spoil your best bonnets, or wet your new clothes, so you cannot go to chapel. You would have gone to market, you know, rain or shine! How many there are who will not be able to come to the prayer meeting tomorrow night! One pleaded, some time ago, at the prayer meeting, "Lord, bless those that are at home on beds of sickness!" "Yes," said the preacher, "and, Lord, bless those that are at home on sofas of wellness!" There are plenty of that kind, who stay at home because they have not enough of the hearty spirit that ought to be in them to let the whole band gather together to confess Christ. Do you love Jesus Christ, my dear sister? Then

come and confess it! Do you love Jesus Christ, my brother? Then out with your avowal of it! Do not try to go to heaven behind the hedges. Get on the King's high road and travel in broad daylight as a soldier of Christ should. Say—

***“I'm not ashamed to acknowledge my Lord,
Or to defend His cause.”***

Next, I think that *these mockers chide the uninventiveness of many Christians*. See how they brought out the old red cloak, plaited the crown of thorns and cried, “Put them on Him!” Then they brought the scepter of reed, saying, “Stick it in His hand and shout, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’” Then came the spitting and the smiting; they could not have made the mockery more complete. They soon rigged up all that mimicry of royalty. Come, then, brothers and sisters, let us be inventive in honoring Christ—

***“Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all!”***

See, is there not some new plan to be tried, some method that you have not yet attempted by which you could make Jesus loved and honored in the soul of somebody, be it only a poor child, a servant girl, or the most humble man in the street? Surely, if enmity was so quick to deride Him, love ought to be equally alert and inventive to find out ways by which to honor Him!

But, once more, *all this mockery should excite our admiration of our patient Lord*. Remember that as He sat there, flouted and made a jest of, He might with one glance of His eyes have flashed hell into their souls and slain every one of them! Had He only opened those lips, He could have spoken thunderbolts that would have destroyed them at once! But He sat there and patiently bore it all. As a sheep before her shearers, He was dumb. He opened not His mouth because He was bearing all this to save you and to save me! Blessed Savior! Oh, come, let us worship and adore and love Him!

The last lesson is, *let us summon all our faculties to honor Christ tonight*. Gather together the whole band, your memory of all His goodness, your judgment of all His greatness, all your hopes and all your fears; your quieted conscience, your soul at rest; come, and with the whole band of faculties that God has given you, from the highest to the lowest, bow down in grateful adoration before Him who bowed so low that He might lift us up to be with Him forever! Dear hearers, are you trusting Christ? There is no other trust that will do for a soul for time and for eternity! On a dying bed, it must be none but Jesus; let it be none but Jesus on your bed, tonight, before you fall asleep. Do not dare to close your eyes till you have committed your soul into the keeping of Him who still holds out His hands, as He did upon the cross, that He may receive you with open arms and save you with an everlasting salvation! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MATTHEW 27:22-50.

Our Lord was brought before the Roman governor, Pilate. He was anxious to let Jesus go, but he was a weak-minded man, easily swayed by the noisy cry of the people, prompted by the chief priests and elders.

Verses 22, 23. *Pilate said unto them, What shall I do, then, with Jesus which is called Christ? They all said unto him, Let Him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil has He done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let Him be crucified!*

A blind, unreasoning hate had taken possession of the people. They gave no answer to Pilate's wondering inquiry, “Why, what evil has He done?” for He had done nothing amiss. But they only repeated the brutal demand, “Let Him be crucified! Let Him be crucified!” The world's hatred of Christ is shown in similar fashion today. He has done no evil, no one has suffered harm at His hands, all unite to pronounce Him innocent, and yet they practically say, “Away with Him! Crucify Him!”

24. *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see you to it.*

Ah, Pilate, you cannot rid yourself of responsibility by that farce! He who has power to prevent a wrong is guilty of the act if he permits others to do it, even though he does not actually commit it himself. If you are placed in positions of power and responsibility, do not *dream* that you can escape from guilt by merely allowing other people to do what you would not do yourself.

25. *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.*

All the people willingly took upon themselves the guilt of the murder of our dear Lord: “His blood be on us, and on our children.” This fearful imprecation must have been remembered by many when the soldiers of Titus spared neither age nor sex and the Jewish capital became the veritable Aceldama, the field of blood.

26. *Then released he Barabbas unto them: and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.*

Why scourge Him before delivering Him up to be crucified? Surely this was a superfluity of cruelty! The Roman scourging was something which I scarcely care to describe; it was one of the most terrible punishments to which anyone could be subjected; yet Pilate first scourged Jesus, and *then* gave Him up to die by crucifixion.

27, 28. *Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto Him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped Him, and put on Him a scarlet robe.*

Some old soldier’s coat that they found lying about, they cast upon Christ in imitation of the royal robes of Caesar or Herod.

29-31. *And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon His head, and a reed in His right hand: and they bowed the knee before Him, and mocked Him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon Him, and took the reed, and smote Him on the head. And when they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him.*

By that fact, though they did not intend it, our Lord was recognized in the street as the same person who had been taken into the Praetorium by the soldiers. Had Jesus been brought forth in the scarlet robe, persons looking at Him might not have known Him to be the same man who wore the garment woven from the top throughout; but in His own seamless raiment, they readily recognized the Nazarene.

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

I wonder if He was a black man. There was a Simon in the early Church, and it certainly was the lot of the Ethiopian to bear the cross for many and many an age. This Simon was a stranger, anyway, and a foreigner; he was truly honored to be compelled to bear the cross after Christ.

33. *And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull.*

From its shape. There appears to be to this day a hill, still in the form of a human skull, outside the gate of Jerusalem. When they came to that common place of execution, the Tyburn or Old Bailey of the city,—

34. *They gave Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall, and when He had tasted thereof, He would not drink.*

A stupefying draught was given to the condemned; that is the only mercy that there was about the whole thing. The Romans did give to the crucified a draught of myrrh to take away something of the agony of crucifixion, but our Lord came not to be stupefied; He came to suffer; therefore He would not take anything that would at all impair His faculties. He drank even to the dregs the bitter cup of grief and woe.

35. *And they crucified Him.*

Horrible scene, to see those blessed hands and feet pierced with nails, and fastened to the cross!

35. *And parted His garments, casting lots.*

Rattling the dice at the foot of the cross! Gambling is the most hardening of all vices. I believe that crimes have been committed by persons under the influence of gambling, which never could have been committed by them in any other condition of mind: “They parted His garments, casting lots.” See here, you gamblers! With Christ’s blood bespattering them, these soldiers still dared to raffle for His robe.

35, 36. *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. And sitting down they watched Him there.*

His enemies gloating their cruel eyes with the sight of His sufferings. His friends with many tears watching His amazing griefs. It is for us, tonight, with humble faith and grateful love, to mark the incidents connected with His painful death.

37, 38. *And set up over His head His accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. Then were there two thieves crucified with Him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.*

Giving Him the place of honor, which means, in this case, the place of *dishonor*. He was the apex of that terrible triangle.

39, 40. *And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, You that destroys the temple, and builds it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.*

This is the cry of the Socinians, today, “Come down from the cross. Give up the atoning sacrifice and we will be Christians.” But, by rejecting His vicarious atonement, they practically un-Christ the Christ, as those mockers at Golgotha did!

41, 42. *Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.*

Just so. Get rid of a crucified Savior, then they will believe in Him! Atonement, substitution, vicarious sacrifice; this staggers them. They will have Christ if they can have Him without His cross.

43-46. *He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now, if He will have Him: for He said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with Him, cast the same in His teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. 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 have You forsaken Me?*

Every word in this terrible cry from the cross is emphatic! Every syllable cuts and pierces to the heart!

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

They knew better, yet they jested at the Savior’s prayer

48. *And straightway one of them ran and took a sponge,*

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.

48-50. *And filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave Him to drink. The rest said, Let Him be, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him. 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! He need not have died on account of any infirmity in Himself, but voluntarily, for your sake; for your sake and mine, He “yielded up the ghost.” Blessed be His holy name!

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