

THE PIERCED HEART OF JESUS

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A SERMON

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“Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they have pierced.”
John 19:32-27

WHAT a wonderful conjunction of prophecy and providence! I want you to behold it, and admire it. Two texts of Scripture, the one in Exodus the other in Zechariah (such a long interval having occurred between the distinct records), predict, the former that not a bone of the Paschal Lamb should be broken, the latter, that He should be pierced. How were these twain to be fulfilled in the minuteness of one incident?

The rough Roman soldier comes with the iron bar to break the bones of the three prisoners who have been crucified. He has orders to break their legs. The well-disciplined soldier acts almost mechanically, according to orders. Roman discipline was of the very sternest kind. Will not the soldier, therefore, break the legs of Jesus? No. Moved by some strange impulse, he marks that one of the three, Jesus, who is called Christ, is dead already. Though commanded to break His legs, he forbears, but most likely to clear himself of all doubt on that point, he pierces His side with a spear. The willfulness of the soldier, wavering though wanton, thus fulfilled both the prophecies of which he must have been himself totally ignorant, and this was brought about first by his not doing what he was ordered to do, and secondly, by doing what he had not been ordered to do.

Oh! how inscrutable the mystery of providence! How marvelously does God rule the sons of men while He leaves them to their own free will! Did not this soldier act altogether as a free agent, whether following the dictates of his reason or the impulse of his temper, when he thus unwittingly, by his singular conduct, verified to the letter the words of prophecy as precisely and entirely as if he had been a mere puppet moved with wires at the instigation of another mind and another hand than his own?

This was not an accidental circumstance, or a singular coincidence—it was providence—a sublime purpose of God brought to pass by simple means. Irregularities among men do not disorganize the ordained purposes of heaven, and what we think to be chaos is a well-ordered system far beyond our ken, into which we vainly attempt to peer.

I need not detain you with any speculations arising out of the piercing of our Savior by the spear. It has been, I think, very soberly argued that in all probability the physical cause of our Savior's death was a broken heart. In a scientific treatise by one who had studied the anatomy of the subject, and investigated cases which appeared after death to bear some resemblance to our Savior's case, it has been shown that when, on the heart being pierced, a small portion of blood and water has flowed, death has been traceable to a heart broken with intense grief.

So, if we may assign a physical cause to the death of our Lord, it appears most probable to have been so occasioned. It was anguish that, in the first stage, produced a bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and in the last stage ruptured His heart. Not, however, that I am inclined to attach any importance to such

arguments or speculations. For my part I do not see that there is any analogy, or that analogy need be sought between the case of the Savior and the case of any common man. The anatomist would be baffled with an analysis. The body of any ordinary person would exhibit symptoms of corruption. From this, He that hung upon the cross was exempt. When death comes, and the vital spark quits the human frame, the process of decomposition speedily begins. But our Lord saw no corruption.

Overshadowed as was His virgin mother by the Spirit at her conception, His birth was predicted as “*that holy thing* which shall be born of thee.” Through the entire course of His life on earth, the Spirit rested upon Him in a special manner. And even after His soul had left His body, the Spirit preserved and kept that body so that the prophecy was fulfilled, “Neither wilt thou suffer *thine Holy One* to see corruption.” Hence you search in vain for a parallel.

The disparity of any instances that might be sought for is so palpable that you really have not any data to start with, or any premises to reason upon, in the effort to judge of what happened in the anatomy of the sacred body of our blessed Lord. Instead of following speculations which rather belong to the physician than the theologian, I desire the Spirit of God to conduct us into some spiritual reflections arising out of the piercing of the heart of Jesus Christ by the soldier’s spear. One observation, I think, lies upon the very surface of the narrative.

I. EVEN AFTER OUR LORD’S DEATH, MEN RUDELY ASSAILED HIM.

Was it not enough that they had scourged His back? Did it not suffice that they had put a thorn crown on His head? Was it not sufficient that they had nailed His feet and His hands to the tree? And yet after they were satisfied that the life had been forfeited to the law, and the body was already dead, nothing could content human cruelty till His heart was pierced with the lance.

Say, now, was not this man who pierced Christ’s heart a fair, though a foul, sample of our sinful race, his heartless act a type of our headstrong profanity? We too, after the Savior’s death have pierced Him. Shall I show you how? The crime is so common that you come to condone it. His Godhead is His glory. *Deny His Deity* and you not only detract from His dignity, but you make Him unworthy of our confidence. This is to thrust the spear into His very heart. Your tone is treacherous when you say, “He is but a man. Though an admirable teacher, I can only regard Him as a finite creature.”

Oh! how many people go up and down among us professing to be members of a Protestant church, and believers in the Scripture, who yet will not acknowledge the miracles of Christ to be authentic, wrought in token of His own personal authority, bearing the witness of His Father, and conveying a clear proof that He was the Son of God! The Lord have mercy upon those who in this respect pierce our dear Redeemer afresh. If any of us have been guilty of this sin, may we be converted from our dangerous error, and led to avow Him, like Thomas, “My Lord and my God.”

They pierce Him too, who *attack the doctrines which He taught*, and the testimony which He delivered. The truth was in Christ’s heart, it was written there. Whatever He preached with His lips He sanctified with His life. His heart was a fountain whence came all those doctrines which reveal the Father to us. Do men attack any truth revealed to us by Christ, they do in effect what the soldier did in fact, they do spiritually as this Roman legionary did literally, they thrust at His heart.

If you disparage the words that Jesus spake, or call in question the truth that He showed to His disciples and made manifest in the Word, what is there left of that mission in which He made known the will of God the Father? To proclaim this truth He came, to bear witness to this truth He died. He witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate. If you touch those doctrines, you touch the apple of His eye, nay, you pierce His heart again.

How do they also thrust at His heart *who persecute His people!* And has He not often been wounded thus through all the centuries that have transpired since He ascended up on high to the Father’s right hand? Saul of Tarsus pierced His heart, for Jesus said, “Why persecutest thou me?” The sufferings of the men and women, hauled to prison, and beaten in the synagogue, and compelled to blaspheme, were injuries wantonly and wickedly done to Christ Himself. And what shall we say of the martyrs, their

groans in the prison house, their cries at the rack, their pangs at the stake, their blood so cruelly shed, have not all these touched the Savior's heart?

So, too, *every rude jeer and ribald jest*, every hard word and bitter taunt aimed at a follower of Christ, is a reproach of the dear Lord and Master for whose sake it is meekly borne, but on their part "who whet their tongue like a sword," it is aimed at the heart of Jesus, on whom they cannot otherwise wreak their vengeance now, for He cannot henceforth suffer, except in sympathy with the sufferings of His saints.

And there is yet another class of persons who, although Christ's sufferings are over, still continue to pierce Him. They *are such as pretend to be His disciples*, but they lie and practice a foul hypocrisy. Are there any such present? I tremble as I ask the question. As there were false apostles of yore, so there are foul apostates in these days. Their profession is only the prelude to their perfidy. They make solemn pledge to obey Him, but like Judas, they only wait a suited opportunity to betray Him. They will sell the Savior for silver, only let the price be high enough, their principle is low enough, their conscience will not hesitate to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame."

Oh! you inconsistent professors! Oh! you graceless men and women! How dare you come to the table of His fellowship? You have a name to live, and yet you are dead, you are crucifying Him, you are piercing Him, the guilt of the Roman soldier clings to you.

I fear me, too, there is another class that pierces His heart—it includes *those who refuse to believe in His willingness to forgive them*. When under conviction of sin, it may be difficult to believe that one can be pardoned, but when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us, and His infinite condescension that brought Him to suffer for us, it does seem hard that any should doubt Him. Yet some there are who link their chains, sit down in despair, and say, "He is not willing to forgive." So unkind, ungenerous a thought as that He is unwilling to forgive must pierce Him to the heart and cut Him to the quick.

I know some of you do not mean this. You are startled now that you think what you are doing. I pray the Lord you may humbly trust Him. Oh! do not doubt Him, the Son of God, who suffered for His enemies, surrendering His life for even the ungodly. Will you, can you still distrust Him? Will you doubt the testimony which God has given concerning His Son? Were it not far better that you honored Him by casting yourselves at His feet? Angels that sing His praises night and day unceasingly do not honor Him more than you will do, if, all black and defiled as you are, you will come and trust Him that He can wash you and make you whiter than snow. Oh! do you this, and pierce His heart no more!

Some men pierce the heart of Christ *through their carelessness*. They trifle and even scoff because they have not known Him, or sought by any means to learn what claims He has upon their homage. They disparage those divine features of His ministry which they have never properly understood. So they pierce the heart of Christ out of ignorant prejudice. They are unacquainted with the Gospel themselves. All that they have heard or read about it has been from the tongue or pen of opponent or satirist, and then, catching their temper, they have joined in reviling it.

Alas! too, there are some who malign the Savior out of mere malice. Though they know better, yet they willfully blaspheme His name. Stop, oh! stop, and pierce Him no more, I pray you, lest He that has meekly endured so long as the Lamb of God should suddenly stir Himself up as the lion of the tribe of Judah, and make *you* feel the terror of His power, who will not feel the majesty of His love. So much for our first point. Even after Jesu's death, there are those who still pierce Him. Our second thought is such as I am charmed to give you.

II. THESE ATTACKS UPON THE SAVIOR ARE OVERRULED TO DISPLAY HIS GRACE THE BETTER.

His heart is pierced, it is true, but with what result, my brethren? Does there flash from it fire? Does the peal of thundering wrath roll over the sinner's head? Ah! no, it is like the sandal tree, that perfumes the axe that wounds it. Adown that spear, no sooner is it withdrawn from the wound than there gushes a fountain of blood and water. *The attacks that are made upon Jesus Christ only display His virtues.*

Observe how this is brought about. If truth be attacked, and the Gospel be assailed, what is the immediate consequence? Why, then, the saints search deeper into it, so they come to understand the doctrine better, they learn the arguments by which it is sustained, and they love the truth with fonder, as well as stronger convictions, till they feel moved to sacrifice themselves for it.

The heart of Christ was opened by the spear, and often the heart of truth is revealed by the opposition brought to bear against it. They think to confute our doctrines, they do but confirm our faith in their verity. Where they think they shall prove us fools, they help to make us sages. They drive us to the root of the matter, and they rather establish us in the precious truth. The March wind tears not up the oak, but roots it more firmly in its native soil. So shall it ever be with attacks made upon our Lord and Master. We shall understand Him the better and discover more of the Scriptures that were fulfilled in Him.

Moreover, it often happens that when Christ is opposed by persecution, *the Gospel is proclaimed with more zeal*, and diffused with more rapidity. The saints who were, in early days, persecuted in Jerusalem, went everywhere preaching the Word. What if I say the spear of persecution does, as it were, set the atoning blood flowing more freely among the sons of men, and make the purifying water of the Savior's sacrifice to be dispersed over a wider area, and amongst a larger population?

Shall I compare the persecuted church to an oppressed nation, and remind you that, like Israel in Egypt, the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied and grew? The spear let loose the blood and water from the heart of Jesus, and the spear of persecution lets loose the Gospel, and compels Christian men who might have rested in inglorious ease to go forward and laboriously dispense the Gospel of salvation, telling the grace of God to perishing men.

So, too (but let no man turn this into evil), the very sin of men which does wound Christ becomes the means of magnifying God's grace. Though it be a vile thing to say, "Let us sin that grace may abound," yet is it a most glorious truth that where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. Thus the cleansing power of the blood becomes more renowned by reason of the sin that made this wondrous sacrifice necessary. Perhaps we had never known the Savior so well if we had not seen sin so clearly in the lives of the pardoned ones, who afterwards were washed, and cleansed, and sanctified by His purifying energy. The very opposition that comes forth is overruled for His triumph. The stronger His foes the louder the shout of victory when He returns from the strife.

And when the church is assailed (which is one way of piercing Christ) she gets some *immediate benefit from the grievous trial*, for persecution acts like a great winnowing fan that drives the chaff away from the floor on which the pure grain is housed, it is to the church like a refiner's fire. The mere dross is separated. The faithless, who are among the faithful found, soon apostatize, while the sterling gold and silver—the genuine lovers of Christ—are purged and purified by the ordeal through which they are constrained to pass.

Oh! blessed Savior, they do pierce You, and pierce You they may, but You are honored, for their bitter reviling elicits Your sweet virtue. They may thrust their spears into Your very heart, but by giving forth Your own energy of love and mercy, and greeting them with salvation, You do conquer those who thought to conquer You! Put these two things together, brethren, man continuing still to wound the Savior, and the more redundant display of the Savior's grace as the consequence. Then find a total if you can.

Another thought, which diverges a little from the last, may help us to pursue our meditation. Since the soldier sent His spear into the Savior's heart—

III. THE WAY TO THAT HEART IS OPEN.

It was always open, in fact, for He always loved the sons of men, but now you can see it open. It was no little wound that was made by the lance, for into it, we read, Thomas put his hand. What a gaping fissure must that have been into which the apostle might put his palm! "Reach hither your hand, and thrust it into my side." He lives still, as none of us could live, with a passage to the heart always open. In

His very flesh He testifies to us today that His heart is ready to receive any message that His children may choose to send, and equally ready to respond with the love that has its fountain there.

Behold the open heart of Jesus! it is open that all the grace that is within it may freely flow to undeserving sinners. Think not, sinner, that you have need to open Jesus' side. The blood has flown freely. Say now, will you come and wash in it? You have not to beg for cleansing, as though it were a boon hardly to be obtained by importunity, it flows, still it flows. He is willing—as willing as He is able, and as able as He is willing, to cleanse you from your guilt. Whatever there may be in the heart of Christ, it all flows out. The precious liquid is kept within, but set abroad for every needy, thirsty soul.

His heart is open. *It is open for the doubter* to put his hand into it now. Where are you, Thomas? Do you ask some hard thing and say, "Except I see this and that, I will not believe"? Oh! trembler, weighed down by your sins and your weakness, do you not see Him this day in glory, with His heart still open towards you? Put your hand into the wound and say, "My Lord and my God." Accept your Savior without hesitation or delay. Come and find rest in Him. His side is open for your hand to reach His heart. It is open—that side is open—for those who pierced Him to look in to see what they have done and lament it.

But see how tender is His heart and go to Him without fear. You pierced Him, look at Him and mourn because you did so. You sinners, though you did put your Lord to death, His heart is open to you. He invites you to come and receive His mercy that He has treasured up for you. Oh! come, come you! He will receive you now. His heart is open to sympathize with the griefs and woes, the prayers and pleadings, the desires and longings of all His people.

You know we have to get to some men's hearts through their ears, and through their eyes. In not a few of our callous race, these passages are choked up. You show them sorrow, and they see it without emotion. You cannot reach their heart. If you tell them a pitiful tale of deep distress, they hear it with indifference, for somehow the story loses its way in the mazes of the ear, it does not reach the heart.

Far otherwise is it with your Lord. His heart is so accessible that you need not fear He will not hear you, or that He will not heed your faintest cry. You will feel that you can come close, straight, quick to Him, by a near passage, you reach His very soul at once. Say not, then, that no one sympathizes with you. Jesus does. He cannot fail to pity, solace, or to cheer. His pierced heart sympathizes far more quickly than the tenderest heart that ever lived before or after. His love passes the love of women, tender as that is. There is no love like that of Him with the open heart—the love of Jesus with the opened heart—with the open side.

I cannot express to you what I see in this bare fact, this blessed truth. I wish I could. But it would be better still if you could see the same. Oh! I can come to Him now and put my prayers into His side—can come and put my desires into His side. Oh! Jesus, "all my desire is before You, and my groans are not hid from You. I have but five senses, You have a new one—You have a new way to Your heart, such as we poor mortals have not. My brethren may be inattentive, but You never. You are He of the wounded heart—forever sympathetic—forever full of gentleness." I might linger on this thought, but I prefer leaving it to your meditation, lest I should darken it with words, so let us finish with a last reflection.

IV. A WOUND IN CHRIST'S SIDE REVEALS THE HEART OF JESUS IN ITS PRECIOUSNESS.

That spear did, as it were, break the alabaster box and let out the sweet perfume. What, then, was there in the Savior's heart? Men carry in their hearts that which is dearest. The true man is what he is at the heart's core. What was our blessed Redeemer's life-thought—the constraining motive of His life-work? Upon what did He most of all concentrate the desires and affections of His heart? See you not that when pierced there flowed forth blood and water? Those two things, then, must have been the nearest to the purpose of His heart.

Hence I discern that in my Lord's heart, there was, first, *a strong determination to purge sinners from their guilt by His blood.* The atoning sacrifice is not merely the hand blood of the Savior's work, nor is it merely the foot blood of the Savior's journeying through the vale of tears, it was His heart's

blood, indicative of heart-work—it was the blood of redemption shed for us. He loved that work. He was straitened till He could accomplish it. And let me tell you it is Christ’s joy to wash you from your sin. Start not back because your conscience is troubled. He has opened a fountain for your uncleanness—in the very midst of the house of David has He opened it. He delights to take away your guilt.

*“Dear, dying Lamb, ‘Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,’
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Is saved to sin no more.”*

It has not lost its power. Then for me let it plead, to me let it be precious. Let me feel its potent virtue. By it may I have boldness. Like the apostle, may I say, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” Oh! to have the blood applied to the conscience. Rest not till you hear it speak peace through your whole nature, till you see the curse removed, and are assured that there is, therefore, now no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus. It is Christ’s heart work to redeem His people by His blood. Oh! that He may now see of the travail of His soul in your redemption!

Moreover, beloved, in Christ’s heart there was the water as well as the blood. He would have His people sanctified as well as pardoned, He would deliver them from the power as well as from the guilt of sin. I believe this is very near Christ’s heart. That He may present His church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing is His design as well as His desire. His Spirit is working to this end. That He might not suffer so much as a single stain to rest upon the nature of His people is alike the pleasure and the purpose of Christ. He has put their guilt away by the sacrifice of Himself. This is done. Yet He continues to demand their self-sacrifice, that He may put away their evil propensities, the fruit of their first father’s fall.

My soul, glorify the pierced heart of Christ. Give Him to see in yourself the effect of the water that flowed from His heart. “Be ye holy,” says He, “as I am holy.” “Be ye perfect,” He says again, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Deny the flesh with its affections and lusts. Separate yourselves from sinners. Avoid partaking of other men’s sins. Like Him, be you “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” This can only be effected by the Spirit’s vital application of the Savior’s atoning death. Stay you at the cross foot, live under the influence of His passion, pray that you may rise out of this world’s fading, failing vanity into newness of life, through His pierced heart.

In fine, let us stand in penitence before the Crucified One, and mourn that we pierced Him, but let us stand in His propitiation, rejoicing that His piercing has procured our pardon. So let us go on our way, resolved, by His help, that we will glorify Him “in all manner of holy conversation and godliness.” For, “He that saw it bares record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.” May you believe, may you all believe the record true! Believing, you shall have life through His name. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 27:50-66

Verse 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 unmeasurable. 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 of the 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 into 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.

55-56. *And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s children.*

We have no record of any unkindness to our Lord from any woman, though we have many narratives of the loving ministry of women at various periods in His life. It was meet, therefore, that even at Calvary, “many women were there beholding afar off.” The ribald crowd and the rough soldiers would not permit these timid yet brave souls, to come near, but we learn from John 19:25 that some of them edged their way through the throng till they “stood by the cross of Jesus.” Love will dare anything.

57-58. *When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus’ disciple: he went to Pilate, and begged for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.*

This rich man of Arimathaea, named Joseph, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, was Jesus’ disciple, “but secretly for fear of the Jews” (John 19:38), yet when his Lord was actually dead, extraordinary courage nerved his spirit, and boldly he went to Pilate and begged for the body of Jesus. Joseph and Nicodemus are types of many more who have been emboldened by the cross of Christ to do what, without that mighty magnet, they would never have attempted. When night comes, the stars appear, so in the night of Christ’s death these two bright stars shone forth with blessed radiance. Some flowers bloom only at night, such a blossom was the courage of Joseph and Nicodemus.

59-60. *And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed.*

Our King, even in the grave, must have the best of the best, His body was “wrapped in a clean linen cloth,” and laid in Joseph’s own new tomb, thus completing the fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. Some see in this linen shroud an allusion to the garments in which priests were to be clothed. Joseph’s was a virgin sepulcher, wherein up to that time no one had been buried, so that, when Jesus rose, none could say that another came forth from the tomb instead of Him.

That rock-hewn cell in the garden sanctified every part of God’s acre where saints lie buried. Instead of longing to live till Christ comes, as some do, we might rather pray to have fellowship with Jesus in His death and burial.

61. *And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre.*

Love and faith were both typified by these two Marys sitting over against the sepulcher. They will be the last to leave their Lord’s resting place, and the first to return to it when the Sabbath is past.

Can we cling to Christ when His cause seems to be dead and buried? When truth is fallen in the streets, or is even buried in the sepulcher of skepticism or superstition, can we still believe in it, and look forward to its resurrection? That is what some of us are doing at the present time. O Lord, keep us faithful!

62-64. *Now the next day, that followed the day of preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first.*

These punctilious priests and Pharisees, who were so scrupulous about keeping the Sabbath, did not mind profaning the day of rest by holding a consultation with the Roman governor. They knew that Christ was dead and buried, but they still stood in dread of His power. They called Him a “deceiver,” and they even pretended to “remember” what “he said, while he was yet alive.” At His trial, their false witnesses gave another meaning to His words, but they knew all the while that He was speaking of His resurrection, not of the Temple on Mount Zion.

Now they are afraid that, even in the sepulcher, He will bring to nought all their plans for His destruction. They must have known that the disciples of Jesus would not steal Him away, and say to the people, “He is risen from the dead,” so they probably feared that he really would come forth from the tomb. Whatever conscience they had made great cowards of them, so they begged Pilate to do what he could to prevent the rising of their victim.

65-66. *Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.*

The chief priests and Pharisees wanted Pilate to make the sepulcher sure, but he left them to secure it. There seems to have been a grim sort of irony about the governor’s reply, “Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can.” Whether he meant it as a taunt, or as a command to secure the sepulcher, they became unconsciously witnesses that Christ’s resurrection was a supernatural act. The tomb in the rock could not be entered except by rolling away the stone, and they guarded that by sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

According to the absurd teaching of the Rabbis, rubbing ears of corn was a kind of threshing, and therefore, was unlawful on the Sabbath, yet here were these men doing what, by similar reasoning, might be called furnace and foundry work, and calling out a guard of Roman legionaries to assist them in breaking the Sabbath. Unintentionally, they did honor to the sleeping King when they obtained the representatives of the Roman emperor to watch His resting place till the third morning, when He came forth Victor over sin, and death, and the grave. Thus once more was the wrath of man made to praise the King of glory, and the remainder of that wrath was restrained.

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