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The Evangelical Quarterly

JULY 15TH, 1948

MEDITATION ON THE CROSS

WE HAVE no right, in the assumed interests of reason, to restrict the Incarnation, when God has so liberally revealed Himself. We are often afraid to enter fully into the completeness of His self-giving. God wishes us to know Him well and intimately, so He has come amongst us in His Son, and the whole of the Son's life is the visible expression of the Father's mind and will.

The more we meditate upon the words and deeds of Jesus Christ, the more do we feel, as it were, the pulse of God, in a growing intimacy which He himself has initiated. Every separate incident and saying in Christ's life becomes an experience in our own deepening acquaintance with Him. All that Christ did on earth was the temporal expression of what God feels and wills unchangingly.

How deeply has God allowed us to see into His heart ! Yet His self-revelation is apprehended only by those who desire to know His truth, who put themselves in the path of spiritual things. God's truth about Himself is never paraded before unhallowed eyes. All may behold the outward scenes of Christ's life, but few look into His eyes: and it is these alone who understand the meaning behind the scene. The woman hidden in the crowd ventured to touch the hem of His garment in her blind half-faith, and the revelation of His divine authority leaped out when He turned round. Yet only to her. The scene was but little changed to the pressing crowd. But for her the lightning of eternity burned the bonds of her weakness, and its thunder drowned all voices except His.

As it was in the days when He dwelt with men, so is it now as we read the Gospel story. With the realisation of our need the picture in our mind suddenly becomes a quickening experience, and the Figure seems to turn toward us with a look that burns the cold embers of our loyalty into a leaping flame. As we read some incident, we find ourselves at His side, beginning to

understand how He felt in that place, and what it meant to Him. How near He lets us come, if only we show ourselves willing ! Some He takes part of the way ; others He takes with Him at His side, as in the Garden or on the Mount of Transfiguration. The most faithful are taken farthest.

There is, however, one incident in Christ's life that seems to break across this relationship of merit. It is a cry He uttered in the presence of His disciples, but which has never ceased to echo across the hills and valleys of human history, as a sigh escaping from the troubled heart of God Himself : " O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not ! " There is a courage in this act that issues from the desperation of divine love gripped in the limits of Incarnation. If all the truth were to be told in the Incarnation, then how could there not be weeping at the sight of the rejectors of that Truth ? The gentle rain itself is not more natural than these tears at the approach to Jerusalem—and like the rain their fall is a source of blessing. Because He wept, there is hope even for those who make Him weep. His sorrow is the greatest light that ever shone upon this sinful world : by His tears is our joy begotten. Had He not wept over Jerusalem at the beginning of His Passion, there would have been only judgment in His steady look—and who could hope for mercy were He but a righteous Judge ? His weeping is the opening of the gates of forgiveness and mercy before the eyes of sinners. All is not lost even though they send Him to the Cross.

He is not stayed by the threatening doom He sees awaiting Him in the seething crowd below. It is for their sakes that He has come thus far, and His work is not completed in His sorrow for men. He goes on, down into the Passover crowds, His anguish once more hidden from sight. God did not wish men to turn to Him in pity for His sufferings ! Whoever, even of His followers, feels pity for the Crucified Christ, has not understood the power of His sorrow, which comes not from helplessness but from His holy purpose to redeem those whom He pities. His sorrow is not the anguish of one overwhelmed by tragedy, but the deep pain of the Father who sees His children fight against Him, and insist on drawing upon themselves by their folly the sufferings He would have them avoid. He weeps

because He sees them determined to take the hardest way, and because He knows what it will cost them to find their way back to the Father from that prodigal land towards which they have so resolutely set their faces.

His weeping is the surest portent of His descent into the rebel city, of His sharing of the consequences of its self-chosen apostasy. Indeed, His weeping is the only path of escape from inevitable misery and destruction. His sharing of the sorrows of these people in the City of Rejection is their sole hope of restoration.

He spends the last week of His earthly life in the city that lies at the foot of Calvary—that name which spells not His tragedy but the world's. Yet the world's tragedy is His sorrow, and in this final week more than ever, He seeks to interpose His incarnate self between men and the consummation of that tragedy. He pleads more urgently with them that they will not slay the heir as they have slain the prophets. There is a stronger note of impending judgment in His passionate appeal. Not even His love can avert from them the natural consequences of their evil, unless they turn and repent.

Now upon His shoulders lies the whole burden of man's final hope. Henceforth, if man would be saved, it must be in spite of himself, in virtue of what he himself scorned and rejected; in virtue of what Christ was left to do alone. Henceforth salvation is of God, through Christ: man has no creative part in its accomplishment. It is his alone to accept it, as a gift, procured for him at a price known only to Christ and the Father. Men threw back in God's face the greatest privilege, unused. In that fateful week they lost all claim to blessedness, except as the undeserved largesse of God's persistent love. They hustled the bearer of Life away to Golgotha, pausing only to plait for Him a crown whose sharpest thorns were scorn and mockery. He was their King, and they enrobed Him for a throne of agony. The deed was theirs even though they used agents of another race. Their unstained hands served only to deepen the stain upon their souls. The very coldness of their deed deprived them even of contact with His body. The heat of passionate wrong-doing is not as far away from God as the cold hate that meditates, and the controlled fury of the enemies of Christ was fanned by the icy wind of the outer darkness. Their words of mockery drove in the nails more surely than the Roman hammers.

into the Kingdom. But in face of that scornful rejection at the last they could do nothing more, except to lament the bitterness of the tragedy. Had Christ been one of them, He too would have been as helpless as they, after their final appeal of Holy Week—deprecating, but being overwhelmed by the tidal wave of human wickedness. Human evil would have proved itself stronger than human good. One of the stark facts of Calvary is that even the perfect goodness of Jesus, if He be only human, is faced with defeat at the massed onslaught of the powers of evil. But Christ did not accept the Cross as a sign of His defeat, for He did not go to the Cross merely as man. He advanced to Calvary in the fullness of power by which alone evil can be finally vanquished, the power that He alone possessed, and which on Calvary took the whole weight of cosmic sin, every dragging wickedness of man and devil, up on the wings of redeeming love in everlasting victory. There was agony, there was darkness : three days of unseen Gethsemane for Him, and desolation for the world. But the light of victory broke at last in the Resurrection of Christ in a dawn that flooded the hills of Eternity as well as earth, and lit up the imprisoned spirits of Hell, with its offer of peace and freedom into new life.

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