

Cheap Repository.

SUNDAY READING.

THE

DEATH OF CHRIST

OR,

TRACT FOR GOOD FRIDAY.



SOLD BY HOWARD AND EVANS,

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DEATH of CHRIST,

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THERE is no part of our religion which is better known than the great and important fact, that Jesus Christ our Savior died on the cross for us; and yet it is often known to little or no purpose. We all have heard also, more or less of the various circumstances attending his death; how he was agonizing in the garden, a little before that dreadful event, saying, 'Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done.' And now, his disciples during this agony of their Master, were unable, through weariness, to keep their eyes open, and three times following fell asleep. You, probably, also remember very well, that he was betrayed soon after by one of these his own Disciples, and betrayed even by a kiss. Many affecting circumstances attended his being led out to execution.—The common people who before had admired his miracles, and had welcomed him as he rode meekly into Jerusalem upon an ass, crying out, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest,'—

now turned against him. The chief priests, in whose hands were the Old Testament Scriptures, those true oracles of God, which foretold of this Jesus Christ, and who ought therefore to have been the first to do him honor, and to welcome his coming—even the chief priests, I say, became his enemies, nay, his chief enemies; for it was they who secretly stirred up the people, having taken counsel among themselves how they might put him to death. Pontius Pilate also, the chief magistrate, who was bound by his office to do justice, and who was appointed to be a judge for this very end; even he, while he confessed that he saw no fault in him, consented to give him up. The soldiers insulted him, thinking, no doubt, to obtain praise from their superiors for every affront which they could offer to this despised Christ. They mocked him, and dressed him up in a purple robe, and they put on him a crown of thorns, and they spit on him, and they smote him with the palms of their hands, and said, 'Hail, King of the Jews!' and finally, all these his enemies being agreed together,—'they took Jesus and led him away—and he bearing the cross, went forth into a place called the Place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha, where they crucified him, and two others with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst.' Then the soldiers took his garments and made four parts, to every soldier a part: and also his coat, which was without a seam. They said therefore among themselves, let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, that the Old Testament Scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vestment they did cast lots. And they gave him vinegar to drink

mingled with gall; and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And sitting down they watched him there. And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads and saying—Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him with the scribes and elders said—He saved others, himself he cannot save. The thieves also which were crucified with him cast the same in his teeth. Now from the sixth hour there was darkness all over the land, until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me? And straightway one of them that stood by took a sponge and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and 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. 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.”

Such is the story of the death of Christ—a most wonderful and affecting story. But what are the uses to be made of it? Now in the first place, I will guard my readers against some common errors on this subject, and then I will describe what it is to be properly affected by the death of Christ.

First, then, I would warn you, that it is not enough simply to believe that Jesus Christ really died, as the Scriptures here describe, and was no impostor. There is indeed a knowledge of this truth, which as I shall presently shew, is of high importance; but there is also a certain, careless, and unfeeling knowledge of it, which perhaps only increases our guilt and condemnation. God forbid, says some, that I should be so wicked as not to believe that Jesus Christ died for me. God forbid also, that I should take part against him, as I read his story, and that I should be like Judas, or Pontius Pilate, or the chief priests, or the soldiers, or any of the multitude who cried out, 'Crucify, crucify, him!' It is admitted that you believe they crucified him wickedly, and were guilty of his blood; and that you would not for the world have had the stain of that blood upon you. But stop, my friend, are you sure that you do not resemble in some respects these very people? The great sin of the multitude, nay, and of many princes and chief persons in those days, was their thoughtlessness and ignorance of Jesus Christ, 'For had they known it,' as the Scripture tells us, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. Most of those who joined in the cry against Christ, seem to me to have been your irreligious, ignorant, and unthinking sort of people, who trouble themselves very little with thinking who is good, and who is wicked. They were ready, therefore, to follow any blind guide, and to commit almost any wickedness without knowing what they were doing.

Now, if you are a thoughtless ignorant person, who have never considered at all what is true godliness, and what is true religion—if you are one of

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those who take up your religion merely on trust, and who have hitherto taken part with Christ only, because you happen to have lived among people who are on that side, you exceedingly deceive yourself if you fancy you are a real believer.— Suppose now that you were in France, where many talk against Christ, and bring forward plausible and well-sounding arguments against Christianity—or suppose you were to go and live a few months in England, among people (and some such there are in this country) who are always talking against Christianity, I fear such faith as yours would presently give way, and you who now suppose yourself a Christian, would turn against that Savior about whom you have hitherto troubled yourself so little; just like that mob of unthinking people who at one time cried out, ‘Hosanna to the son of David!’ but presently afterwards turned round and said, ‘Crucify, Crucify him!’— Take care then, in the first place, that your’s is not that idle thoughtless way of believing in Christ, which is in fact no believing at all—which lasts no longer than while Christianity is fashionable among those around us.

But beware also of another way of believing in the death of Christ, which is of almost as little use or avail. I mean, beware lest your thoughts concerning him are merely general, and have no application to yourselves, so as to influence your own practice. Christ, say some, is the Savior of the world; they also call him commonly, ‘Our Savior;’—they trust in a general way, that through him they shall be saved: but here lies the great mischief—they have not applied this matter to themselves. He is our Savior; they are apt to

say! but, He is my Savior, is a language to which they have not yet attained. They are satisfied with the general truth, for they have never felt uneasy and cast down on account of their sins, and therefore they have never needed to be comforted and raised up. Neither have they felt the want of some new and powerful motive to obedience, such as the true knowledge of the death of Christ supplies; they are therefore almost as cold and indifferent, though they know the general truth, as the more ignorant persons I first spoke of. But the meaning of this rebuke will be rendered still more plain by preceeding next to shew what it is to be properly affected by the death of Christ.

First then, before we can be rightly affected, there must be some right foundation of knowledge. Some persons, perhaps, have been to church many hundred times in their lives, and still they know little or nothing even of Jesus Christ—the great subject of all preaching. Ask yourselves then, who was Christ? He is called in Scripture the Son of God, he was not a mere man like us, but he came down from heaven and he went back to heaven again. He was with God the Father in the beginning, for the Scripture saith, “The Word (that is Christ) was with God, and the Word was God; and the Word was made flesh, and he dwelt among us.” Now, if we know that Christ is thus great, and divine, we shall know also, that there is good reason for trusting in him. If a common man were to promise you something great, perhaps you would not trust his promise, because you might suspect that he had promised more than such a one as he could perform; but if a King’s Son were to promise you the same thing, you would put con-

fidence in him, because he was a King's Son, and though the thing were ever so great, you would have no doubt at all on the matter. Now Christ is the Son of God;—He is therefore great and worthy to be trusted in, with respect to all those things in which he claims our trust. He is qualified to fulfil all the ends for which he came into the world, and to accomplish the great work of our Salvation. But how does he accomplish it?—I answer, chiefly by the dying for us—this is therefore the point on which I mean here principally to dwell. By his death, he made satisfaction, or atonement, to God for our sins. Man is a sinner. We are all sinners. We ought to obey God every day, and every hour of every day. We ought to do nothing but what God commands, and to do every thing we do because God commands it.—Not a thought ought to be indulged which God does not approve—not a single wish or affection of the heart. It is astonishing how strict the Scripture is in describing our duty—it says, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul, and mind, and strength, and thy neighbour as thyself.' But do you thus love God, and dost thou love thy neighbour also? Is this great and good being habitually in your thoughts, and are you continually saying to yourself,—'How shall I please him?'—Are you for the Lord's sake earnest also to serve every one of your fellow creatures, and careful not to prefer yourself before them? And is it always thus with you? Do these good intentions and aims never flag within you?—Look back now to your conduct this morning;—did you cast off sloth betimes as you ought! Did you betake yourself to prayer as you ought with earnestness,

with warm affection towards God, with reverence, with deep humility, with becoming devotion? Did you read his word as you had opportunity? Did you pursue whatever was the most proper duty of the next hour with alacrity, and in a perfect right frame of spirit? Has no impatient thought risen up this day—no evil desire—has no angry word proceeded out of your lips? Now, if in examining your conduct for a single morning, you find much sin may be traced in you, what then must have been the sin of your whole lives! O think on this subject, and apply it to your own hearts! Think, I mean, of those offences against God, which in childhood, in youth, and in riper age you have committed. Think also, of all the good which you might have done, and have neglected to do. Perhaps many a false step in life has been deliberately taken by you, and many a gross and dreadful sin committed, besides all your other innumerable offences; and if you do not see much sin to have been in you, it is only because your ignorance has hidden from you your guilt; because your conscience is blinded, and your whole life has been one constant course of forgetfulness of God, and neglect of his will and commandments.

And how, therefore, I say, are all these sins to be pardoned? Will your future obedience serve as a plea before God? Alas! you cannot expect to do in future any thing more than your whole future duty, even if you can be supposed to do that, the future therefore shall not be able at the utmost to atone, for more than itself.—Will you then say, that your sins are small, and shall be forgiven on account of their smallness? But are they not sins against the great God, and does not your conscience witness in consequence of what has been already

said, that they are both many and great? Will you then plead that they were committed through ignorance and thoughtlessness? I answer, that this very thoughtlessness was a sin. Or will you plead, in short, that your sins do not in themselves deserve punishment? I answer, that at this rate you may as well say, that no sin deserves punishment; for if one sin, why not another? And how then is God's government, or indeed any government to be maintained, if sin and ignorance are to be all alike, and if the guilty are not to be liable to any punishment for their guilt?

Now this is a plain and practical way in which every one, as I think, may learn to understand the great ends of Christ's coming into this world. He came 'to die for us, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.' He came 'to seek and to save them that were lost, (for without him we are all lost) and to give his life a ransom for us.'—'Behold then the lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.'—'For he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before the shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.'—That Jesus whom wicked men crucified between two thieves, one on either side, and Jesus in the midst—that Jesus who hung on the cross as a criminal for our sakes, was wounded for our sins, and bruised for our iniquities. He bare our sins on his own body on the tree. Our sins are imputed to him, and his righteousness is imputed to us, if we are of the number of those who confess their sins, and who by a hearty repentance, and true faith turn unto him.

While therefore we read the melancholy tale of the Death of Christ, we must not forget what a part

we had in it. It is not the soldier only that pierced the side of Christ. It is not the Jews only that crucified him—it was not Judas, or Pontius Pilate, or Caiaphas, or the chief priests only that did this deed—it is our sins that have crucified him. We should “look on him whom we have pierced.”—God would have interposed in order to deliver his own Son from the base and wicked treatment which he was exposed to from his enemies, if there had not been a grand design to be accomplished by it: namely, your salvation and mine. While we weep over a suffering Saviour, let us then weep over those sins of our own which caused him to suffer. And while we blame Pilate, and Herod, and Judas, and all the rest of the wicked tribe, let our blame be chiefly directed among ourselves, whose guilt has made this costly sacrifice necessary, and for whose sake Christ was contented to die—was contented to bear his cross to Golgotha, and then to be crucified upon it. This then is the way to be properly affected by the story of the death of Christ.

But further, we should be affected also with a sense of gratitude for the benefits derived from Christ's death. It is not sorrow, or contrition only that we ought to feel on reading Christ's death—we ought also to feel thankfulness and joy for our deliverance. Christ has suffered that we might go free. What thanks and praise are due to both God the Father, who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all; and to Christ himself for the willingness with which he became obedient unto death—even the death of the cross—for the willingness with which he bore his agony in the garden, and then carried his cross, and then had his body nailed to the accursed tree—for the willingness, I

say, with which he endured all until the hour came, when having received the vinegar, he cried out, and said, 'It is finished!'

Gratitude is therefore most clearly due to Christ for this mercy, and in the idea of this gratitude, I mean to include a thankful and willing obedience. What! is no return due to him for these sufferings which I have shewn were all on our account? Or, if you admit that we should give him praise, will you say that this praise should be with our lips only? No, surely it should be with our lives; we should do from the heart whatever he commands us.—When the apostle Paul thought of Christ dying for him, he was led to say, that 'they which live thro' Christ, should now no longer live to themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again.' Do you then live to yourself or with a view to Christ's service? Ask yourself that question.—What do you chiefly aim at in life? To please your own humour—to advance yourself and your family in the world—to be comfortable as long as you are in it, and to pass through it with reputation, honor, and prosperity, having plenty of all the good things of this life, and caring much for yourself, and little for other people? Or have you really learnt by the study of the death of Christ to live as Paul did, no longer to yourself, but to him who died for you? The story of our Savior's death, rightly understood, should make you come to such a determination as the following;—'O merciful Savior,' it should teach us to say, 'thou hast not spared to give up thy life a sacrifice for my sin, that so (notwithstanding all my offences against God, which might have brought down just punishment upon me) I might be entirely delivered

from my guilt, and be made heir of everlasting glory. I bless thee for this astonishing act of thy mercy, and my life shall now be dedicated unto thee. My heart is filled with gratitude unto thee, who has even died for me, and this gratitude shall teach me obedience. I will spend my days on earth in doing thy will. Much hast thou sacrificed for me—what then shall be my return? I will surrender to thee my time, my talents, my all; I will deny myself—I will renounce all selfish plans of living; I will also mortify my body; I will resist my pride, my vanity, and all my various sins; I will now be thy servant, for thou hast bought me by thy blood, and I will think no service hard, and no sacrifice great for thy sake.'

But lastly, I would observe, that they only are rightly affected by the death of Christ, who continue to be rightly affected by it. It is not enough to feel while you read this story some such emotions as I have described. You must think often of this Savior who has this day been set forth as crucified before you. You must think of him not on this day but to-morrow also; not to-morrow only, but all the days of your life; not occasionally, in short, but habitually. The common motive of a true believer's actions is a regard to him who died for him. The thought of his Savior's crucifixion, recurs to him in all the various periods of life; and I may add more particularly, that it recurs to him in every hour of trial—in every season of temptation, of provocation, of hardship and of disgrace. Are you dejected? What is your dejection to that of Christ? Are you in pain? What is your pain to his pain, and your sorrow to the sorrow of his soul! Are you contradicted, reviled, and

despised? Behold your Savior wearing a crown of thorns, dressed in a purple robe, mocked, insulted and spit upon, and then crucified between two thieves, having Barabbas a murderer, preferred before him. Again, do you meet with unkind usage in return for all your kindness and benevolence to others? Does nobody thank you, though you try to do every body good? Do they hate you even, and revile you, though you lay out your whole life in endeavouring to serve them? Behold your Savior laying down his life for his enemies; and when he was reviled, not reviling again! Father, says he, forgive them! forgive these my murderers, for whom I am now dying! 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!' O what a spirit of persevering kindness does the right knowledge of Christ's death teach us! In short, is there any grievance in our case? our very grievances may remind us of Christ crucified, for that cup of bitterness of which we merely taste, he drank up even to the dregs, for the whole wrath of God fell upon his head, and therefore our Savior's death is at once a motive to all cheerful obedience, and a cure for all our complaints. May we then use the doctrine for this purpose, and thus may we shew that we have a true faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE END.

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