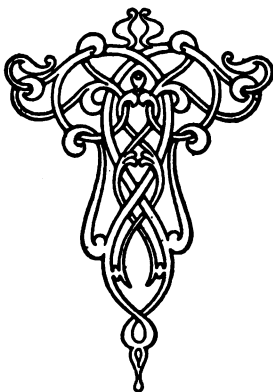


EVANGELISTIC SERMONS



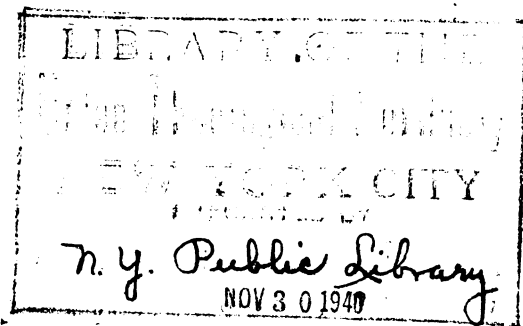
TOGETHER WITH PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS
FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE AFTER-MEETING



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XV
CHRIST FORSAKEN UPON THE
CROSS

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XV

CHRIST FORSAKEN UPON THE CROSS

"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 hast thou forsaken me."—ST. MATTHEW xxvii, 46.

THE utterances of Christ upon the cross were seven in number. Beginning with the fervent prayer for his enemies: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," they closed with the trust-breathing petition: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Midway between these was heard the cry which we have chosen as the topic of our thought. That mournful crucifixion scene which began with an exhibition of the wondrous pity of Jesus, which ended in completest triumph for that love wherewith He loves sinners, witnessed also the endurance, on His part, of three hours of burdening anguish, of an anguish whose pressure at last opened the long silent lips, and forced from them the despairing moan: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" "From the sixth hour," it is written, "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." Cry of despair from amid thick darkness, moan of Jesus upon the cross, let us, with reverence, contemplate its significance.

The ground of this significance lies in the person of

the sufferer. Turn, then, and look upon Him as He hangs upon His cross of shame, the words upon His lips, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." Contrast His present condition with what He had been, and what He was. He had been three and thirty years previous, a babe, cradled in a manger, it is true, but a babe welcomed to earth as babe never was, either before or since. Around His manger-cradle shepherds rejoiced, and Magi worshiped, above it angels sang, and saints adored, as saints only can. He had been for the three years immediately preceding His crucifixion the joy of the multitudes of Israel, welcomed in every corner of the land, even in Jerusalem, with gladness; for at His coming the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the lepers were cleansed, the deaf heard, the dead were raised up, and the poor had the Gospel preached unto them. He had been the teacher, leader, and companion, during the period of time last mentioned, of a little company of disciples, unto whom He revealed Himself as He did not unto the world, in whom He trusted He had found men worthy His exalted friendship. He had been in the hour of His baptism by John in Jordan acknowledged fully as that which He was. The record reads: "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him: and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" That which He was,

God's beloved Son, was attested not only by the voice from heaven, by the miracles done by him, but also by His life. His life, in itself, was evidence to the divineness of His being. His whole life was a life of holiness, for He knew no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. His whole life was a life of devotion, it was His meat and drink to do the will of the Father who is in heaven. His whole life was a life of patient submission to the divine guidance, of Him it is written, that "He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Perfect was the Christ, and perfect He remained. And yet this perfect man, this beloved Son of God, this friend of the disciples, this healer of the masses, this Messiah of Israel and hope of the ends of the earth, hangs dying, one Friday afternoon, upon a cross of shame, His only steadfast companion, the believing robber at His side. The masses whom He had both taught and healed, forgetful of all that He had done for them, have left Him a helpless victim of the rage of priest and scribe. The disciples with whom He had companied as a friend, have preferred, by flight, to secure their own safety, rather than have share in the martyr-honors of their Master's cross. These, with all the blessing they would have brought in the life that now is, with all the glory they would have secured in the life that is to come, the disciples left to the lot of a poor, penitent thief. Christ was deserted in death by all whom He had benefited, all whom He had trusted. He was utterly forsaken of men!

Forsaken of men! Ah! that was not all. To be forsaken of the world—this is but the lot of many others of God's dear ones, and it can be borne. To be deserted by His disciples, that was harder to bear, for even to us undeserving, what pain comes, when, in the hour of adversity, the friends whom we had deemed true, turn faithless! To us, however, when the world becomes cold; to us when friends grow chill and own us not, to us comes the comforting divine presence, alleviating our every pain with the sweet promise: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," lighting up even the valley of the shadow of death with the glow of the hope which shines in the words: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." When all else fails we find rest in God.

Surely, the like comforting rest was accorded unto God's beloved Son! Surely, His last hours outwardly dark, were made inwardly bright with the radiant divine presence. Surely, the Father-heart of God was opened unto Him, enabling Him to declare, with prophet and apostle, martyr and saint: "My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever." Surely, in this hour of direst agony to the Son of Man, will the words once more be heard: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased?" Was it thus? Turn to the cross for answer. See about it has gathered the darkness of midnight; hear amid that darkness the anguished

cry, "My God, My God, why hast *thou* forsaken me." Forsaken of the world, forsaken of His disciples, Christ was also forsaken of God. Oh! thought of awe, the God of love abandoning the Son of His love. Why?

Some of you may have stood above the dying bed of an unrepentant sinner. But, however our experience varies in this respect, well we all know the truth, and the whole truth, in every such case. One person may pass away from life with the apathy which ignorance begets, another may yield to the king of terrors in sullen silence of obstinate physical courage, yet others may enter eternity with the wail of despair upon their lips; but of them all is it true that they are lost because of unforgiven sin, because of the guilt which rises as an impassable barrier between them and God. God cannot company with the wicked, who cling to their wickedness, in any hour, either of life or death, and they are lost, forever lost, because forsaken of the Father. With deepest reverence, let us apply this truth to the crucifixion of our Lord. That He should be numbered with the transgressors was foretold by Isaiah, the prophet. That He was for a time forsaken of God, is certified unto us by His own words. That He Himself fully realized the dread nature of such abandonment, His prayer in the garden: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," as well as the agonizing cry upon the cross, sufficiently attest. The fact confronts us, however we may shrink from it, that as Jesus hung upon the cross, He

was treated by the Eternal Father as if He were the vilest of the vile! Why? Because of what He had been? Nay. God is just, and could but rejoice in the good, unmixed with evil, which had characterized the whole life of Jesus. Because of what He was? Nay. God is love, and could take naught but delight in Him who was the express image of His person. Because of lack of power in Himself to save Himself? Nay. But five hours before, at furthest, He had plucked an immortal soul from Satan's grasp, and had cheered its dying agonies with the words: "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." What He had been, what He was, His almighty power to save, the Paradise whither His own hand would guide the penitent thief, known these all to the Christ and to the Father, in them there is no cause for the awful condition, dimly shadowed in the words, "Forsaken of God." Wherefore then was Christ forsaken of God on the cross? Brethren in the Lord, turn for answer, not to the cross, but to your own hearts; look not upon the Christ, but upon yourselves; strive once to fully realize Paul's meaning when he wrote: "He who knew no sin was made sin for us." Ah, it was for us that the Perfect One became even as the vilest of the vile. He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon Him. He was the propitiation for our sin, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. He who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth,

bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He stood in our stead, face to face with that irrevocable divine law: "The wages of sin is death." He died, the just for the unjust. My sins and yours, these shrouded His cross with midnight darkness, these made the Almighty Helper helpless, these gave force to the mocking words of priest and scribe: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save," these averted the Father's face, these were part of the mighty burden, which pressed Him down to death, and wrung from His agonizing lips, the cry: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me." Christ was deserted of God upon the cross because our sins, in the Father's sight, became His sins. One Friday afternoon, nearly 1900 years ago, as the eye of Divine Justice flashed earthwards with its lightning glance, it rested upon a little hillock that men called Calvary, and saw there, nailed to a splintery, bloody cross,—not Jesus in the perfection of his manhood,—not Jesus in the glory of his deity,—but us, my hearers, us in our sins and under the just condemnation of divine law, and poured forth there upon Him, our substitute, that wrath of God against sin which is even yet held in store against judgment for the impenitent, and whose dread result no words so picture as the words: "Forsaken of God."

This desertion upon the cross of the loving Son by the loving Father, is to us, in its nature, beyond comprehension. Understand why it occurred we can, for Scripture tells us plainly: "He bare our sins in His

own body on the tree." *Comprehend* its nature, we cannot, nor ever will.

"None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Or how dark was the night the Lord went through,
Ere He found his sheep which was lost."

Let it then suffice that we learn from the fact of Christ's desertion upon the cross certain practical truths.

Learn, first, the truth concerning sin. Men, in these lax days, endeavor to underestimate its heinousness, judge of it as if it were a mere mistake, not a thing evil in itself, and hateful in God's sight. Further, they are inclined to think but lightly of it, in its influence upon human destiny. Sin, fellow-sinners, is not a mere mistake easily overlooked. Sin, even the minutest, is no light thing with God, whatever it may be with you. Sin has brought down upon us here manifold evil; what it may bring hereafter, the cross witnesses, the cross where it rose a barrier between earth and heaven, which hid from the Christ the face of God, the cross where it lay upon His soul, a burden which taxed infinite strength, and wrung from an omnipotent Savior the cry: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" While the cross and its memory abides, there will be seen upon every human transgression, stamped, not in the thunders of Sinai, but in the blood of Jesus Christ, the divine disfavor; there will be uplifted before the eyes of all, clear warning of the sure consequence of unforgiven sin,

that death eternal which consists in eternal banishment from the divine presence. How needful, then, that ye who are Christ's resist sin even unto blood; how indispensable that ye who are not His, lay hold by faith, in this accepted hour, upon the sinlessness and omnipotence of Him who triumphed over sin upon the cross, that through Him ye may be reconciled unto the Father.

Learn, next, the truth concerning God. There are not a few persons in this generation who possess very little knowledge of the true meaning of the word father, either in a human or a divine sense. Father, to them, appears to mean one who permits his children to do as they please; who smiles at the waywardness, and is too mild to punish. We engage at this time in no argument against any such conception. We confine ourselves to the pointing out of the revelation the cross makes of the Fatherhood of God. Does it declare that God is love? Yes; strongly it emphasizes the words: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." But while the cross declares that God is love, it also declares that God is just. God loved the world? Yes; but the world lay under the condemnation of the law: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." God loved the world? Yes; but His justice is equal unto His love. Punishment is no arbitrary thing, but the unavoidable effect of the cause, transgression. God could not clear the guilty, and remain just, and while sin remained

unforgiven, salvation was impossible. How, then, became salvation possible? Let the words: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," respond. Christ took the sinner's place. Christ stood face to face, in the sinner's stead, with violated law. Against Him the sword of divine justice was raised; upon Him fell the chastisement rightfully due unto human sin. In His death divine justice was fully satisfied, and salvation was made not merely possible, but assured. Oh, cross on Calvary! Mighty is thy witness to the unchangeable love of God, but as mighty, too, thy witness to His inflexible justice. Teach thou men, as naught else can, that out of Christ there is for sinners only the sure result of their misdeeds. God, fellow-sinners, is love; yes, but He is also justice; so just is He, that salvation was impossible for you and me, until Christ died, the just for the unjust. God is a fathèr, but no such father as some men vainly imagine. No weak Eli is He, pandering ever to the wilfulness of His children. He is inflexibly just, and vain the hope of any person, in His mercy, or His fatherhood, if he dies unrepentant. God will not spare the unrepentant and unbelieving any more than He spared not His only begotten Son as he hung upon the cross at Calvary, the sacrifice for human sin. He who smote the Christ, will not withhold from smiting the sinner who believeth not. Turn, then, now to Christ, and through faith in Him, pass forth from the

grasp of inflexible justice into the embrace of unchangeable love.

For, lastly, learn the assurance Christ hath given us in the text, of a salvation which may not be taken away from those into whose possession it has come. The words: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me," are a pledge given by the Eternal God, unto those who believe in Christ that never shall they be forsaken by Him. The Father in heaven may not be just, and yet abandon those sinners for whom His Son's agonizing death has abundantly atoned. They who are Christ's are forever safe, because He stood, once for all, in their place, forsaken of God, that they might never be so forsaken. In every hour the promise is fulfilled to them. "Lo, I am with you alway." Theirs is that immovable covenant, sealed with blood: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee, and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee," that covenant, so well expressed, in the thrilling lines:

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to His foes,
That soul—though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Blessed covenant, which binds our weakness to the omnipotence of the Father who is in heaven. Are we within it? Then it matters little what our earthly lot shall be, we are safe for eternity. Here there may be trial, here there may be sorrow, here friends may forsake and loved ones grow cold, but God will

be with us, and we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. God will be with us in every hour of life, and, in death, our song shall be the sweet words of the Psalmist: "I fear no evil for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Saved by the sacrificial death of Christ, assured that He is able to save unto the uttermost all that come to God by Him, let our closing thought deal with the obligations which rest upon Christians. Find illustration in an incident which took place in a Southern city prior to the Civil War. Upon the auction block of a slave market stood a young woman, fair of face, graceful in form, and having about her but slight traces of African blood. She was evidently, by her bearing, a person of some degree of culture. Financial reverses of the family with which she was connected had brought her to the slave market. As she was offered for sale, bid after bid, increasing quickly in amount, was made by the rough and jeering men who stood nearest the grim auctioneer, but every bid was answered and exceeded by another bid from a distant corner of the room. At last the girl was sold to the as yet unknown purchaser. At the auctioneer's direction, the crowd gave way to give the new owner access to his slave. As he approached her the girl's eyes opened wide with astonishment, for she saw approaching her a man, in dress and manner, plainly a person of high position. He drew near the young woman, took out from his pocket a paper, handed it to

her with the words: "Here, my girl, are your manumission papers; you are free." He then turned to leave. On the instant, the young woman leapt to the ground, threw her arms about the knees of the gentleman, and cried out: "Oh, sir, I do not know you, but you have ransomed me, and I will serve you faithfully all the days of my life."

Could a slave girl feel her obligation in such manner to one who had ransomed her, then what is your obligation, you, of whom it is true that you have been "redeemed, not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb, without blemish and without spot?" Is not ours the obligation to a life-long and consecrated service unto Him who died for us. May we in every hour be faithful unto Him who for our sakes was forsaken of God upon the cross. And may we carry the message of redeeming love, in His name, unto others unceasingly, that they, with us, may become partakers of "an eternal salvation."