

CHRIST'S PLEA FOR IGNORANT SINNERS

NO. 2263

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 3, 1892.
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,
 ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, OCTOBER 5, 1890.

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”
Luke 23:34.

WHAT tenderness we have here; what self-forgetfulness; what almighty love! Jesus did not say to those who crucified Him, “Be gone!” One such word and they would have all fled. When they came to take Him in the garden, they went backward and fell to the ground when He spoke but a short sentence! And now that He is on the Cross, a single syllable would have made the whole company fall to the ground, or flee away in fright.

Jesus says not a word in His own defense. When He prayed to His Father, He might justly have said, “Father, note what they do to Your beloved Son. Judge them for the wrong they do to Him who loves them and who has done all He can for them.” But there is no prayer against them in the words that Jesus utters. It was written of old, by the Prophet Isaiah, “He made intercession for the transgressors”—and here it is fulfilled! He pleads for His murderers, “Father, forgive them.”

He does not utter a single word of upbraiding. He does not say, “Why do you do this? Why pierce the hands that fed you? Why nail the feet that followed after you in mercy? Why mock the Man who loved to bless you?” No, not a word, even, of gentle upbraiding, much less anything like a curse. “Father, forgive them.” You notice Jesus does not say, “I forgive them,” but you may read that between the lines. He says that all the more because He does not say it in words. But He had laid aside His majesty and is fastened to the Cross and, therefore, He takes the humble position of a suppliant, rather than the more lofty place of One who had power to forgive. How often, when men say, “I forgive you,” is there a kind of selfishness about it? At any rate, self is asserted in the very act of forgiving. Jesus takes the place of a *pleader*, a pleader for those who were committing murder upon Himself. Blessed be His name!

This word on the Cross we shall use, tonight, and we shall see if we cannot gather something from it for our instruction, for, though we were not there and we did not actually put Jesus to death, yet we really caused His death—we, too, crucified the Lord of Glory and His prayer for us was, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

I am not going to handle this text so much by way of exposition, as by way of experience. I believe there are many here to whom these words will be very appropriate. This will be our line of thought. First, *we were, in a measure, ignorant*. Secondly, *we confess that this ignorance is no excuse*. Thirdly, *we bless our Lord for pleading for us* and fourthly, *we now rejoice in the pardon we have obtained*. May the Holy Spirit graciously help us in our meditation!

I. Looking back upon our past experience, let me say, first, that WE WERE, IN A MEASURE, IGNORANT. We who have been forgiven, we who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, we once sinned in a great measure through ignorance. Jesus says, “They know not what they do.” Now, I shall appeal to you, Brothers and Sisters—when you lived under the dominion of Satan and served yourselves and sin—was there not a measure of ignorance in it? You can truly say, as we said in the hymn we sang just now—

“Alas! I knew not what I did.”

It is true, first, that we were ignorant of *the awful meaning of sin*. We began to sin as children—we knew that it was wrong, but we did not know all that sin meant. We went on to sin as young men—perhaps we plunged into much wickedness. We knew it was wrong, but we did not see the end from the beginning. It did not appear to us as rebellion against *God*. We did not think that we were presumptuously defying God, setting at nothing His wisdom, defying His power, deriding His love, spurning His holiness, yet we were. There is an abysmal depth in sin. You cannot see the bottom of it.

When we rolled sin under our tongue as a sweet morsel, we did not know all the terrible ingredients compounded in that deadly bittersweet. We were, in a measure, ignorant of the tremendous crime we committed when we dared to live in rebellion against God. So far, I think, you are with me.

We did not know, at that time, *God's great love for us*. I did not know that He had chosen me from before the foundation of the world. I never dreamed of that! I did not know that Christ stood for me as my Substitute, to redeem me from among men. I did not know the love of Christ—did not understand it. You did not know that you were sinning against eternal Love, against infinite compassion, against a distinguishing Love such as God had fixed on you from eternity. So far, we knew not what we did.

I think, too, that we did not know all that we were doing in *our rejection of Christ and putting Him to grief*. He came to us in our youth and, impressed by a sermon, we began to tremble and to seek His face. But we were decoyed back to the world and we refused Christ. Our mother's tears, our father's prayers, our teacher's admonitions often moved us—but we were very stubborn and we rejected Christ. We did not know that, in that rejection, we were virtually putting Him away and crucifying Him! We were denying His Godhead, or else we would have worshipped Him. We were denying His love, or else we would have yielded to Him. We were practically, in every act of sin, taking the hammer and the nails and fastening Christ to the Cross, but we did not know it. Perhaps, if we had known it, we would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. We knew we were doing wrong, but we did not know all the wrong that we were doing.

Nor did we know fully *the meaning of our delays*. We hesitated—we were on the verge of conversion, but we went back and turned, again, to our old follies. We were hardened, Christless, still prayerless, and each of us said, "Oh, I am only waiting a little while till I have fulfilled my present engagements, till I am a little older, till I have seen a little more of the world!" The fact is, we were refusing Christ and choosing the pleasures of sin instead of Him—and every hour of delay was an hour of crucifying Christ, grieving His Spirit and choosing this harlot world in the place of the lovely and ever-blessed Christ! We did not know that.

I think we may add one thing more. *We did not know the meaning of our self-righteousness*. We used to think, some of us, that we had a righteousness of our own. We had been to Church regularly, or we had been to the Meeting House whenever it was open. We were christened; we were confirmed, or, perhaps, we rejoiced that we never had either of those things done to us. Thus, we put our confidence in ceremonies, or the *absence* of ceremonies! We said our prayers; we read a chapter in the Bible night and morning. We did—oh, I do not know what we did *not* do! But there we rested—we were righteous in our own esteem. We had not any particular sin to confess, nor any reason to lie in the dust before the Throne of God's majesty. We were about as good as we could be and we did not know that we were, even, then, perpetrating the highest insult upon Christ, for, if we were not sinners, why did Christ die? And, if we had a righteousness of our own which was good enough, why did Christ come here to work out a righteousness for us?

We made Christ to be a superfluity, by considering that we were good enough without resting in His atoning Sacrifice. Ah, but we did not think we were doing that! We thought we were pleasing God by our religiousness, by our outward performances, by our ecclesiastical correctness! But all the while we were setting up antichrist in the place of Christ! We were making out that Christ was not needed! We were robbing Him of His office and glory! Alas, Christ would say of us with regard to all these things, "They know not what they do." I want you to look quietly at the time past wherein you served sin and see whether there was not a darkness upon your mind, a blindness in your spirit, so that you did not know what you did.

II. Well now, secondly, WE CONFESS THAT THIS IGNORANCE IS NO EXCUSE. Our Lord might urge it as a plea, but *we* never could. We did not know what we did and so we were not guilty to the fullest possible extent—but we were guilty enough—therefore let us acknowledge it.

For first, remember, *the law never allows this as a plea*. In our own English law, a man is supposed to know what the law is. If he breaks it, it is no excuse to plead that he did not know it. It may be regarded by a judge as some extenuation, but the law allows nothing of the kind. God gives us the Law and we are bound to keep it. If I erred through not knowing the Law, still it was a sin. Under the Mosaic Law there were sins of ignorance and for these there were special offerings. The ignorance did not blot out the sin. That is clear in my text, for, if ignorance rendered an action no longer sinful, they why would Christ say, "Father, *forgive* them"? But He does—He asks for mercy for what is *sin*—even though the ignorance, in some measure, is supposed to mitigate the criminality of it.

But, dear Friends, *we might have known*. If we did not know, it was because we *would* not know. There was the preaching of the Word, but we did not care to hear it. There was this blessed Book, but we did not care to read it. If you and I had sat down and looked at our conduct by the light of the Holy Scripture, we might have known much more of the evil of sin, much more of the love of Christ, much more of the ingratitude which is possible in refusing Christ and not coming to Him.

In addition to that, *we did not think*. “Oh, but,” you say, “young people never think!” But young people *should* think. If there is anybody who need not think, it is the old man whose day is nearly over. If he thinks, he has but a very short time in which to improve—but the young have all their lives before them. If I were a carpenter and had to make a box, I would not think about it *after* I had made the box. I would think, before I began to cut my timber, what sort of box it was to be. In every action, a man thinks *before* he begins or else he is a fool. A young man ought to think more than anybody else, for now he is, as it were, making his box. He is beginning his life-plan—he should be the most thoughtful of all men. Many of us, who are now Christ's people, would have known much more about our Lord if we had given Him more careful consideration in our earlier days. A man will consider about taking a wife. He will consider about making a business. He will consider about buying a horse or a cow, but he will not consider about the claims of Christ and the claims of the Most High God! And this renders his ignorance willful and inexcusable.

Beside that, dear Friends, although we have confessed to ignorance, *in many sins we did not know a great deal*. Come, let me quicken your memories. There were times when you knew that such an action was wrong when you began it. You looked at the gain it would bring you—and you sold your soul for that price and deliberately did what you were well aware was wrong. Are there not some here, saved by Christ, who must confess that, at times, they did violence to their conscience? They did despite to the Spirit of God, quenched the Light of Heaven, drove the Spirit away from them, distinctly knowing what they were doing! Let us bow before God in the silence of our hearts and acknowledge to all of this. We hear the Master say, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Let us add our own tears as we say, “And forgive us, also, because in some things we *did* know. In *all* things we *might* have known, but we were ignorant for lack of thought, which thought was a solemn duty which we ought to have rendered to God.”

One more thing I will say on this head. When a man is ignorant and does not know what he ought to do, what should he do? Well, he should do nothing till he does know! But here is the mischief of it—*when we did not know, yet we chose to do the wrong thing*. If we did not know, why did we not choose the *right* thing? But, being in the dark, we never turned to the right, but always blundered to the left from sin to sin! Does not this show us how depraved our hearts are? Though we are seeking to be right, when we are left alone, we go wrong of ourselves. Leave a child alone. Leave a man alone. Leave a *tribe* alone without teaching and instruction—what comes of it? Why, the same as when you leave a field alone! It never, by any chance, produces wheat or barley! Leave it alone and there are rank weeds, thorns and briars—showing that the natural set of the soil is towards producing that which is worthless!

O Friends, confess the innate evil of your hearts as well as the evil of your lives, in that, when you did not know, yet, having a perverse instinct, you chose the evil and refused the good and, when you did not *know enough of Christ* and did not *think enough of Him* to know whether you ought to have Him or not, you would not have come to Him that you might have life! You needed light but you shut your eyes to the sun. You were thirsty but you would not drink of the living spring and so, your ignorance, though it was there, was a *criminal* ignorance which you must confess before the Lord. Oh, come to the Cross, you who have been there, before, and have lost your burden there! Come and confess your guilt, again, and clasp that Cross afresh! Come and look to Him who bled upon it and praise His dear name that He once prayed for you, “Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

Now, I am going a step further. We were, in a measure, ignorant, but we confess that that measurable ignorance was no excuse.

III. Now, thirdly, WE BLESS OUR LORD FOR PLEADING FOR US.

Do you notice *when* it was that Jesus pleaded? It was *while they were crucifying Him*. They had not just driven in the nails, they had lifted up the Cross and dished it down into its socket—and dislocated all His bones so that He could say, “I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint.” Ah, dear Friends, it was *then* that, instead of a cry or groan, this dear Son of God said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” They did not ask for forgiveness for themselves—Jesus asks forgiveness for them! Their hands were stained with His blood and it was then, even then,

that He prayed for them! Let us think of the great love with which He loved us, even while we were yet sinners, when we were rioting in sin, when we drank it down as the ox drinks down water! Even *then* He prayed for us! “While we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.” Bless His name tonight! He prayed for you when you did not pray for yourself! He prayed for you when you were crucifying Him!

Then think of His plea, *He pleads His Sonship*. He says, “Father, forgive them.” He was the Son of God and He put His Divine Sonship into the scale on our behalf. He seems to say, “Father, as I am Your Son, grant Me this request and pardon these rebels. Father, forgive them.” The filial rights of Christ were very great. He was the Son of the Highest. “Light of Light, very God of very God,” the second Person in the Divine Trinity—and He puts that Sonship here before God and says, “Father, Father, forgive them.” Oh, the power of that Word from the Son’s lips when He is wounded, when He is in agony, when He is dying! He says, “Father, Father, grant My one request! O Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” And the great Father bows His awful head in token that the petition is granted.

Then notice that Jesus here, silently, but really *pleads His sufferings*. The attitude of Christ when He prayed this prayer is very noteworthy. His hands were stretched upon the transverse beam. His feet were fastened to the upright tree and there He pleaded! Silently His hands and feet were pleading and His agonized body from the very sinew and muscle pleaded with God! His Sacrifice was presented complete and so it is His Cross that takes up the plea, “Father, forgive them.” O blessed Christ! It is thus that we have been forgiven, for His Sonship and His Cross have pleaded with God and have prevailed on our behalf.

I love this prayer, also, because of the *indistinctness* of it. It is, “Father, forgive them.” He does not say, “Father, forgive the soldiers who have nailed Me here.” He includes them. Neither does He say, “Father, forgive sinners in ages to come who will sin against Me.” But He means them. Jesus does not mention them by any accusing name—“Father, forgive My enemies. Father, forgive My murderers.” No, there is no word of accusation upon those dear lips. “Father, forgive *them*.” Now into that pronoun, “them,” I feel that I can crawl. Can you get in there? Oh, by a humble faith, appropriate the Cross of Christ by trusting in it and get into that big little word, “*them*”! It seems like a chariot of mercy that has come down to earth into which a man may step—and it shall bear him up to Heaven. “Father, forgive them.”

Notice, also, what it was that Jesus asked for—to omit that would be to leave out the very essence of His prayer. *He asked for full absolution for His enemies*—“Father, forgive them. Do not punish them. Forgive them. Do not remember their sin. Forgive it, blot it out, throw it into the depths of the sea. Remember it not, My Father. Mention it not against them any more forever. Father, forgive them.” Oh, blessed prayer, for the forgiveness of God is broad and deep! When man forgives, he leaves the remembrance of the wrong behind. But when God pardons, He says, “I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.” It is *this* that Christ asked for you and me long before we had any repentance, or any faith—and in answer to that prayer we were brought to feel our sin! We were brought to confess it and to believe in Him! And now, glory be to His name, we can bless Him for having pleaded for us and obtained the forgiveness of all our sins!

IV. I come now to my last remark, which is this—WE NOW REJOICE IN THE PARDON WE HAVE OBTAINED.

Have you obtained pardon? Is this your song?—

*“Now, oh joy! My sins are pardoned,
Now I can, and do believe.”*

I have a letter, in my pocket, from a man of education and standing, who has been an agnostic. He says that he was a sarcastic agnostic and he writes praising God and invoking every blessing upon my head for bringing him to the Savior’s feet. He says, “I was without happiness for this life and without hope for the next.” I believe that that is a truthful description of many an unbeliever. What hope is there for the world to come apart from the Cross of Christ? The best hope such a man has is that he may die the death of a dog and that may be the end of him. What is the hope of the Roman Catholic when he comes to die? I feel so sorry for many devout and earnest friends, for I do not know what their hope is. They do not hope to go to Heaven—not for some time, at any rate—they believe some “purgatorial” pains must be first endured. Ah, this is a poor, poor faith to die on—to have such a hope as that to trouble your last thoughts! I do not know of any religion but that of Christ Jesus which tells us of sin pardoned, absolutely pardoned!

Now, listen. Our teaching is not that, when you come to die, you *may, perhaps*, find out that it is all right, but, “Beloved, now we are the sons of God.” “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.” He has it now and he knows it,

and he rejoices in it! So I come back to the last head of my discourse—we rejoice in the pardon Christ has obtained for us. We are pardoned! I hope that the larger portion of this audience can say, “By the Grace of God, we know that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

Pardon has come to us through Christ's plea. Our hope lies in the plea of Christ and especially in His death. If Jesus paid my debt—and He did it if I am a believer in Him—then I am out of debt. If Jesus bore the penalty of my sin—and He did it if I am a Believer—then there is no penalty for me to pay, for we can say to Him—

***“Complete Atonement You have made,
And to the utmost farthing paid
Whatever Your people owed.
Nor can His wrath on me take place,
If sheltered in Your Righteousness,
And sprinkled with Your blood.
If You have my discharge procured,
And freely in my place endured
The whole of wrath Divine—
Payment God can't twice demand,
First of my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then, again, at mine.”***

If Christ has borne my punishment, I shall never bear it! Oh, what joy there is in this blessed assurance! Your hope that you are pardoned lies in this—that Jesus died. Those dear wounds of His bled for you!

We praise Him for our pardon because *we do know, now, what we did.* Oh, Brothers and Sisters, I know not how much we ought to love Christ because we sinned against Him so grievously! Now we know that sin is, “exceedingly sinful.” Now we know that sin crucified Christ. Now we know that we stabbed our heavenly Lover to His heart! We slew, with ignominious death, our best and dearest Friend and Benefactor! We know that, now, and we could almost weep tears of blood to think that we ever treated Him as we did! But, it is all forgiven, all gone! Oh, let us bless that dear Son of God who has put away even such sins as ours! We feel them more, now, than ever before. We know they are forgiven and our grief is because of the pain that the purchase of our forgiveness cost our Savior. We never knew what our sins really were till we saw Him in a bloody sweat. We never knew the crimson hue of our sins till we read our pardon written in crimson lines with His precious blood! Now we see our sin and yet we do not see it, for God has pardoned it, blotted it out, cast it behind His back forever!

From now on *ignorance*, such as we have described, *shall be hateful to us.* Ignorance of Christ and eternal things shall be hateful to us. If, through ignorance, we have sinned, we will have done with that ignorance! We will be students of His Word. We will study that masterpiece of all the sciences, the knowledge of Christ Crucified. We will ask the Holy Spirit to drive far from us the ignorance that genders sin. God grant that we may not fall into sins of ignorance any more, but we may be able to say, “I know whom I have believed and, henceforth I will seek more knowledge till I comprehend, with all saints, what are the heights, and depths, and lengths, and breadths of the love of Christ, and know the love of God, which passes knowledge!”

I put in a practical word here. If you rejoice that you are pardoned, *show your gratitude by your imitation of Christ.* There was never before such a plea as this, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Plead like that for others. Has anybody been injuring you? Are there persons who slander you? Pray, tonight, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” Let us always render good for evil, blessing for cursing—and when we are called to suffer through the wrong-doing of others—let us believe that they would not act as they do if it were not because of their ignorance. Let us pray for them and make their very ignorance the plea for their forgiveness—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

I want you to think of the millions in London just now. Think of those miles of streets, pouring out their children this evening! Think of those public houses with the crowds streaming in and out. Go down our streets by moonlight. See what I almost blush to tell. Follow men and women, too, to their homes, and be this your prayer—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” That silver bell—keep it always ringing. What did I say? “That silver bell”? No, it is the *golden* bell upon the priest's garments. Wear it on your garments, you priests of God, and let it always ring out

its golden note, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." If I can set all God's saints imitating Christ with such a prayer as this, I shall not have spoken in vain.

Brothers and Sisters, I see *reason for hope in the very ignorance that surrounds us*. I see hope for this poor city of ours, hope for this poor country, hope for Africa, China and India. "They know not what they do." Here is a strong argument in their favor, for they are more ignorant than we were. They know less of the evil of sin and less of the hope! Send up this fiery shaft of prayer, straight to the heart of God, while Jesus, from His Throne, shall add His prevalent intercession, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

If there are any unconverted people here, and I know that there are some, we will mention them in our private devotion, as well as in the public assembly. And we will pray for them in words like these, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." May God bless you all, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

LUKE 23:33-46; JOHN 19:25-30.

We have often read the story of our Savior's sufferings, but we cannot read it too often. Let us, therefore, once again repair to "the place which is called Calvary." As we just now sang—

*"Come, let us stand beneath the Cross,
So may the blood from out His side
Fall gently on us, drop by drop.
Jesus, our Lord is crucified."*

We will read, first, Luke's account of our Lord's crucifixion and death.

Luke 23:33. *And when they were come to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.* They gave Jesus the place of dishonor. Reckoning Him to be the worst criminal of the three, they put Him between the other two. They heaped upon Him the utmost scorn which they could give to a malefactor—and in so doing they unconsciously honored Him. Jesus always deserves the chief place wherever He is. In all things He must have the pre-eminence. He is King of sufferers as well as King of saints.

34. *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* How startled they must have been to hear such words from One who was about to be put to death for a supposed crime! The men that drove the nails, the men that lifted up the tree must have been started back with amazement when they heard Jesus talk to God as His Father—and pray for them—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Did ever Roman legionary hear such words before? I should say not. They were so distinctly and diametrically opposed to the whole spirit of Rome. There it was, blow for blow—only in the case of Jesus, they gave blows where none had been received. The crushing cruelty of the Romans must have been startled, indeed, at such words as these, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

34, 35. *And they parted His raiment, and cast lots. And the people stood beholding.* The gambling soldiers little dreamed that they were fulfilling the 22nd Psalm, which so fully sets forth our Savior's sufferings and which He probably repeated while He hung on the tree. David wrote, "They parted My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture." "And the people stood beholding," gazing, looking on the cruel spectacle. You and I would not have done that—there is a public sentiment which has trained us to hate the sight of cruelty, especially of deadly cruelty to one of our own race—but these people thought that they did no harm when they "stood beholding." They also were thus fulfilling the Scriptures, for the 17th verse of the 22nd Psalm says, "They look and stare upon Me."

35. *And the rulers also with them derided Him.* Laughed at Him, made Him the object of course jests.

35, 36. *Saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He is Christ, the Chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming to Him, and offering Him vinegar.* In mockery, not giving it to Him, as they did later in mercy, but in mockery, pretending to present Him with weak wine, such as they drank.

37. *And saying, If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself.* I fancy the scorn that they threw into their taunt—"If You are the King of the Jews"—that was a bit of their own. "Save yourself"—that they borrowed from the rulers. Sometimes a scoffer or a mocker cannot exhibit all the bitterness that is in his heart except by using borrowed terms, as these soldiers did.

38. *And a superscription also was written over Him in the letters of Greek, Latin and Hebrew—THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS.* John tells us that Pilate wrote this title and that the chief priests tried in vain to get him to alter it. It was

written in the three current languages of the time, so that the Greek, the Roman and the Jew might, alike, understand who He was who was thus put to death. Pilate did not know as much about Christ as we do, or He might have written, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS AND OF THE GENTILES, TOO.

39. *And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed at Him, saying, If You are Christ, save Yourself and us.* He, too, borrows this speech from the rulers who derided Christ, only putting the words, “and us,” as a bit of originality. “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.”

40-41. *But the other answering rebuked him saying, Do you not fear God, seeing you are in the same condemnation? And we, indeed, justly, for we receive the reward of our deeds: but this Man has done nothing amiss.* A fine testimony to Christ—“This Man has done nothing amiss”—nothing unbecoming, nothing out of order, nothing criminal, certainly—but nothing even, “amiss.” This testimony was well spoken by this dying thief.

42-46. *And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto you, today shall you be with Me in Paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the Temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up His ghost.* He yielded His life. He did not die, as we have to do, because our appointed time has come, but willingly the great Sacrifice parted with His life—“He gave up the ghost.” He was a willing Sacrifice for guilty men. Now let us see what John says concerning these hours of agony, these hours of triumph.

John 19:25. *Now there stood by the Cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.* Last at the Cross, first at the sepulcher. No woman's lips betrayed her Lord; no woman's hands ever smote Him; their eyes wept for Him; they gazed upon Him with pitying awe and love. God bless the Marys! When we see so many of them about the Cross, we feel that we honor the very name of Mary.

26. *When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the Disciple standing by, whom He loved, He said unto His mother, Woman, behold your son!* Sad, sad spectacle! Now was fulfilled the word of Simeon, “Yes, a sword shall pierce through your own soul, also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” Did the Savior mean, as He gave a glance to John, “Woman, you are losing one Son, but yonder stands another who will be a son to you in My absence”? “Woman, behold your son!”

27. *Then said He to the Disciple, Behold your mother!* “Take her as your mother, stand in My place, care for her as I have cared for her.” Those who love Christ best shall have the honor of taking care of His Church and of His poor. Never say of any poor relative or friend, the widow or the fatherless, “They are a great burden to me.” Oh, no! Say, “They are a great honor to me—my Lord has entrusted them to my care.” John thought so—let us think so! Jesus selected the Disciple He loved best to take His mother under his care. He selects those whom He loves best, today, and puts His poor people under their wings. Take them gladly and treat them well.

27. *And from that hour that Disciple took her into his own home.* You expected him to do it, did you not? He loved his Lord so well.

28. *After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst.* There was a prophecy to that effect in the Psalms, and He must fulfill it. Think of our dying Savior prayerfully going through the whole of the Scriptures and carefully fulfilling all that is there written concerning Him—“That the Scripture might be fulfilled, Jesus said, I thirst.”

29, 30. *Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, For He did receive it.* It was a weak kind of wine, commonly drunk by the soldiers. This is not that mixed potion which He refused, wine mingled with myrrh, which was intended to stupefy the dying in their pains—“When He had tasted thereof, He would not drink”—for He would not be stupefied. He came to suffer to the bitter end the penalty of sin and He would not have His sorrow mitigated. But when this slight refreshment was offered to Him, He received it. Having just expressed His human weakness by saying, “I thirst,” He now manifests His all-sufficient strength by crying, *with a loud voice* as Matthew, Mark and Luke all testify.

30. *He said, It is finished.* What, “it,” was it that was finished? I will not attempt to expound it. It is the biggest, “it,” that ever was! Turn it over and you will see that it will grow, and grow, and grow, and grow till it fills the whole earth—“It is finished.”

30. *And He lowered His head, and gave up the ghost.* He did not give up the ghost and *then* bow His head because He was dead. But He bowed His head as though in the act of worship, or as leaning it down upon His Father's bosom—and *then* gave up the ghost.

Thus have we had two Gospel pictures of our dying Lord. May we remember them and learn the lessons they are intended to teach.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—561, 279, 278.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307