

TESTIMONY

FOR

THE CHURCH.

NO. 17.

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### THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

In order to fully realize the value of salvation, it is necessary to understand what it cost. In consequence of our limited ideas of the sufferings of Christ, we place a low estimate upon the great work of the atonement. The glorious plan of man's salvation was brought about through the infinite love of God the Father. In this divine plan is seen the most marvelous manifestation of the love of God to the fallen race. Such love as is manifested in the gift of God's beloved Son amazed the holy angels. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." This Saviour was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person. He possessed divine majesty, perfection and excellence. He was equal with God. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell." "Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

Christ consented to die in man's stead that man, by a life of obedience, might escape the penalty of

the transgression of the law of God. The death of Christ did not make the law of God of none effect. His death did not slay the law, lessen its holy claims, nor detract from its sacred dignity. The death of Christ proclaimed the justice and perpetuity of his Father's law in punishing the transgressor, in that he consented to suffer the penalty of the law himself, in order to save fallen man from its curse. The death of God's beloved Son on the cross shows the immutability of the law of God. His death magnified the law and made it honorable, and gave evidence to man of its changeless character. From his own divine lips is heard, "I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill." The death of Christ justified the claims of the law.

In Christ was united the human and the divine. His mission was to reconcile God to man, and man to God; to unite the finite with the infinite. This was the only way in which fallen men could be exalted through the merits of the blood of Christ, to be partakers of the divine nature. Taking human nature, fitted Christ to understand the nature of man's trials, and his sorrows, and all the temptations wherewith he is beset. Angels who were unacquainted with sin could not sympathize with man in his peculiar trials. Christ condescended to take man's nature. He was tempted in all points like as we, that he might know how to succor all who should be tempted.

As the human was upon him, he felt his need of strength from his Father. He had select places of prayer. He loved the solitude of the mountain where to hold communion with his Fa-

ther in Heaven. In this exercise, his holy, human soul was strengthened for the duties and trials of the day. Our Saviour identifies himself with our needs and weaknesses, in that he became a suppliant, a nightly petitioner, seeking from his Father fresh supplies of strength, to come forth invigorated and refreshed, braced for duty and trial. He is our example in all things. He is a brother in our infirmities, but not possessing like passions. As the sinless One his nature recoiled from evil. He endured struggles, and torture of soul, in a world of sin. His humanity made prayer a necessity, and privilege. He required all the stronger divine support and comfort which his Father was ready to impart to his Son, who had left the joys of Heaven, chose his home, for the benefit of man, in a cold and thankless world. Christ found comfort and joy in communion with his Father. Here he could unburden his sorrows that were crushing him. He was a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

Through the day he labored earnestly to do good to others, to save men from destruction. He healed the sick, he comforted the mournful, and brought cheerfulness and hope to the despairing. He brought the dead to life. After his work was finished for the day, he went forth, evening after evening, away from the confusion of the city, and his form was bowed in some retired grove, in supplication to his Father. At times the bright beams of the moon shone upon his bowed form. And then again the clouds and darkness shut away all light. The dew and frost of night rested upon his head and beard while in the attitude of a suppliant. He frequently con-

tinued his petitions through the entire night. He is our example. If we could remember this, and imitate the pattern, we should be much stronger in God.

If the Saviour of men, with his divine strength, felt the need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals, feel the necessity of prayer, — fervent, constant, prayer? When Christ was the most fiercely beset by temptation, he ate nothing. He committed himself to God, and through earnest prayer, and perfect submission to the will of his Father, came off conqueror.

Those who profess the truth for these last days, above every other class who take the name of Christian, should imitate the great Exemplar in prayer. "It is necessary for the disciple to follow his Master, and enough for the servant to be as his Lord." Our tables are frequently spread with luxuries not healthful nor necessary, because we love these things more than we love self-denial, freedom from disease, and a sound mind. Jesus sought earnestly for strength from his Father. This he considered, even for himself, the divine Son of God, of more value than to sit at the most luxurious table. He has given us evidence that prayer was essential in order to receive strength to contend with the powers of darkness, and to do the work allotted us to perform. Our own strength is weakness, but the strength which God gives is mighty, and will bring off every one who obtains it, more than conqueror.

As the Son of God in the garden of Gethsemane bowed in the attitude of prayer, the agony of his spirit forced from his pores sweat like great drops of blood. It was here that the horror of

great darkness surrounded him. The sins of the world were upon him. He was suffering in man's stead as a transgressor of his Father's law. Here was the scene of temptation. The divine light of God was receding from his vision, and he was passing into the hands of the powers of darkness. In the agony of his soul-anguish, he lay prostrate on the cold earth. He was realizing his Father's frown. The cup of suffering, Christ had taken from the lips of guilty man and proposed to drink it himself, and in its place, give to man the cup of blessing. The wrath that would have fallen upon man, was now falling upon Christ. It was here the mysterious cup trembled in his hand.

Jesus had often resorted to Gethsemane with his disciples for meditation and prayer. They were all well acquainted with this sacred retreat. Even Judas knew where to lead the murderous throng, that he might betray Jesus into their hands. Never before had the Saviour visited the spot with a heart so full of sorrow. It was not bodily suffering from which the Son of God shrank, and which wrung from his lips, in the presence of his disciples, these mournful words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "Tarry ye here," said he, "and watch with me."

He went a little distance from his disciples, leaving them within hearing of his voice, and fell on his face, and prayed. His soul was agonized, and he plead, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The sins of a lost world were upon him, and overwhelmed him. It was a sense of his Father's frown, in consequence of sin, which rent the heart of the Son of God with such pierc-

ing agony, and forced the great blood-drops from his brow down his pale cheeks, falling to the ground, and moistening the earth.

He rose from his prostrate position, and came to his disciples, and found them asleep. He said unto Peter, "What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." At the most important time, the disciples were found sleeping—at the time when Jesus had made a special request for them to watch with him. He knew that severe conflicts and terrible temptations were before his disciples. He took them with him, that they might be a strength to him, and that the events they should witness that night, and the lessons of instruction they should receive, might be indelibly printed upon their memories. This was necessary, that their faith might not fail, but be strengthened for the test just before them.

But instead of watching with Christ, they were burdened with sorrow, and fell asleep. Even the ardent Peter was asleep, who, only a few hours before, had declared that he would suffer, and, if need be, die for his Lord. At the most critical moment, when the Son of God was in need of their sympathy and heartfelt prayers, they were found asleep. They lost much by thus sleeping. Our Saviour designed to fortify them for the severe test of their faith to which they would soon be subjected. If they had spent the mournful period in watching with the dear Saviour, and in prayer to God, Peter would not have been left to his own feeble strength to have denied his Lord in the time of trial.

The Son of God went away the second time, and prayed, saying, "O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, thy will be done." And again he came to his disciples, and found them sleeping. Their eyes were heavy. By these sleeping disciples is represented a sleeping church when the day of God's visitation is nigh. It is a time of clouds and thick darkness, when to be found asleep is most perilous.

Jesus has warned: "Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping." The church of God is required to fulfill her night watch, however perilous, whether long or short. Sorrow is no excuse for her to be less watchful. Tribulation should not lead to carelessness, but to double vigilance. Christ has directed the church by his own example to the Source of their strength in times of need, distress, and peril. The attitude of watching is to designate the church as God's people indeed. By this sign the waiting ones are distinguished from the world, and show that they are pilgrims and strangers upon the earth.

The Saviour turned sadly the second time from his sleeping disciples, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to them, and said, "Sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners." How cruel for the disciples to permit sleep to close their eyes and slumber to chain their senses, while their divine Lord was enduring such inexpressible mental anguish. If they had remained watching, they

would not have lost their faith as they beheld the Son of God dying upon the cross. This important night-watch should have been signalized by noble mental struggles and prayers, which would have brought them strength to witness the unspeakable agony of the Son of God. It would have prepared them, as they should behold his sufferings upon the cross, to understand something of the nature of the overpowering anguish which he endured in the garden of Gethsemane. And they would have been better able to recall the words he had spoken to them in reference to his sufferings, death, and resurrection; and amid the gloom of that terrible, trying hour, some rays of hope would have lit up the darkness, and sustained their faith. He had told them before that these things would take place; but they did not understand him.

The scene of Christ's sufferings was to be a fiery ordeal to his disciples, and hence the necessity of watchfulness and prayer. Their faith needed to be sustained by an unseen strength, as they should experience the triumph of the powers of darkness.

We can have but faint conceptions of the inexpressible anguish of God's dear Son in Gethsemane, as he realized the separation from his Father in consequence of bearing man's sin. He became sin for the fallen race. The sense of the withdrawal of his Father's love pressed from his anguished soul these words: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." Then with entire submission to his Father's will, he adds, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

The divine Son of God was fainting, dying. The Father sent a messenger from his presence to strengthen the divine Sufferer, and brace him to tread his blood-stained path. Could mortals view the amazement and the sorrow of the angelic host as they watched in silent grief the Father separating his beams of light, love, and glory, from the beloved Son of his bosom, they would better understand how offensive is sin in his sight.

The sword of justice was now to awake against his dear Son. He was betrayed by a kiss into the hands of his enemies, and hurried to the judgment hall of an earthly court, there to be derided, and condemned to death, by sinful mortals. There the glorious Son of God was "wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." He bore insult, mockery, and shameful abuse, until his "visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men."

Who can comprehend the love here displayed? The angelic host beheld with wonder and with grief Him who had been the majesty of Heaven, and who had worn the crown of glory, now wearing the crown of thorns, a bleeding victim to the rage of an infuriated mob, fired to insane madness by the wrath of Satan. Behold the patient sufferer! Upon his head is the thorny crown. His life-blood flows from every lacerated vein. All this in consequence of sin! Nothing could have induced Christ to leave his honor, his majesty, in Heaven, and come to a sinful world, to be neglected, despised, and rejected, by those he came to save, and finally to suffer upon the cross, but

eternal, redeeming love, which will ever remain a mystery.

Wonder, O Heavens! and be astonished, O earth! Behold the oppressor and the oppressed. A vast multitude enclose the Saviour of the world. Mocking and jeering are mingled with the coarse oaths of blasphemy. His lowly birth and his humble life are commented upon by unfeeling wretches. His claim to be the Son of God is ridiculed by the chief priests and elders, and the vulgar jest and insulting derision are passed from lip to lip. Satan was having full control of the minds of his servants. In order to do this effectually, he commences with the chief priests and the elders, and imbues them with a religious frenzy. They are actuated by the same Satanic spirit which moves the most vile and hardened wretches. There is a corrupt harmony in the feelings of all, from the hypocritical priests and elders down to the most debased. Christ, the precious Son of God, was led forth, and the cross was laid upon his shoulders. At every step was left blood which flowed from his wounds. Thronged by an immense crowd of bitter enemies and unfeeling spectators, he is led away to the crucifixion. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

His sorrowing disciples follow him at a distance, behind the murderous throng. He is nailed to the cross, and hangs suspended between the heavens and the earth. Their hearts are bursting with anguish as their beloved Teacher is suffering as a criminal. Close to the cross are the blind,

bigoted, faithless priests and elders, taunting, mocking, and jeering: "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. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God, let him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God." Not one word did Jesus answer to all this. While the nails were being driven through his hands, and the sweat-drops of agony were forced from his pores, from the pale, quivering lips of the innocent sufferer a prayer of pardoning love was breathed for his murderers: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." All Heaven was gazing with profound interest upon the scene. The glorious Redeemer of a lost world was suffering the penalty of man's transgressions of the Father's law. He was about to ransom his people with his own blood. He was paying the just claims of God's holy law. This was the means through which an end was to be finally made of sin and Satan, and his host to be vanquished.

Oh, was there ever suffering and sorrow like that endured by the dying Saviour! It was the sense of his Father's displeasure which made his cup so bitter. It was not bodily suffering which so quickly ended the life of Christ upon the cross; It was the crushing weight of the sins of the world, and a sense of his Father's wrath.

The Father's glory and sustaining presence had left him, and despair pressed its crushing weight

of darkness upon him, and forced from his pale and quivering lips the anguished cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Jesus had united with the Father in making the world. While amid the agonizing sufferings of the Son of God, blind and deluded men alone remained unfeeling. The chief priests and elders were reviling the expiring agonies of God's dear Son. Yet inanimate nature groans in sympathy with her bleeding, dying Author. The earth trembles. The sun refuses to behold the scene. The heavens gather blackness. Angels have witnessed the sufferings of God's dear Son, until they can look no longer, and hide their faces from the horrid sight. Christ is dying! He is in despair! His Father's approving smile is removed, and angels are not permitted to lighten the gloom of the terrible hour. They could only behold in amazement their loved Commander, the Majesty of Heaven, suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law.

Even doubts assailed the dying Son of God. He could not see through the portals of the tomb. Bright hope did not present to him his coming forth from the tomb a conqueror, and his Father's accepting his sacrifice. The sin of the world, with all its terribleness, was felt to the uttermost by the Son of God. The displeasure of the Father for sin, and its penalty which was death, was all that he could realize through this amazing darkness. His soul was tempted to fear that sin was so offensive in the sight of his Father, that he could not be reconciled to his Son. The fierce temptation that his own Father had left him, caused that piercing cry from the cross, "My

God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Christ felt much as sinners will feel when the vials of God's wrath shall be poured out upon them. Black despair, like the pall of death, will gather about their guilty souls, and then they will realize, to the fullest extent, the sinfulness of sin. Salvation has been purchased for them, by the suffering and death of the Son of God. It might be theirs, if they would accept of it willingly, gladly; but none are compelled to yield obedience to the law of God. If they refuse the heavenly benefit, if they choose the pleasures and deceitfulness of sin, they can have their choice, and at the end receive their wages, which is the wrath of God and eternal death. They will be forever separated from the presence of Jesus, whose sacrifice they had despised. They will have lost a life of happiness, and sacrificed eternal glory, for the pleasures of sin for a season.

Faith and hope trembled in the expiring agonies of Christ, because God had removed the assurance he had heretofore given his beloved Son of his approbation and acceptance. The Redeemer of the world then relied upon the evidences which had hitherto strengthened him, that his Father accepted his labors and was pleased with his work. In his dying agony, as he yields up his precious life, he has by faith alone to trust in Him whom it has ever been his joy to obey. He is not cheered with clear, bright rays of hope on the right hand nor on the left. All is enshrouded in oppressive gloom. Amid the awful darkness which is felt by sympathizing nature, the Redeemer drains the mysterious cup even to its dregs. Denied even bright hope and confidence in the triumph which will be his

in the future, he cries with a loud voice, "Lord, into thy hands I commit my spirit." He is acquainted with the character of his Father, his justice, his mercy, and great love. In submission he drops into the hands of his Father. Amid the convulsions of nature are heard, by the amazed spectators, the dying words of the Man of Calvary. Nature sympathized with the suffering of its Author. The heaving earth, the rent rocks, proclaimed that it was the Son of God who died. There was a mighty earthquake. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. Terror seized the executioners and spectators as they beheld the sun veiled in darkness, and felt the earth shake beneath them, and saw and heard the rending of the rocks. The mocking and laughing of the chief priests and elders was hushed as Christ commended his spirit into the hands of his Father. The astonished throng began to withdraw, and grope their way, in the darkness, to the city. They smote upon their breasts as they went, and in terror, speaking scarcely above a whisper, said among themselves, "It is an innocent person that has been murdered. What if, indeed, he is, as he asserted, the Son of God."

Jesus did not yield up his life till he had accomplished the work which he came to do, and exclaimed with his departing breath, "It is finished." Satan then was defeated. He knew that his kingdom was lost. Angels rejoiced as the words were uttered, "It is finished." The great plan of redemption, which was dependent on the death of Christ, had been thus far carried out. And there was joy in Heaven that the sons of Adam could, through a life of obedience, be finally

exalted to the throne of God. Oh, what love! What amazing love! that brought the Son of God to earth to be made sin for us, that we might be reconciled to God, and elevated to a life with him in his mansions in glory. Oh! what is man, that such a price should be paid for his redemption!

When men and women can more fully comprehend the magnitude of this great sacrifice, which was made by the Majesty of Heaven in dying in man's stead, then will the plan of salvation be magnified, and reflections of Calvary will awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian's heart. Praises to God and the Lamb will be in their hearts, and upon their lips. Pride and self-esteem cannot flourish in the hearts that keep fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. This world will appear of but little value to those who appreciate the costly price of man's redemption—the precious blood of God's dear Son. All the riches of the world are not of sufficient value to redeem one perishing soul. Who can measure the love Christ felt for a lost world, as he hung upon the cross, suffering for the sins of guilty men? This love was immeasurable. It was infinite.

His love, he has shown, was stronger than death. He was accomplishing man's salvation; and although he had the most fearful conflict with the powers of darkness, yet, amid it all, his love decreased not, but grew stronger and stronger. He endured the hidings of his Father's countenance, until he was led to exclaim, in the bitterness of his soul, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" His arm brought salvation. The price was paid to purchase the redemption of man, when, in the last soul-struggle, the blessed words

were uttered, which seemed to resound through creation, "It is finished."

Many who profess to be Christians, will become excited over some worldly enterprise. Their interest is awakened for new and exciting amusements, while they are cold-hearted, and appear as if frozen in the cause of God. Here is a theme, poor formalist, which is of sufficient importance to excite you. Eternal interests are here involved. Upon this theme it is sin to be calm, and unimpassioned. The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. That Christ, so excellent, so innocent, should suffer such a painful death, bearing the weight of the sins of the world, our most extended thoughts and imaginations can never be able to fully reach, and enable us to comprehend the length, the breadth, the height, the depth, of such amazing love. The contemplation of the matchless depths of a Saviour's love, viewed by faith, fills and absorbs the mind, touches and melts the soul, refines and elevates the affections, and completely transforms the whole character. The language of the apostle is, "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified." We may look toward Calvary, and also exclaim, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."

Considering at what an immense cost our salvation has been purchased, what will be the fate of those who neglect so great a salvation? What will be the punishment of those who profess to be followers of Christ, yet fail to bow in humble obe-