

A Devotional Commentary on the Gospels

Arranged for family devotions,
for every day in the year.

By [Favell Lee Mortimer](#)

NOVEMBER 1

John 17:6-10. *Christ speaks to his Father of his apostles.*

It is very touching to hear a friend praying for us. The heart of a child is moved and melted while he hears a parent describe his case, and plead for him at the footstool of divine mercy. Are there not some of us who can remember such moments? How did the disciples feel when they heard their beloved Master speak of *them* to his Father; for they must have known it was of *them* he spoke, when he said, "The men whom you gave me out of the world."

Are the apostles the *only* men that the Father has given to the Son? Blessed be his name, they are *not*. An innumerable multitude have been given to the Son, as the fruit of his infinite sufferings. Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, says, "Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed *us* with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, according as he has chosen *us* in him before the foundation of the world." Adam and Eve, by one sinful act, gave *themselves*, and all their children, to Satan; and the *whole* human race must have perished, had not the Father given to his Son a spiritual family. And that family is a *numerous* one; "that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of *many* redound to the glory of God." (2 Cor. 4:15.)

The Lord Jesus watches over the men whom the Father has given him out of the world! Who would not water the plants, or nourish the lambs, that a beloved friend had entrusted to his care! Much more would he show kindness to his friend's *children* if they were left to his guardianship. But no guardian was ever so watchful, no teacher so patient, no nurse so tender as Jesus ever has been to the men whom the Father has given him out of the world. During the three years that he led the apostles from place to place, he forgot his own ease, his own pleasure, his own feelings, that he might instruct, and comfort, and edify them. When he was going to leave them, he could declare to his Father that he had faithfully discharged his trust. He said, "I have manifested your name unto the men which you gave me out of the world." On the part of Jesus nothing had been lacking.

But what did Jesus say of his *apostles*? Did he declare to his Father how often they had doubted his power, repulsed his poor suppliants, and disputed with each other for honor and distinction? No! he said not one word *against* them. He was not their *accuser*, but their *intercessor*. He said, "They have kept your word; they have believed that you did send me."

Many believers, who are now cast down, would be lifted up, if they could hear the prayers that Jesus is offering up for them at his Father's right hand. While they are lamenting their sins, their Savior is speaking well of them before the throne. While they are saying, "Surely Jesus must be ashamed of us," He is saying, "I am glorified in them." If the change *already* wrought in their hearts brings glory to Jesus, how much more will their *perfection*! Could we see the diamond as it was found in the mine, we should know how to appreciate the jeweler's skill. How unlike is the dull and rough stone to the gem that shines with liquid luster in the monarch's crown! But not so unlike as the one dark, polluted, guilty soul, is to the pure and bright spirit now rejoicing in the presence of Jesus. When millions of such happy beings surround the throne, with what rapture will their Savior say, "I am glorified in them." To have rescued those souls from the pit of hell, and to have washed them from the pollution of sin, will bring more glory to Jesus than to have created the innumerable worlds that fill the boundless regions of space.

November 2

John 17:11-19. *Christ prays for his apostles.*

Before the Lord Jesus offered up any petition for his disciples, he presented their case to his Father. He described the desolate situation in which they would soon be left. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to you." Before we pray for our friends, it is well to consider their circumstances, and to spread them before the Lord. By doing this, we are enabled to offer up prayers *suited* to their needs. Our indolent minds are often content with saying, "Bless my friend, my father, and my child;" but we ought to inquire *what* blessing each of them appears to stand most in need of, and to ask for *that*.

What was the petition which the Savior made for his disciples? It was this—"Keep through your own name those whom you have given me, that they may be one, as we are." When the disciples heard this prayer, must they not have been reminded of their frequent contentions? How lately they had disputed which should be greatest! But their Lord did not ask that any of them might be made great, but that *all* might be *kept*, and be made *one*. God is love, and every one that loves is born of God. God cannot make his creatures happy without teaching them *first* to love each other. The Father answered his Son's petition, and knit the hearts of the apostles together in one. We read of no more contentions among them. During the time their Lord lay in his grave, they mingled their tears

together; when he appeared to them after his resurrection, they were assembled in *one* room; and after he had ascended, they continued with *one* accord in prayers and supplications.

It is the design of Jesus that all his people shall live together forever and ever. None of them could bear the idea of *not* dwelling with their Lord. They must, therefore, dwell *together*. It is sad to think that even true believers sometimes disagree when living for a little while beneath the same roof. Ah, did they but remember that they will live *forever* in their Father's house, they could never harbor one unkind thought.

Jesus offered up another petition—"I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that you should keep them from the evil." The disciples longed to be taken out of this world, now that their Master was going to leave it! But they had a great work to perform in it. They were to seek those that were lost, even as Jesus had sought them. It is natural for believers to desire to leave this world. He whom they love best has left it, and they long to be where he is. But what would become of the world, if all the servants of Christ were taken out of it? The *Sabbath* would return, but no faithful minister would entreat sinners to flee from the wrath to come; the *Bible* might be opened, but no pious friend would press the truth home upon the conscience of the heedless reader; *death* would come, but none would point the departing soul to Christ, or, kneeling by his bedside, would implore mercy in the last hour.

Are there any who say, "I would cheerfully remain in this world, were it not for the sin that continually harasses me?" Has the Holy Spirit taught you to hate sin? Be comforted, the Savior has prayed that you may be kept from this evil. He said, "I pray not that you should take them out of this world, but that you should keep them from the evil." Your desire was once expressed by a little child, when conversing with his playmates. The question was proposed, "What is the thing you wish for most?" Several children said they would like to have nice or pretty things. But when it came to the turn of this little boy of ten years old to speak, he said, "I wish to live without sinning." This was not a mere empty profession, for the child showed by his conduct that he hated sin.

November 3

John 17:20 to end. *Christ prays for all who shall believe on him.*

We esteem it a privilege to hear the prayers of eminent saints, especially in their dying hours. How invaluable is the blessing we enjoy in possessing the record of this prayer of the Son of God! The apostles must have listened to each sentence with the deepest interest. Their tears may have flowed fast while their Master was praying, but those tears must have been less bitter than before. What comfort it must have given them to hear Jesus offer up this petition, "Father, I will

that those whom you have given me be with me where I am!" They desired earnestly to be with him. How grieved they were, when at the supper-table they heard him say, "Where I go you cannot come." Afterwards Jesus softened the hardness of the saying by telling Peter, "Where I go, you cannot follow me *now*, but you shall follow me *afterwards*." Now they heard him pray that they might all be with him, and they saw plainly that he DESIRED to have them with him.

And was it for *them alone* he prayed? No! he has not left us in *doubt* on this subject. He said, "Neither pray I for these ALONE, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." When he uttered this petition, he had in his thoughts *every* creature who ever has believed in him—who ever *shall* believe in him; not one so weak, so young, so lowly, as to be forgotten. The *little child* who in dying should lisp, with *loving* heart, its Savior's words, "Permit little children to come unto me;"—the *diseased beggar* who, as he lay on his pallet, should exclaim with lively faith, "Come, Lord Jesus;"—yes, even the condemned criminal, who on his way to the scaffold, with *true penitence* should smite on his bosom and say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner;"—each of these was remembered by the Son of God, when he said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word."

And does not each of us hope that *he* was included in this petition? If we believe in Jesus, if we ever *shall* believe in him, we were included in it. And if he prayed for us *then*, he prays for us *now*; for he has never ceased to intercede for all believers. If anyone thinks in his heart, "What a comfort it would be to me to know that my Savior prayed for me," let him ask himself this question, "Do I pray for *myself*?" All who believe in Jesus, pray to the Father in his name. They ask for the *very things* that he asked for. He said, "Father, I will that they also whom you have given me be with me where I am." Is this *our* desire?—Is this *our* prayer? Do we ever ask the Father to let us live forever with him, that we may behold the glory of Jesus? There are many who desire to go to heaven that they may escape from pain and grief; but only those who believe in Jesus desire to behold his glory. And HE desires that they shall behold it, and he PRAYS that they *may*. Can His prayer be refused? Impossible. When Jesus shall be seated on his throne of glory, and shall survey the vast multitude of the redeemed, he will know if any one of them is missing. He has loved each, he has died for each, he has prayed for each; he could not forget ONE. He would not be satisfied, if one were absent. It may be that we have loved him but a *little* while, a *few* years, or only a few DAYS; but *he* loved *us* before the foundation of the world. *Our* prayers to him have been short, and feeble; but *his* prayers for us were offered up before we were born, and ever since we were born. While we sleep he prays; and even when we sin he prays. "He *ever* lives to make intercession for them that come unto God by him."

November 4

Luke 22:39-46. *The Redeemer's agony in the garden.*

Was there ever any sight, since the beginning of the world, so wonderful, so affecting, as the Prince of life passing through the valley of the shadow of death! Can the angels have continued their songs during that dreadful night? They were deeply interested in all that befell their beloved Lord. One of their number was sent from heaven to strengthen him. What must that honored angel have felt when he approached the earth, and beheld HIM who filled heaven with his glory, lying prostrate on the ground, and bathed in his own blood! But did he attempt to persuade the Lord to *renounce* his purpose of saving man? Did he say, "Why suffer so much for that polluted and apostate race?" Ah, no! he strengthened him. We cannot tell what words he spoke, but we may be sure they breathed love towards fallen man, and sympathy with his suffering Lord. Perhaps he spoke of the lake of fire, into which all men must sink if the Son of God should give up the work of redemption. Or perhaps he spoke of the joys redeemed saints shall taste through eternal ages, because he would persevere in his mighty undertaking. But, more than all, he must have spoken of the glory that would redound to God his Father, through the salvation of sinners. *Hereafter* we may know every particular concerning our Lord's last conflict.

But do we ask what was the *cause* of our Savior's agony? Was it the fear of the *bodily* pangs of death? Surely the Son of God possessed more courage than man. Fear of *bodily* anguish could not have overwhelmed the Captain of the hosts of the Lord. He himself told his disciples the *cause*, when he said, "Hereafter I shall not talk much with you, for the prince of this world comes." (John 14:30.) The cause of his sufferings was, the assault of the prince of darkness. Hell came to meet him in the garden of Gethsemane. Satan, who had been defeated in the wilderness, returned with his legions, to make a last attack. When Jesus sweat great drops of blood, he was struggling with principalities and powers. His foot was lifted up to crush the serpent's head, and his heel was in his jaws. His weapon of defense was prayer. Prayer was his sword, his shield, and his helmet.

And why did the Father permit Satan to attack his well-beloved Son? Because He had sent his Son to be the Savior of the world; therefore He laid upon him the iniquity of us *all*, and inflicted the punishment due to us all. Those who believe in Jesus can never suffer the punishment due to their sins, because Jesus has suffered it in their place. They *may*, they *will* suffer, but it will not be to atone for their sins. Jesus has *atoned* for them. Criminals cannot be punished twice for the *same* offence—Jesus has suffered the punishment of *all* the sins *of* all his people. Their sufferings are not *penalties*, inflicted by a *judge*, but *chastenings*, bestowed by a *father*. When they pass through the valley of the shadow of death, Satan may *assault* them, but he cannot *distress* them *as* he distressed their Lord. Many believers have passed through that dark valley, singing as they went, and have expired almost without a struggle or a sigh.

"Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are,
While on his bosom I lean my head,
And breathe my life out sweetly there." *Isaac Watts.*

But what will become of those who neglect this great salvation? They will drink of the cup of wrath. What a cup it is! "Deep and large—it contains much." (Ez. 23:32.) God says to the wicked, "You shall even drink it, and suck it out." And why? "Because you have forgotten me, and cast my words behind your back." He is a wicked man who forgets the Savior, and casts his promises of pardon behind his back.

November 5

Matthew 26:36-46. *The disciples sleep instead of watching.*

With what feelings the pious traveler now views the spot where his Savior suffered excruciating pangs! It lies just beyond the gates of Jerusalem, in a narrow and gloomy valley. The tall steep rocks on which the temple formerly stood shade *one* side of the valley, and the gentle sloping sides of Mount Olivet the *other*. The stream of Kedron flows between, though in summer its bed is dry. A bridge is placed over it, and a narrow path leads to Gethsemane. This garden covers about an acre of land, and is enclosed by a low stone wall. Eight olive-trees may still be seen casting their broad shadows over that earth which once received the precious drops of the Savior's blood. They are ancient trees of immense size; their roots have burst the soil, and form resting-places for those who come here to sit and muse. None who visit Gethsemane can wonder that the Savior often resorted there, for it seems an appropriate place for meditation and for prayer.

At the entrance of this garden the suffering Redeemer left eight of his apostles—the other three he chose as the witnesses of his agony. They were the three that had been the witnesses of his *glory* on the Mount of transfiguration. No doubt he had designed to prepare them by that enchanting sight for the dreadful scene of Gethsemane. Had they not beheld his countenance when it shone as the sun, their faith might have been shaken by the sight of his face marred with anguish, and bathed in blood.

These apostles must have esteemed it an *honor* to accompany their Lord to his sorrowful retreat; but this honor proved to be the occasion of their *humiliation*. Though they had said they would *die* with him, they failed to *watch* with their suffering Master, even for one hour. Three times *he* rose from *prayer* to rouse *them* from *sleep*. How gentle his reproof! "Could you not watch with me one hour?" How wise his caution, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." He knew what sharp trials were coming upon them, therefore he said, "Pray that you

enter not into temptation." How often shall we find, when we look back upon our past lives, that we received *warnings* before we fell into sin. The remembrance of these warnings makes us feel that we are *without excuse*, and that we are guilty in the sight of God.

What a precious opportunity these apostles lost of showing love to their Master by watching with him in the garden! *We* never can enjoy such a privilege; but though we cannot watch with Jesus *himself*, we may watch with his suffering members. He will consider sympathy shown to *them*, as shown to *himself*. Among his people there are many in deep sorrow. Some are harassed by the sore temptations of Satan; many are persecuted by wicked men, and many more are suffering under heavy bereavements and painful diseases, inflicted by the hand of God. With *these* let us watch; with *these* let us sympathize; with *their* infirmities let us be touched, and in their afflictions let us be afflicted. He who once said to Saul, when he *persecuted* his people, "Why are you persecuting *me*?" will say to those who *comfort* his people, "You have watched with *me*."

November 6

Matthew 26:47-50. Judas betrays his Master.

It is impossible to conceive a greater crime than Judas committed when he betrayed his Master. It would have been a cruel act to deliver a *stranger* into the hands of his enemies; but Judas betrayed the kindest Friend, and the most generous Benefactor. Had he committed the deed *openly*, his sin would have been atrocious, but he did it *secretly*, and even covered it with a veil of love. What could have induced him to fix upon a token of affection as the sign by which to point out his Master to his foes? Did he hope to deceive his *Lord*? Surely he must have known that he was already detected by *him*—for when he had once dared to ask, "Is it I?" Jesus had replied, "You have said." But he may have hoped to deceive his *fellow-apostles*. He may not have heard his Master say to one of them, "He who dips his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me."

The Lord, however, would not permit him to imagine he had escaped detection. He said, "Friend, (or companion,) Why have you come? Why are you betraying the Son of man with a kiss?" Did the Lord's gentle appeal melt his cruel heart? O no! that heart had already resisted the strongest expressions of divine love. Judas had seen the Lord of all, girded with a towel, bending low, and washing his disciples' feet. He had felt the touch of those sacred hands around his *own* feet, around *those* feet that had already been swift to shed innocent and precious blood. He had witnessed the trouble of his spirit, when he said, "One of *you* shall betray me." He who could resist such expressions of love, was past feeling.

And did the Lord of glory permit the traitor's lips to touch his holy cheeks? Did

heaven permit hell to draw near, and God permit Satan to approach? In this behavior, he set us an example of perfect patience. No *greater* provocation can be conceived, than that which Judas gave to the Lord. Not one of us can presume to say that he ever received so great a provocation. When we feel disposed to think that any creature has treated us with unheard-of ingratitude, and inconceivable treachery, let us remember Judas.

There are some who behave to Jesus *now* that he is in *heaven*, as Judas did when *He* was upon *earth*. When it seems to be their interest to appear to love him, they put on the mask of piety; but when they can gain worldly advantages by betraying his servants, they will do it, and yet all the time continue to observe the forms of religion. They do not consider how much their guilt is increased by their acts of apparent devotion. God reproached Israel with similar hypocrisy, saying, "When they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the *same* day into my sanctuary to profane it." (Ez. 23:39.) Satan employs such people to do his darkest deeds. Let all who, while they hear the gospel, yet remain unconverted, fear, lest they should ever become hardened in wickedness, and be driven to commit actions which they cannot *now* bear to think of. But if we love Christ, then we are sure we can never act the part of Judas. We may be tempted in some evil hour to *forsake* our Lord, yes, even to *deny* him, but we never *shall*, we never *can*, deliberately betray him.

November 7

John 18:1-9. *The enemies of Christ fall to the ground.*

How dreadful was the prospect that lay before the Savior when he went forth to meet his enemies! If *we*, before we passed through our light afflictions, knew all we should be called to endure, how often our minds would shrink back appalled! After having experienced bitter sufferings, we feel that had we known *beforehand* their minute particulars, we should have been overwhelmed with the prospect. But Jesus knew every minute circumstance of *his* approaching sufferings. He knew the pangs each nail would give his feeble body, and the grief each scornful speech would create in his sensitive heart. And, above all, he knew the horror that the guilt of our sins would cause his spotless soul. He might have escaped from all these torments; but he willingly gave himself up into the hands of his foes.

At the words, "I am he," his enemies went backward and fell to the ground. "The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness." (Ps. 29.) The voice of Jesus, though so *gentle* that little children were not afraid to hear it, was so *powerful* that it broke the strength of his stubborn foes, and shook their stout hearts. His disciples had once been cheered in the storm by hearing their Master say, "It is I;" but his enemies were struck to the ground by the words, "I am he." There is an *attractive* power in the voice of Jesus. Those

who love him feel it. When he says, "Come unto me," they draw near. There is also a *repellent* power in his voice. His enemies will feel it at the last day, when he shall utter the word "Depart." Then they will go backward, and fall into the pit of destruction.

What must have been the feelings of the apostles, when they beheld their enemies fallen on the ground! If they rejoiced for a *moment*, they must have been the more disappointed to see them rise again. Yet even *then* they did not forsake their Master; they intended to cleave closely to his side through all his troubles. But *he* knew their weakness, though *they* did not—He knew they were not yet strong enough to confess his name before princes; therefore he took the opportunity, when his enemies were scarcely recovered from their consternation, to make this request—"If you seek *me*, let *these* go their way." The disciples cannot have understood the deep meaning of these words. When Jesus washed Peter's feet, he said, "What I do, you know not *now*; but you shall know *hereafter*." The disciples knew afterwards that they were washed in the Savior's blood; they also knew *afterwards* that Jesus was *bound*, that they might be forever *free*. If he had not surrendered himself to his enemies, we must have remained forever the prisoners of Satan.

In the Savior's last prayer with his disciples, he said to his Father, "Of those who you gave me, have I lost none." How did he preserve them? By his love, his wisdom, and his power. Love alone would not have been sufficient to keep them in safety. Jacob was a loving shepherd, but he acknowledged he had lost some of his flock; for when defending his own character to Laban, he said, "That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto you; I bore the loss of it; of my hand did you require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night." (Gen. 31:39.) A human shepherd cannot preserve his flock from evil accidents. But Jesus had *wisdom* to foresee the approach of every enemy, and had *power* to secure his disciples from overwhelming temptations. At this moment he foresees all the temptations that will assail us. Are we the sheep of his pasture? Do we hear his voice, and follow him? Then we shall be shielded from every fatal danger; then we may say with the apostle Paul, "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." (2 Tim. 4:18.)

November 8

Matthew 26:51-54. *Peter cuts off the ear of the high priest's servant.*

What must have been the dismay of the apostles, when they beheld their Master in the hands of his enemies! We cannot wonder that one of them drew his sword to attack the high priest's servant. We might have *conjectured* that it was *Peter* who committed the rash deed; but we are not left to *uncertainty* on this point. John informs us that it was Peter. Perhaps as the other evangelists wrote their gospels during the lifetime of that apostle, they were afraid of exposing him to

danger by revealing his name; whereas John, who (it is supposed) wrote his account after Peter's death, had no inducement to conceal it.

It is evident that Peter had misunderstood his Lord, when at the supper-table he had heard him say, "He who has no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Had Jesus intended that his disciples should fight, he would not have reproofed Peter's rashness by saying, "Put up again your sword into his place; for all those who take the sword shall perish by the sword." These words contained not only a *reproof*, but also a *prophecy* of the dreadful calamities that would befall the wicked men who were now wielding swords against their rightful king, the Son of God. No doubt Peter was astonished to find that his conduct was disapproved by his Master. He must have thought that Jesus would be pleased to see that, instead of forsaking and denying him, he was ready to fight for him against an armed multitude. When he had boasted of his fidelity, he little thought in what *form* temptation would come upon him. The sight of the murderous band did not terrify him so much as the words of the maiden in the high priest's palace.

God alone knows what circumstances would prove the most trying to each of us; for He alone knows what is in each of our *hearts*. We may have surmounted some temptations that appear very great, and yet be overcome by others that seem less formidable. None are safe, but those who, putting no trust in their own hearts, wait continually on the Lord for light and strength.

How *useless* were Peter's attempts to defend his Lord! Had Jesus but spoken the word, each of his enemies would have been the captive of a mighty angel, and he himself again seated upon his throne of light. Had he called upon his Father, more than seventy thousand angels would have come flying to his rescue. Yet he forbore to speak the word. And why? He gave the reason—"How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" His Father from the beginning had declared, that he would provide a sacrifice for the sins of men. To fulfill every word that his Father had spoken, was the glorious work of the Son of God.

John records a most affecting expression that he used on this occasion—"The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?" Shall we be enabled in the day of *our* trouble to utter these words? Yet if we are his children, the Father will never give us so bitter a cup to drink, as he gave to his well-beloved Son. That cup was bitter, because it contained his wrath against our sins. But every cup that God gives to his children *now*, is sweetened by his love; for he has said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." No human mind can conceive what that cup contained which Jesus drank for our sakes. Lost spirits know its taste; for it is written of them, "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture in the cup of his indignation." (Rev. 14:10.) But the redeemed shall never taste it. Has Jesus forgiven us our sins? Then our cup may contain pain, or poverty, bereavement, imprisonment, or death, but not one drop of the wrath of God. Let us take it thankfully from our Father's hand; and though tears may stream down our cheeks, and sobs almost choke our

voice, let us say, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?"

November 9

Luke 22:50-53. *Christ heals the servant's ear.*

It is remarkable that though *all* the four evangelists mention the circumstance of Peter's cutting off the servant's ear, yet that Luke alone relates how it was healed. It seems that this miracle was the *last* the Savior performed. In one respect it was the *greatest*. No doubt the Lord's *power* was more fully displayed when the dead were raised; but his *grace* was most gloriously manifested when his *enemy* was healed. Multitudes had often surrounded him, entreating him with piteous cries to restore their blind parents to sight, and their sick children to health. But *this* multitude came, *not to entreat*, but to *assault*. Yet the gracious Savior healed even one of this wicked company.

What effect had this merciful act upon the heart of Malchus? Is it possible that *he* could join that night in the cry, "Crucify him!" that *he* could see with cruel joy the nails thrust through the hand that had touched his bleeding ear? It is *possible*, though we hope that Malchus was not guilty of such ingratitude. The heart of man is so hard by nature that no mercy can melt it. There are many now living who have received greater deliverances from the hand of God than Malchus, and who yet continue to rebel against their Savior. Until the Holy Spirit softens the heart, man remains the enemy of God.

How ungrateful were that multitude with whom Jesus had spent the last week of his life! He seemed to feel their ingratitude when he said, "I was daily with you teaching in the temple." How can we account for the conduct of man towards the Redeemer? The Scriptures reveal the secret. It was Satan who first set man against his best friend; and it is *Satan* who still keeps up this enmity. Therefore Jesus said to his enemies, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness." As long as the heart is under the influence of Satan, it resists both the most dreadful judgments and the most melting mercies. The following fact is an instance of this truth.

A young missionary, named Felix Carey, once resided in the Burmese empire. The viceroy who governed the province in which he dwelt, was remarkable for inflicting very barbarous punishments upon criminals who had committed very slight offences. On one occasion the missionary beheld a poor creature suspended to a cross by red-hot nails. Deeply touched with compassion, he went to the palace to plead for the release of the sufferer. Though he knew that the viceroy had forbidden, on pain of death, intercession to be made for criminals, he was not deterred from pleading the cause of the unhappy man. At first he received a peremptory refusal; but he continued to entreat, and even declared that he would not leave the palace until he had obtained the favor he craved. By

importunity he prevailed. He received an order for the criminal's release. He hastened to the cross. The man had hung there seven hours, and when taken down had scarcely strength to thank his deliverer. The missionary took him to his own home, and nursed him with tender care. In a fortnight the wounded man was able to stand, and at length completely recovered. Did he attend to the instructions of his benefactor? Did he devote his life to his service? No, he even robbed the man who had risked his own life to save his. The agonies of a cross were not sufficient to root out the love of sin; nor the tender compassion that had been shown him to plant the love of holiness in his heart.

Can we suppose that the pains of hell will make lost spirits better than they were when first they entered their dark abode? O no! pain cannot change the heart. If God were to release those souls after a thousand years of suffering, they would still be unfit to join in the songs of heaven, and to stand in the presence of the Most Holy. How shall our evil hearts be made better? The Spirit of God, by applying the blood of Jesus, can take away all their hardness. The preaching of the Gospel cannot *alone* soften them. If it could, those whom Jesus daily taught, would not have conspired against him. Let us ask the Father for the Holy Spirit to convert us, if we are *not* converted; and if we are, to make us know more of the love of Christ, and to live more to His glory.

November 10

Mark 14:51-54. *A young man follows Christ.*

There are many who have become known to us only on account of their having had something to do with Jesus. We should never have heard of this young man, if he had not followed him this terrible night. It was a moment never to be forgotten, when he heard the tumult, and determined to go and see what it was. It appears that he loved the Lord, and desired to be with him in the hour of danger and disgrace. But when the enemies laid hold of him his courage failed, and leaving his covering in their hands, he fled for his life. This circumstance gives us a lively idea of the terror that prevailed among the friends of Jesus. Those who had a little while before clung closely to his side, were now afraid to be known as his disciples.

This was the case with Peter. He followed Jesus afar off—so far off, that he hoped none of the enemies would perceive that he was following him at all. When he saw his Master enter into the palace of the high priest, it appears that he longed to enter also. But there was a damsel who kept the door, and she would not permit strangers to pass. However, a way was opened for the entrance of this affectionate disciple. Another disciple, who was known to the high priest, obtained permission to admit Peter. We know not who this man was. Some think it was John, because he alone mentions that it was through another disciple that Peter gained admission into the palace. Others suppose that none but a man of

rank could have obtained so great a privilege for a stranger. Whoever it was, it is evident that he did not *tell* the doorkeeper that Peter was a disciple of Jesus.

Had the apostle, when he ventured into the palace, known what a crime he would commit within those walls, he would have shrunk back with horror. We cannot tell when we enter a place, whether we shall afterwards look back with sorrow or with joy upon our visit there. Any place where we have grievously sinned against the Lord must afterwards be regarded with mournful feelings.

Was Peter wrong to enter the palace? Had Peter gone there openly to defend or comfort his Master, his conduct would have been noble and courageous—but he went *secretly* to see the end. He endeavored to conceal who he was. This attempt prepared the way for his shameful fall. How could he sit by the fire, warming himself, while his Master stood exposed to the insults of his enemies? How was it that his sobs and tears did not betray who he was?

We are taught to pray, "Lord, lead us not into temptation." It is a dangerous thing to mix with the ungodly. Whenever duty calls us to enter their abodes, we should arm ourselves beforehand by earnest prayer. While we are among them we should keep watching and looking to Jesus for strength. Our conduct will soon show that we are his disciples. If the conversation turns upon worldly gaities, can we appear interested in it? If a profane jest be made, can we join in the laugh? If a servant of God be spoken against, can we refrain from defending his character? And if the name of Jesus be blasphemed, can we conceal our grief and indignation? When Henry Martyn, the missionary, conversed with the learned men of Persia, he heard them blaspheme that holy name. He could not conceal the anguish that he felt. Even the heathens themselves, when they beheld it, were touched as well as astonished. They saw that he really loved Jesus.

November 11

John 18:19-24. *An officer strikes Jesus with the palm of his hand.*

There are some acts of love done to the Son of God, recorded in the Scriptures to the everlasting *honor* of those who did them. We count *her* blessed who washed the Redeemer's feet with her tears; and Mary also, who anointed his head with ointment; and Joseph and Nicodemus, who wrapped his body in fine linen; and the little company of women who brought spices to the sepulcher. Even the man who lent him the donkey on which he rode, and he who lent him the room in which he supped, acquired honor by these acts of kindness.

But there are some deeds of *malice* recorded in Scripture, to the everlasting *shame* of those who perpetrated them. Such was the deed of the man who struck with the palm of his hand the Lord of glory. Had Jesus been merely a *common*

prisoner, it would have been ungenerous to strike him when his hands were *bound*. But though the officer may not have known that he was the Son of God, he must have been aware that he was no *common* prisoner. He must have heard of his works of mercy and of power. What could have been his motive for inflicting a profane blow? Was it to please the high priest? Caiaphas encouraged wickedness in his servants. *He* had given the counsel that it was expedient that one man should die for the people. He was accountable for all the injuries inflicted upon the Savior from the time of his apprehension to the moment of his death, for he was the proposer of the whole scheme. But *everyone* who had a share in those dreadful transactions will have to answer for *their* part, *except* they afterwards repented of their deeds. *Some* who with wicked hands slew the Savior, were afterwards pierced in their heart at the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost. Who can tell but that this officer was found among those penitents? He may have washed his guilty hand as white as snow in the precious blood of the Lamb; for that blood cleanses from *all* sin. *If so*, with what anguish he must have looked back upon the insult he had once offered to the Son of God! But if he never did repent, his daring act remains recorded, not only in the Scriptures, but also in the book of God's remembrance.

Sinners have not *now* the opportunity of *striking* the Lord of glory—their puny arms cannot reach his exalted throne. But they can show their contempt and hatred by scoffing at his word, and persecuting his people. There are many insults offered every day to the Son of God. And why does he not avenge those insults? Because his hands, though no longer bound with *cord*, are restrained by *love*. He is patience toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Some persecutors have died rejoicing in those wicked deeds on account of which they were going to be eternally condemned. It is recorded of a Roman Catholic Bishop of London, named Stokesley, that on his death-bed he gloried in having assisted at the burning of fifty men, whom *he* called *heretics*, but whom *we* call *martyrs*. In the same dreadful state of mind the holy apostle Paul *would* have died, had not God shown mercy to him when a blasphemer, and a persecutor; he would have died exulting in the recollection of the day when the blood of Stephen was shed, and when he was standing by consenting to his death—for at that time he thought he was doing God service by making havoc of his church. But "the grace of the Lord was exceedingly abundant with faith, and love which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 1:14.) Saul heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Why are you persecuting me?" It was the same voice that once had said on *earth* to another persecutor, "Why do you smite me?" The words from heaven were accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit, and they subdued the man, breathing out threatenings and slaughter. God has sometimes displayed his almighty power, not only in conquering the most daring *offenders*, but in conquering them in their most daring *moods*. When their sins seemed to have reached the highest point, and to have broken out with the greatest violence, then his powerful hand has laid them low at the foot of the cross.

November 12

Matthew 26:59-66. *The false witnesses.*

Those who are bent on doing evil often wish to keep up the *appearance* of good. The high priest did not say to his colleagues, "Let us condemn the prisoner untried." No—but he secretly sought *false* witness against him. When the world desire to injure a saint, they invent excuses for treating him badly, they encourage his enemies to speak against him, and they easily find some who will gratify their wishes. Though Jesus had spent his life in relieving the miserable, yet there were many willing to bear false witness against him. How then can the servants of God expect to escape the breath of slander? God may sometimes see fit to preserve them from evil reports; but generally he appoints them a share in the reproaches that fell on his well-beloved Son.

It was difficult to find two false witnesses whose testimony agreed together; and it was contrary to the Jewish law to condemn a prisoner on that of *one* alone. At length two appeared whose testimony was accepted. They repeated words *very much like* some Jesus had really uttered, but they gave them a sense which he had never intended to convey, and therefore they are called "false witnesses." Those who attribute motives to others, without being able to prove what they say, are "*false witnesses.*" It is a very *common* sin to bear false witness, and yet it is a very *great* one. It is the *worst* form of lying. It is mentioned in the ninth commandment, because it is the *greatest* sin of the *kind*. He who would bear false witness would tell *any* other lie.

Who can but shudder at the thought of the guilt of these two false witnesses! Ungrateful men! they had heard the words of Jesus only to distort them, and to bring them against him in the hour of his sorrow. But the guilt of the high priest towers far above even their guilt. He displayed a show of justice, by appearing to grant Jesus an opportunity of defending himself. He said, "What is it which these witness against you?" But the divine prisoner held his peace, for he knew his condemnation was already determined.

Had he refused to answer the *next* question, how much his enemies would have triumphed! When the high priest said, "Tell me whether you are the Christ, the Son of God?" *then* the Lord declared plainly that he was. He would not permit the shadow of a doubt to rest upon his divinity. He is equal with God. He and the Father are one. Jesus did not tell the wicked Caiaphas that he had come to *die* for him; but he did tell him that he would come again to *judge* him. When he spoke of himself as Judge, he called himself the *Son of man*. It seems as if he would prepare Caiaphas for beholding that same human form that now stood *bound* before him, clothed with power, and enthroned in light.

We have never seen Jesus. We cannot conceive how he looked when he was upon earth. But what will be the feelings of those who knew him and who hated him, when they see the *face* once so marred, shining with glorious luster, and adorned with the diadem of the universe!

November 13

Luke 22:63-65. *The servants of the High Priest insult Christ.*

The most remarkable night that has been known since the beginning of the world, was the night before the crucifixion of the Lord. It is written concerning the night on which the children of Israel left Egypt—that it is a night to be much observed to the Lord. But *this* night was far more memorable than the night of the Passover. Then all the *first-born* of Egypt were slain; but *now* the *first-born* of God was betrayed, accused, condemned, and insulted.

That was a memorable night, when the angels appeared to the shepherds of Bethlehem, to announce the birth of the holy Babe. *Then* angels *rejoiced*, but now angels must have wept, *if* angels *can* weep.

We are looking forward to another night, in which there will be both weeping and rejoicing. When the Son of God comes again, it will be night to half the inhabitants of the world. What terror some will feel, when the last trumpet rouses them from their slumbers!

Let us look back upon the transactions of that dreadful night which Jesus passed in the palace of the high priest. Human nature never displayed its deformity in a more glaring manner than at that season. Satan must have recognized in man every feature of his own character, and have seen that he was indeed his son. But insults could not degrade the Son of God. Sin *alone* degrades. The grossest insults, borne with meekness, exalt, instead of degrading. How glorious the Son of God appears, surrounded, *not* by worshipers but tormentors; yet bearing all their taunts with divine patience! "When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself unto him that judges righteously." (1 Peter 3:23.) He regarded every injury as a drop in the cup his Father had given him to drink. He knew the prophecies that had been made concerning his sufferings—"They shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek." (Micah 5:1.)

"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting." (Is. 50:6.)

Could we receive all that happened to us as the appointment of God, we should not be so easily provoked as we often are. Yet the malice of our enemies could never be vented against us, except by the decree of God.

There was an ingenuity in the torments inflicted on Jesus, worthy of Satan, their author. Perhaps there was a burst of applause, when it was first proposed to blindfold those meek and sorrowful eyes, and no doubt a profane laugh was heard, as each blow was struck, and the question asked, "Who smote you?" How much astonished those men would have been, had Jesus told them who had smitten him! They little thought how well he knew their names; but they will find hereafter that he *did* know who struck him that night. *Many other* things they blasphemously spoke against him, though only a *few* of their blasphemies are recorded as a specimen of the rest.

When we think of the greatness of the Son of God, and then reflect upon the indignities he endured, the mind is filled with wonder. Though saints have been praising him, age after age, for the love he displayed in their redemption; though their chorus is continually increasing, and though their song will never cease, yet sufficient honor can never be done to our crucified Savior.

November 14

Mark 14:66 to end. *Peter denies Christ.*

Is there anyone who loves the Lord, who has read Peter's history without trembling? Who would have believed that so affectionate a disciple should prove so faithless in the hour of trial! But man, even when renewed by divine grace, is liable to fall. Though his *spirit* is made willing to obey, the *flesh* still inclines him to sin. The apostle Paul declares, "For I delight in the law of God, after the *inward* man; but I see *another* law in my *members*, warring against the law of my *mind*." (Rom. 7:22, 23.) There is also a tempter always going about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

The fall of Peter is related by all the four evangelists, and some peculiar circumstances are mentioned by each.

The *first* denial was made while Peter stood by the fire, in the palace. The damsel who kept the door accused him of being a disciple. Peter, taken by surprise, denied the fact. We know not *what* evil he feared, when he had recourse to this sinful means of escape—whether he thought he should be turned out of the palace, and deprived of the opportunity of seeing the end, or whether he dreaded lest he should be apprehended, like his Master, and exposed to the same insults and injuries. It appears that several other people, besides the doorkeeper, taxed him with having some connection with the holy prisoner; but he persisted in the lie he had already told. This was the *first* denial.

Finding he was known, he withdrew into the porch, and then—the cock crew. But he attended not to this faithful monitor, nor did he even remember the Lord's

warning. While in the porch, both a maid and a man recognized him, and this time he added an *oath* to his declaration. This was his *second* denial.

Soon afterwards he returned into the palace, and was discovered, by his peculiar manner of speaking, to come from that part of Israel called Galilee; and as it was well known that most of Christ's disciples were Galileans, it was immediately supposed that he was one of them. On this occasion Peter not only denied his Lord, but he began to curse and to swear. He had now reached an dreadful pitch of iniquity. How much farther he *might* have gone, none but God knows. Again the cock crew. This time Peter understood the voice of the bird. And why? Because at the same moment that the cock crew, the Lord turned and looked upon him. It is probable that Jesus was now standing among the servants, enduring their insults. His eyes had lately been blindfolded, his face smitten, and spit upon. That face, thus bruised and defiled, those eyes which had shed so many tears, were turned towards Peter. No wonder he could not bear the look. He went again into the porch, and wept bitterly. Then all the past was brought before his mind; all the love that he had experienced, all the vows he had made, and all the base denials of which he had been guilty—*all—all* rushed to his remembrance. "And when he thought thereon, he wept."

There are such moments in the believer's experience. Blessed moments! in which he learns more of his own wickedness, and of his Lord's goodness, than he has learned in years that have gone before. Some actions, which he had never viewed in their true light, are all at once seen to be dark offences against his gracious God. No tears shed for blasted prospects, or heavy bereavements, are as bitter as these. Yet even then he must not say, "There is no hope." Peter did not read in his Master's look, "There is no forgiveness for you." How could he have lived during the next two days, had he despaired of pardon! Had he been without hope, could he have run so eagerly to the tomb of his risen Lord, and even ventured to enter in! It was the thought that he had sinned against a Savior ready to forgive, that made his tears flow so abundantly. It was the same thought that kept him from despair. His Savior had once said, "I have prayed for you that your *faith* fail not." And it failed not.

True penitence is a mixture of sorrow and faith. The penitent says with sorrow, "My sin is before me;" and with faith, "There is forgiveness with you." Such is the broken heart which God will not despise. Let this be our prayer—

"If near the pit I rashly stray,
Before I wholly fall away,
The keen conviction dart—
Recall me by that pitying look,
That kind, upbraiding glance which broke
Unfaithful Peter's heart."

November 15

Luke 22:66 to end. *The council condemn Christ.*

It is probable that this examination is not the same as that of which Matthew gives an account. *That* examination seems to have taken place in the *night*, *this* in the *day*. It was a law among the Jews that no sentence pronounced in the *night* should stand good, and to this law Jeremiah is supposed to refer when he says, "Execute judgment in the *morning*." (21:12.) Accordingly, the council assembled at the dawn of day to confirm the condemnation they had pronounced during the hours of darkness. This council was called the Sanhedrin. It consisted of seventy people, of whom the high priest was the chief. The other members were *priests*, who *had* been *high* priests, or who were heads of the twenty-four courses—*elders*, or princes of the people; and *scribes*, or men learned in the law. They were all people whom the world revered. *Priests* who had a reputation for *holiness*; *elders* who boasted of *noble birth*, and *scribes* who had acquired great *learning*; all these combined against the *Holy One*, the Most *High*, the only *wise* God.

There were two members of that council who took no part in the proceedings of their brethren. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were honorable counselors and rulers in Israel. They were also disciples of Jesus, though *secretly*, for fear of the Jews. It is probable that they were absent when the council met to condemn the Lord, or if present, it is certain that they did not unite in pronouncing the guilty sentence.

As Jesus had already acknowledged himself to be the Son of God, no witnesses were summoned to appear against him. His own confession was enough. When he was asked, "Are you the Christ?" he showed by his answer that he would have *proved* his claim, had his judges been willing to listen. He said, "If I tell you, you will not believe; and if I also ask you, you will not answer me, nor let me go." On former occasions he had *asked* them various questions, by which he had shown he was the Christ, and that the Christ was the Son of God. This is the great truth that Jesus sealed with his own blood. By *confessing* it, men are *saved*, for John declares, "Whoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwells in him, and he in God." By *denying* this truth men are *lost*; for John also declares, "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is *anti-Christ*," (that is, the enemy of Christ,) "that denies the Father and the Son."

Do we believe that Jesus is the Christ, *the Son of God*? If we believe it, we cannot feel *indifferent* on the subject. We may have believed some things, and yet we may now forget that we ever heard them; or though we may still believe them, we should not be grieved if we discovered them to be false. But we cannot feel in this manner concerning the great truth that Jesus is the Son of God. Would it make no difference to a mother whether she believed that the ship containing her only son was lost at sea, or safely arrived in the harbor? Would

not every stranger by the first glance of her countenance discover *which* of these tidings she had heard? Those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God, believe that they have a friend dearer than the dearest child, and more powerful than the mightiest monarch, ever ready, ever able to support them in time of need. They believe that he died to save them, and lives to bless them—that he will walk with them through the valley of the shadow of death, and lead them forever by living fountains of waters. When they say, "I believe that Jesus is the Son of God," their hearts burn within them, and their spirits rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

November 16

Matthew 27:3-10. *The death of Judas.*

Should we not have supposed, after reading how Judas betrayed his Master, that he was too much hardened ever to feel remorse? But the conscience sometimes awakes when least expected; for no one can lull it into so profound a sleep that it *cannot* be aroused. When Judas saw that his Master was condemned he repented himself. It seems then that he had hoped that the Lord would escape, as he had done on former occasions. But if he had escaped, would the crime of Judas have been less heinous? The guilt of sin is not to be measured by its *consequences*. By what, then, is it to be measured? By its *motives*.

When Judas became conscious of his guilt, how did he act? He went to the chief priests, confessed his crime, and rejected his bribe. Was not this all he could do? No! had he *loved* Jesus he would have done much more. He would have shed *such* tears as Peter shed. He would have been willing to live, bowed down with the remembrance of his crimes, sooner than have added to his offences against his Lord, by putting an end to his own life. But he was a "devil." (John 6:70.) *Satan* acknowledges that Jesus is the Holy One of God, and *Judas* did the same. But Satan does not love him; neither did Judas love the Master he betrayed, though he was forced by remorse to declare his innocence.

How dreadful must have been the expression of his countenance when he entered into the assembly of the chief priests to return the ill-gotten money! How different from the look he wore when he came to offer to betray his Lord! *Then* he felt satanic *joy*, and *now* satanic *misery*. His heart was full of despair, not of true repentance, when he said, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood!"

How much hearing this confession added to the guilt of the chief priests! Could they believe that Jesus was a wicked man, when one of his most intimate companions declared to his own shame how excellent a Master he had betrayed? Was it not that he might bear this testimony that Jesus had chosen him three years before to be an apostle?

But how did the priests *receive* the testimony? They replied, "What is that to us? see you to that." In this way tempters treat their deluded victims. If a youth, who has been drawn into sin by artful companions, were to go to them and say, "See the misery you have brought upon me." What would they answer? "See you to *that*." They would regard his qualms of conscience as proofs of weakness and cowardice. What dreadful recriminations will be heard in the abode of despair among lost spirits! With what bitterness will the tempted reproach their tempters, as the authors of their woe!

It seems that the priests could not entirely smother the voice of conscience in their bosoms, for they looked upon the thirty pieces of silver cast on the floor with abhorrence. They did not dare to return them to the treasury set apart for the expenses of the temple services, but determined to purchase with them a burying-ground for strangers. Perhaps they thought by this charitable deed to atone for their cruel treatment of an innocent person. They were not aware that they thus fulfilled a prophecy that had been made long before by the prophet Zechariah. There was a piece of ground near Jerusalem called the potter's field. It is probable that the soil having been used for the manufacture of earthen vessels, had become unfit for cultivation, and could be obtained at a low price. At first it was set apart for the burial of those Gentiles who had embraced the Jewish religion, but who were considered unworthy to be buried with the Jews.

It is still a burying-place for Gentiles. The Armenian Christians have hired it from the Turks. The Holy Field (as it is now called) lies near the deep and gloomy valley at the south of Jerusalem. A square building, about twelve feet high, covers half this little plot of ground. Through the top, which is open, dead bodies are let down. Travelers who have looked into the building have seen the corpses lying beneath in various stages of decay. The potter's field is the memorial of the low price at which the Savior of the world was estimated. Those who behold the worthless plot may well exclaim, "He was despised and rejected of men."

We know not what solitary spot Judas chose for the commission of his last crime. It seems probable that he fastened himself by a rope to a branch of a tree that overhung one of those precipices which abound near Jerusalem, and that the rope breaking by his weight, he fell into the valley beneath. There his body became a horrible spectacle, and a token to all who beheld it of the vengeance of God.

On the same day that Judas died, Jesus died also. Nearly at the same time the betrayer and the betrayed entered into the presence of God. With what unutterable shame must Judas have seen his injured Lord received with joyful shouts by redeemed sinners! The blood he had caused to be shed never washed his own soul from its dark stains. While the penitent thief was ushered spotless into the presence of the Most Holy, the despairing apostle was consigned, with all his guilt upon his head, to "*his own place*." (Acts 1:25.) It has been well

observed by Dr. Bennet that they crossed each other on the path. One who just before had *appeared* to be going to hell—went to heaven; and another who once had *appeared* to be going to heaven—went to hell!

November 17

John 18:28-38. *Christ appears before Pontius Pilate.*

We now behold the Savior delivered by the Jews into the hands of the Gentiles. Pontius Pilate was a Gentile. Caesar, the Roman emperor, who had conquered the Jewish nation, had appointed Pontius Pilate to be their governor. It was he alone who had the power of sentencing any man to be put to death. On this account the chief priests and elders led their captive to his judgment-seat; for no punishment less than *death* would satisfy their malice. Thus the saying of Jesus, signifying *what* death he should die, was brought to pass. Had the Jews put him to death, he would have been *stoned*; but it was necessary that he should be *crucified*. As our *sacrifice*, he bore our *curse*. God has declared in his word, "Cursed is every one that hangs on a tree." Thus Jesus, by hanging on a cross of wood, became a curse for us. (See Gal. 3.)

But when the Jews brought their holy prisoner to Pilate, they refused to enter into the hall of judgment. And why? Because they feared lest they should be defiled by entering into the dwelling of a Gentile, and that they should not be able to keep the passover; for that feast was celebrated during a *whole week*, and many peace-offerings of the herd and of the flock were eaten, besides the unleavened bread and Paschal Lamb. What must Pilate have thought of the Jewish religion, when he saw these men at once so much occupied with empty forms, and so much distorted with evil passions! Many think poorly of the Christian religion from the same cause. They see people who would not on any account miss attending church or the sacrament, filled with envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. The fault, however, is not in the *religion*, but in the *hearts* of its professors.

As the Jews refused to enter into the judgment-hall, they were not present when Pilate examined their innocent victim. Thus the Lord enjoyed a short respite from their angry and noisy accusations. They had not told Pilate that Jesus said he was the *Son of God*, because they knew that such an accusation would not be regarded by a heathen; but they had accused him of making himself a *king*.

The first question that Pilate asked the Lord was, "Are you the king of the Jews?" The holy prisoner did not refuse to answer the question. He made a good confession before Pontius Pilate, and acknowledged that he was a king. What an opportunity Pilate now enjoyed of hearing the truth to the saving of his soul! Like the woman of Samaria, he was now conversing with a stranger who could teach him all things. The Lord was willing to answer his questions, and to enlighten his

ignorance; but Pilate was not willing to listen to his voice. He broke off the conversation abruptly. Though he asked, "What is truth?" he did not wait for an answer. How unlike he was to the Samaritan, who left the Savior only that she might call together the men of her city to hear his wonderful words! Had Pilate acted as she did, he might have lost his monarch's favor—he might have incurred the Jews' displeasure—he might have forfeited his honors and even his life, but—he would have *saved his soul*. What must he *now* think of his conduct on that occasion! A price was then put into his hand to buy wisdom, but he had no *heart* for it. Jesus knew this when he said to him, "Everyone that is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate was not of the truth, therefore he did not hear his voice.

Those only are *of the truth* who *love* the truth; all others turn away their ears from hearing it. Multitudes have opportunities of hearing the truth, who *will* not hear it. Though conscience tells them, "This is the truth," they find excuses for neglecting it. They say, "I have no time," or, "I shall offend my relations," or "I shall injure my business," or "I am too young, too fun-loving, and too happy;" and they often *end* by saying, "*It is too late.*" There was one who made this dreadful answer to the *last* messenger of mercy who approached his dying bed, "*It is too late.*"

November 18

Luke 23:4-12. *Christ appears before Herod.*

The Lord Jesus stood before the tribunals of four judges. Two of them were priests, Annas and Caiaphas; and two were rulers, Pilate and Herod. Of *Annas*, we know nothing, except that he did *not unbind* his sacred prisoner. For it is written, "Now Annas had sent him *bound* unto Caiaphas, the high priest." (John 18:24.) But of the other three we hear much. Though all of them were wicked men, they were not *equally* guilty, for they had not equal *light*, nor did they reach the same point in crime. Pilate was an ignorant heathen—Herod had been instructed by John the Baptist—Caiaphas had enjoyed frequent opportunities of hearing the Son of God himself; for his office obliged him to spend the whole of every day at the temple, where the Lord taught so often, and wrought so many miracles. The hearts of these three men were set against the Savior, just in proportion to their knowledge of his truth. Pilate knew *nothing* of the Lord, and he was desirous to release him. Herod knew *something* of him, and he cared not what became of him. Caiaphas knew *much*, and he was bent upon his destruction. It is not *hearing* of Christ that softens the heart, nor seeing him, nor listening to his own words. The Holy Spirit alone can make the wicked heart of man love the Savior. We shall often find that those who have been religiously educated, and who have heard the gospel many years, are greater enemies to Christ than the ignorant world.

But though Pilate did not hate Jesus, he had a share in his murder. Caiaphas accused him—Herod made no effort to release him, and Pilate condemned him.

Each was actuated by different motives. Caiaphas was under the dominion of envy; Herod was in a hardened, unbelieving, arrogant state of mind; and Pilate was afraid of exasperating the Jews, and of incurring the displeasure of the Roman emperor. Soon all these wicked judges were hurled from their high seats, deprived of their shining honors, and plunged in deep disgrace. Herod and Pilate were banished to distant countries. The end of Caiaphas is not known.

There was one circumstance in Herod's case which aggravated his guilt. He was once under religious impressions. There was a time when he heard John gladly, and did many things that were right; but there was a sin that he would not renounce. He refused to part with the wicked Herodias, his brother's wife. What was the consequence? His good impressions wore off, and his heart grew harder than before. He shut up John in prison, then beheaded him, and at last derided the Son of God. Behold him encouraging his soldiers in turning that blessed and sorrowful sufferer into ridicule! Had he known who stood before him, he might have asked of him, and he might have obtained the pardon of his sins. The blood that Jesus shed could have washed his guilty hand and heart, even from the stains of the Baptist's blood. But he had smothered the reproaches of conscience, and brought himself to regard religion as a fable. Instead of being *afraid* of seeing Jesus, whose faithful servant he had murdered, he was exceedingly *glad*. But he will be exceedingly *sorry* the next time he beholds him; for then he will find the dreadful threatening fulfilled, "I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear comes." (Prov. 1.)

The case of Herod is not uncommon; there are many who once received good impressions, and who once struggled with strong convictions, who are now grown hard, scornful, and hostile. They would not *obey* the truth, and therefore they tried to *disbelieve* it, and they have succeeded. No sermons now make them tremble, no afflictions now touch their hearts; they are steeled against warnings and persuasions, against mercies and judgments. We earnestly hope that there is no one among us in this hardened state. But if there are any who are *now* resisting the convictions of conscience, who can tell how hard their hearts may become!

November 19

Matthew 27:15-19. *Pilate's wife.*

Pilate felt reluctant to condemn Christ. He resorted to various expedients in order to save himself from passing the unjust sentence. He sent Jesus to Herod; but Herod sent him back. He next appealed to the people. He knew that it was envy of the people's attachment to their favorite teacher, that had caused the priests to deliver him up. Therefore he hoped that the *people* would demand *his* release, in preference to that of the notorious robber, called Barabbas. But why did not Pilate, instead of resorting to these expedients, simply and boldly say, "I will not

condemn an innocent man?" He had not courage to face the opposition of the Jews; therefore he endeavored to *slip out* of his difficulties. Have we never acted in a similar manner? When convinced that it was our duty without delay to take a certain step, have we never thought, "I will wait, in hopes that some circumstance may arise to save me from this trial?" But God usually defeats these plans, and brings us into such a position that we must take a decided part, either for good or evil.

Pilate was in a state of great perplexity, when a message arrived that increased his trouble. His wife sent unto him, saying, "Have nothing to do with this just man, for I have suffered many things in a dream because of him." This message was a merciful warning from God to deter him from committing the crime to which he was tempted.

It is not recorded that any *woman* took part against the Lord while he was on earth. There was no Herodias to promote *his* death, though there was one to ask for the head of John the Baptist. In this appointment, we can trace the mercy of God to woman. Eve, by her counsels to her husband, ruined the world. This circumstance cast a deep shade upon the character of woman. Pilate's wife, by *her* counsels, endeavored to save her husband from sharing in the world's greatest crime. It is remarkable that Pilate's wife should be favored by a dream from heaven, for in all probability she was a heathen; but God often works in the minds of those who know him very imperfectly. There are many dreams which are not worthy of regard; they come (Solomon says, Eccles. 5:3) through the multitude of business, and are full of confusion and impossibilities. But the dream of Pilate's wife was of a different kind. It was sent by God to instruct her ignorance and to awaken her fears. She suffered *many* things in her dream; we know not *what* things; but they were terrible, and they were all connected with a just man then standing before her husband's tribunal. What must have been her feelings, when she found her message had been disregarded, and that the Just One was condemned! When the darkness overspread the earth at noon, she must have suspected its cause. We should like to know whether she ever truly believed in the Savior, or whether her alarm passed away without making any saving impression on her soul. Did she afterwards hear the preaching of the apostles? We know not. Her history is not related in the Scriptures. The only event of her life that is recorded, leads us to hope that she found mercy. It was her privilege on earth to plead in behalf of the slandered Savior, when, with the exception of a few disciples, the world were combined against him. We hope it is her blessed portion to worship him in heaven, amid countless adoring hosts. She suffered many things in a *dream* because of *him*; we hope that she now knows that he suffered many *more* things on a *cross* for *her* sins.

November 20

Matthew 27:20-25. *The multitude prefer Barabbas to Christ.*

What guilt there was in the short answer the people made to Pilate's inquiry! "Barabbas." It was the name of a murderer; yet they preferred that murderer to him who came to give *life* unto the world. It was not *one* man only who made this wicked choice, but a *whole multitude*. Is not this a proof that the heart of man is desperately wicked? The most lovely of all Beings clothed himself in a human form, and a whole multitude preferred a *murderer* before him. Could we have seen the meek and holy countenance of the Son of God, and then have beheld the degraded, abject, brutal looks of the wicked Barabbas, we should have said, "It is impossible that men can prefer that vile criminal to the righteous Savior." Did any of the blind whom Jesus had restored to sight join in the cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas?" Did any tongue that he had loosed exclaim, "Let him be crucified?" We *hope* that no such act of ingratitude was committed; we hope that Bartimeus was weeping in some secret place, as well as the women who had followed him to Jerusalem. But when we consider what numerous miracles Jesus had wrought in the temple, we must conclude that many of the multitude had received great benefits from his gracious hands. How many helpless parents, and drooping children, had been restored by Him to health and joy! but all his mercies were now forgotten, and only the crimes of which he was accused were remembered. What is man? Changeable, base, ungrateful. Judas preferred thirty pieces of silver to his divine Master; the multitude a *murderer* to their *Benefactor!*

Pilate was astonished at the mad violence of the people. He feared to resist their clamor, lest his own life should fall a sacrifice to their fury; yet he was so deeply impressed with a sense of the injustice of the deed he was going to commit, that he took water, and washed his hands before them all, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see you to it." But could that water cleanse his hands from guilt? O no. Pilate had *power* to release the prisoner; he was bound to exert that power. It was not sufficient for *him* to bear his testimony against evil. Pilate's *wife* could do no more than lift up her feeble voice on behalf of the innocent; but Pilate could have said, "I will defend him with the last drop of my blood." How blessed would he *then* have been, though he had been torn to pieces by the exasperated multitude! That day he would have been with Jesus in Paradise.

Who can hear, without a thrill of horror, the curse which the Jewish nation invoked on their own heads, when they answered, "His blood be on us, and on our children!" They intended to say, "If he is innocent, we will bear the guilt of his murder; but we are sure that he is *not* innocent." God heard the dreadful words. Forty years afterwards, the Romans conquered Jerusalem. Blood then flowed in such torrents through the streets, that it extinguished many a burning pile; and crosses were erected in such numbers around the walls, that there was no more room in which to place them, nor wood of which to construct them. But who could have thought, that in that horrible curse a *blessing* also was contained! They cried, "His blood be upon us;" but the Savior interceded, that it might wash them from their sins. A time shall come, when that precious blood shall wash the whole

nation from their iniquities; and "so all Israel shall be saved." (Rom. 11:26.)

To every soul who hears the gospel, the *blood* of Jesus shall prove either a curse or a blessing. It *must* be upon us, either to *increase* our guilt, or to *wash it away*. Let us not be satisfied with thinking, "How wicked the Jews were to shed that blood!" It was shed that we might wash, and be clean. Jesus lives to wash with his own hands those for whom he shed his own blood. The apostle John says, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood." (Rev. 1.) Let every sinner come to this Savior, and bathe in this fountain. Let each learn to say,

"My Savior died upon the tree,
And sank for me beneath the flood;
My sins are cast into this sea,
Of love, of sorrows, and of blood."
Hymn 283. Collection by Rev. J. H. Evans

November 21

Matthew 27:26-30. *The band of soldiers mock Christ.*

Barabbas was released, and Jesus was delivered up to be crucified. We know nothing of the future history of Barabbas. We know not whether he ever believed in him, who was led to execution, when he himself was permitted to live. But there have been some as guilty as Barabbas, who have believed; and they have felt that if Jesus had not been crucified, they would never have been released from the everlasting prison-house of sin and death.

Before Jesus was crucified, he was scourged. It was the custom to treat criminals in this barbarous manner. The scourge was a sharp and torturing instrument, frequently composed of the nerves of oxen, and the bones of sheep. The poor sufferer was fastened to a post, with his hands tied behind him, while the executioners, with all their might, covered his whole body with their cruel strokes. Among the *Jews* there was a law forbidding more than forty strokes to be inflicted at *one* time; but among the *Romans* there was no such law. We know not how many strokes lacerated the sacred flesh of our Divine Lord. It was *then* that he meekly "gave his back to the smiters." (Is. 50:6.) It was *then* that the plowers plowed on his back, and made long their furrows. (Ps. 129:3.) But there was a healing virtue in those stripes. The blood that flowed from those wounds, heals the wounds of sin in the human heart. It is written, "With his stripes we are healed." It is indeed wonderful that *stripes* should heal. But those who are harassed by the remembrance of past sins, may find that the stripes of Jesus can restore peace to their souls. The innocent Lamb of God was wounded in our stead, and if we believe in him, we shall be healed.

No pity was awakened in the hearts of the Roman soldiers, by the sight of the Redeemer's sufferings. After the scourging was over, Jesus was taken back into the magnificent hall of Pilate, and was surrounded by the *whole band* of soldiers, in number at least *six hundred*. This was the third time that he had been publicly mocked. The servants of the high priest had derided his *wisdom*. Herod, with his men of war, had mocked his *innocence*, by clothing him in a white, or gorgeous robe; and now Pilate's soldiers scoffed at his *royal dignity*, by clothing him in a scarlet robe, and adorning him with a crown of thorns. The soldiers themselves had platted this crown. They had taken some twigs of a plant that bore spikes, and, with the ingenuity of fiends, had contrived to give pain to their victim, while they indulged their own mirth. Some of the faithful followers of Jesus have thought of this crown while enduring the same kind of sufferings. When a crown, not made of *thorns*, but of *paper*, and painted with the figures of three devils, was placed on the head of the martyr, John Huss, he said, "I am glad to wear this crown of ignominy, for the sake of him who wore a crown of thorns." He felt that the Savior's torments were sharper than his own; he felt, also, that it was for *his* sake that the thorns pierced the Savior's brow. Yes! It was for *us* that Jesus wore a crown of thorns. No evil thought had ever proceeded from his divine mind. It was to atone for *our* offences that the blood trickled down his sacred cheeks. He who suffered all these pangs, and bore all these insults, was *God*, the God who made us, who gives us breath, who upholds the worlds! What must *sin* be to require such an atonement! It must be infinitely evil. And what must *Jesus* be, to be willing to offer this atonement! He must be infinitely good. The day is coming, when he will appear adorned with *many* crowns, but not *one* of them composed of thorns. Then every knee shall bow to him, not in cruel mockery, but with deep awe, and call him *Lord*, to the glory of God the Father.

November 22

John 19:4-9. Pilate shows Christ in his royal robes to the Jews.

The Jews did not witness the torments Jesus suffered among the soldiers, because they would not enter into the judgment-hall. It would have gratified their malice had they seen the profane scoffers bending their knees in pretended homage. When Pilate beheld the bleeding sufferer, he hoped that the sight would melt the hearts of his enemies, and therefore he brought him forth into the open place and said, "Behold the man." Can we conceive the appearance of the Man Christ Jesus at this moment? We know that he wore over his shoulders a robe of purple and scarlet, and a crown of thorns upon his head. We may form some idea of his weak frame, bowed down with the anguish of the scourge, and of his sorrowful features, suffused with blood; but we cannot imagine the holy and subdued expression of his countenance. No sinful feeling had ever clouded his brow, or ruffled one feature of his face; sorrow alone had marred that sacred visage.

But the sight of their mangled victim did not touch the cruel hearts of the Jews. They cried out, "Crucify him, crucify him." Then Pilate said, "Take him, and crucify him." His object was not to shield the *sufferer*, but *himself*. If *he* could avoid having any hand in the deed, he was willing to allow it to be done. Pilate was a selfish and unrighteous man. He felt no generous concern for the innocent; though fear impelled him to plead in his behalf.

This fear was increased when the Jews cried out, "He made himself the Son of God." It now flashed across Pilate's mind that this extraordinary man might really be a divine person. He desired to speak with him again in the judgment-hall. What a question he proposed when he said to the Son of God, "Where are you from?" How astonished Pilate would have been had his injured prisoner described the glories of the place where he came from! But he would not even answer the question. And why not? On a former occasion he *had* answered some of Pilate's important inquiries; but since then his unrighteous judge had done violence to his own conscience, and had resisted the warning sent in a dream. He had commanded the innocent to be scourged, and had permitted him to be tormented by a barbarous crew. Those who shut their eyes to the light, will soon find *that* light begin to wane. When we will not attend to the voice of conscience, or to the warnings of God, we must expect to be left to pursue the way of destruction.

It was a sign that God was angry with Pilate when Jesus forbore to tell him where he was from. He had told his *disciples* that he was with the Father, and that he came into the world. It is the thought of his original greatness that makes his abasement so wonderful. If we read the first chapter of Genesis, containing an account of the *Creation*, and then read the nineteenth chapter of John, describing the *Crucifixion*, we must be amazed to behold the same Being performing so vast a work, and then enduring such deep humiliation.

November 23

John 19:10-16. *Pilate delivers up Christ to be crucified.*

These were Pilate's last efforts to obtain the release of his prisoner. We must feel compassion for this wretched governor, as he runs to and fro, seeking some new mode to extricate himself from his difficulty. The path to true happiness and everlasting glory lay open before him, but he had no heart to walk in it. He threw away the golden opportunity that was presented to him of defending the most glorious of Beings, placed for a season beneath the shelter of his arm.

How base and how absurd was his arrogant boast—"Know you not that I have *power* to crucify you, and *power* to release you." The Lord in his answer gave him a lesson calculated to humble his proud spirit. "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from *above*." To this humiliating

declaration he added a solemn warning, "He who delivered me unto you has the *greater* sin." Then Pilate had *some* sin. He who was counted as a *criminal* accused his *judge of sin!* That judge was compelled to say of his prisoner, "I find no fault in him." But the reputed criminal found great fault in his judge. Yet *not* the *greatest*. The high priest, who had delivered him up to Pilate, had the *greater* sin. There are then *degrees* of sin. Why was the high priest more guilty than Pilate? Because he had gone *out of his way* to destroy Jesus, whereas Pilate had been called to pronounce sentence in the regular execution of the office to which he "was ordained of God." (Rom. 13:1.) There were many other circumstances that increased the sin of Caiaphas; his knowledge of the Scriptures, his malicious motives, and his false accusations. God knows all the *aggravating* circumstances of our sins, and all the *palliating* circumstances also. He estimates our temptations, and forms an exact judgment of our *degree* of guilt. When we run to *meet* temptation, we are more guilty than when we yield to a temptation that *overtakes* us. But even *then* we are guilty. There is a way of escape for every tempted person. No creature is so hemmed in by temptations, that he could not escape, if he were to look to God for aid. For we have this promise, "God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." (1 Cor. 10:13.)

Pilate might have escaped from all his perplexities; but instead of escaping, he became each moment more entangled in the net. It is melancholy to view him making his last struggle against his fatal temptation. He left the judgment-hall accompanied by his prisoner, and took his seat on the "Pavement." It is supposed this was a covered balcony, the floor of which being covered with Mosaic work, it acquired the name of the Pavement. From this high seat he appealed for the *last* time to the furious multitude, saying, "Shall I crucify your King?" The reply was, "We have no king but Caesar." Then Pilate gave up his innocent victim, and the soldiers took him and led him away. What must have been the feelings of the unjust governor, as he beheld the enemies rejoicing over their prey! Can the events of that day have ceased to haunt him during the remainder of his life? But his calamity was near to come, and his affliction hastened fast. (Jer. 48:16.) Two years afterwards he lost the favor of the emperor, and was banished into a distant province, where, it is said, he put an end to his own life. It is to be feared that it would have been good for him if he had never worn a royal robe—if he had never seen the Son of God.

November 24

Mark 15:20, 21. *Simon bears the cross.*

We have entered upon a new scene in our Lord's sufferings. Behold him now on his way to Calvary, the place of his crucifixion! The *evening* before had been spent in the upper room at Jerusalem—the *night* in the garden at Gethsemane,

and in the palace of the high priest—and the *early morning* in the judgment-hall of Pilate. What a variety of sorrows had he undergone in these places! At the supper table and in the garden his *soul* was troubled—in the palace and the judgment-hall his *body* was buffeted, spit upon, and wounded.

Before he set out on his *last* painful journey, the royal robe was taken from his shoulders, and his own garments placed upon them; but we do not know whether the crown of thorns was removed from his bleeding brows. It is probable that the cruel soldiers permitted that instrument of torture to remain. They little knew that it was the badge of his real dignity.

"And he, bearing his cross, went forth." (John 19:47.) The Jews were accustomed to see criminals laden with their crosses, going to the place of execution, and generally offered the grossest insults to the unhappy sufferers as they proceeded on their way. There can be no doubt that the soldiers who had before tormented Jesus, now pursued him with unrelenting barbarity. But it seems they found their victim could scarcely move beneath his painful load. Fastings and watchings, prayers and tears, had dried up the strength of the Son of Man. He was now in the state which David described in Ps. 102:5. "By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones cleave to my skin."

But would the soldiers help him to carry his heavy cross? No! it was too shameful a burden for them to bear, or even to touch.

At this moment they met a man named Simon, a native of Africa, (the land of accursed Ham.) "Him they compelled to bear his cross." We cannot be certain that Simon was *unwilling* to bear it, for the choice was not given to him. The soldiers *commanded* him to do this public service. Whether Simon was an enemy or a friend to the Savior, or altogether a *stranger* to his name and character, we know not. It is evident, however, that he had not joined in the cry of "Crucify him, crucify him," for he was coming out of the *country*, as Jesus was leaving the *city*.

At the time it was thought a degrading office to bear the cross of the despised Jesus; but afterwards it was regarded as a distinguished honor. The sons of Simon were known as the sons of the man who bore the Redeemer's cross. Simon himself will never be forgotten, because he was the Savior's cross-bearer. How many angels in heaven would joyfully have taken his place, if they could have obtained permission! We may believe that there were some on *earth* who *would*, if they *might*, have borne their Lord's burden, and shared his reproach. Would not the women who followed him weeping, gladly have relieved him? And Peter, too, now lamenting his base denial—and the loving John, would not *they* have helped to bear the cross, had not the fear of the brutal soldiers and malicious priests kept them at a distance! Do we think we should have been desirous to occupy Simon's place?

Though our Lord is not *now* fainting beneath the weight of his cross, his name is

still despised, and his people persecuted. He delights to see us willing to bear shame for his sake. Some have humbled themselves to the very dust that they might please him. Dober, the Moravian missionary, intended to sell himself for a slave, that he might teach the negroes the way of salvation. Circumstances prevented him fulfilling his intention; but if he had, would he have degraded himself? To bear the cross of Jesus, and to share his reproach, is reckoned in heaven more honorable than to govern kingdoms, or to discover worlds. Whether Simon knew it or not, no monarch on his throne occupied a place of such distinction as he did when bearing the cross of the Nazarene.

November 25

Luke 23:27-31. *The weeping women.*

Though so *many* insulted our Lord in his last hours, yet a *great* company bewailed him. This troop was composed chiefly of *women*. Apostles had been afraid to let it be known that they belonged to Jesus, but these women were not afraid to let their tears be seen.

Apostles had failed to watch with him one hour; but these women, *unasked*, accompanied him on his way to the cross.

Jesus valued sympathy. He condescended to notice these mourners. He turned and spoke to them. What a moment it was when their Savior's failing eyes rested upon them! How eagerly they must have listened to his words, fearing they were the *last* they should ever hear from his lips.

He knew how soon his sufferings would be over, and how great the joy that would follow; therefore he said, "Weep not for me." He also knew what long and bitter woes were coming upon the Jewish nation; therefore he said to the women, "Weep for yourselves and for your children." Perhaps some of those little children who had sung his praises in the temple now accompanied their mothers, and wept with them. It grieved the Savior's compassionate heart to think of the sorrows that awaited *them*, as well as their parents; for he knew the future history of each person in the company. When children are born into prosperous families they are welcomed as *blessings*, but they were regarded as *curses* in the horrors of the siege of Jerusalem. Nothing can give us an idea of greater misery than the cry, "Fall on us," addressed to hills and mountains. Such misery the Jews *began* to endure, when, forty years after the crucifixion of their king, the Romans besieged their city.

What is the meaning of the words, "If they do these things in a *green* tree, what shall be done in the *dry!*" In the prophet Ezekiel there is a little parable, in which the Jewish nation is compared to a *forest*, and the anger of God to a *fire*. (Ezek. 20:47.) A fire quickly destroys *dry* trees, but *green* trees less easily. *Dry* trees

represent the *wicked*, who are prepared for destruction; *green* trees the *righteous*. God gives this explanation of Ezekiel's parable—"Say to the land of Israel, Behold, I am against you, and will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from you the *righteous* and the *wicked*." (Ezek. 21:3.) When Jesus, therefore, spoke of a *green* tree, he meant *himself*; and when he spoke of a *dry* tree, his *enemies*. This seems to be the explanation of his words. "If *they* (that is, the Romans) treat me who am *innocent* so cruelly, what will be done to the GUILTY!"

But why did Jesus speak of these calamities to the weeping women? Did he desire to wound those hearts already bleeding with sorrow for his sufferings? No! but in his mercy he gave a *last warning* to his enemies. A pious father, before he leaves this world, if he be able, summons all his children around his dying bed, and while he *comforts* some, he *warns* others of approaching judgments. His words, unheeded before, often sink deep into the heart at this solemn season. The dying Savior longed to save his enemies from impending destruction. He had often warned them in the temple, and they would not hear; now he warns them on his way to Calvary. But are the *Jews* the *only* people who will ever say to the mountains, "Fall on us?" Not so; all in every age, of every nation, of every rank, who have not believed in the crucified Savior, will be filled with terror when they see him coming in the clouds of heaven. If now we will say to Jesus, "Pardon us," we shall never say to the mountains, "Fall on us."

November 26

Matthew 27:33, 34. *Golgotha*.

At length the drooping Savior arrived at the spot appointed for his crucifixion—Golgotha, or the place of a skull. It is supposed that near it were caverns filled with the bones of crucified malefactors. Such places were detested by the Jews, who were forbidden to enter the temple if they had touched a dead body. This was the loathsome spot on which the innocent Lamb of God was to be sacrificed for the sins of men.

But there was a hidden reason why God led men to select this polluted place for the Redeemer's execution. He had commanded the High Priest, once a year, to sprinkle the blood of a bullock and of a goat upon the mercy-seat in the Holiest of Holies, to make atonement for sin. The *bodies* of these beasts were taken to a place outside the camp, or city, and burned. Their blood represented the precious blood of Christ, which pleads for us in the presence of God. *Because* his *blood* atones for sin, *therefore* his *body* was taken to a loathsome spot outside the city of Jerusalem. This divine mystery is explained in the Epistle to the Hebrews, (13:11, 12.) "For the *bodies* of those *beasts* whose *blood* is brought into the sanctuary by the High Priest for sin, are burned without the camp; wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own *blood*,

suffered *without* the gate."

Before he was crucified, the soldiers gave him vinegar mingled with gall, a bitter draught, which he just tasted, and then refused to drink. In the gospel of Mark it is written, (15:23,) "And they gave him to drink *wine* mingled with *myrrh*, and he received it not." Was this cup of wine, the *same* as the cup of vinegar, (which is weak wine,) or was it a *different* cup? Most commentators think they were *different* cups.

The *wine* mingled with *myrrh* seems to have been a stupefying draught, given to criminals before they were crucified, to render them less sensible to pain. Of this alleviation of his anguish the Savior refused to accept.

The *vinegar* mingled with *gall* seems to have been offered by the soldiers in a spirit of mockery. Some executioners by their compassion have imparted comfort to innocent sufferers. They have turned away and wept as the blood flowed from the open wounds. When Wishart, the Scottish martyr, was led to the stake, the executioner, kneeling down, said, "Sir, I pray you forgive me, for I am not guilty of your death." But the men who surrounded the Lord were of a more ferocious disposition—they felt no pity, they showed no mercy; therefore it is written in the Psalms, "Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." (Ps. 69:20, 21.)

When we have been laid on beds of suffering, how differently have we been treated! Kind friends and faithful servants have administered to our needs, and have anticipated our wishes. Many a dying believer, when a cordial has been presented to his parched and quivering lips, has thought of the vinegar mingled with gall, which his Savior tasted in gloomy Golgotha.

November 27

Luke 28:33, 34. *The Crucifixion.*

Every innocent sufferer feels it a disgrace to be confounded with wicked men. He would rather suffer *alone*, or with other *innocent* people, than be led to execution in company with criminals. Martyrs have generally been led *together* to the stake, and have enjoyed in their dying moments the sweet society of the righteous.

But the glorious Son of man was conducted to the cross in company with two malefactors, or evil doers. *Their* names were joined with *his* in the history of the executions of that day. Thus the prophecy spoken by Isaiah was fulfilled—"He was numbered with the transgressors." (Is. 53:12.) Had John the Baptist been crucified with him, or one of his own disciples, the shame of his death would not

have been so great. But shame was one of the ingredients in his bitter cup. Shame is the consequence of sin, and he who bore *our sins* bore also *our shame*.

His death was not only disgraceful, but painful. Perhaps there is no manner of being put to death that causes such lingering pain as crucifixion. It suited the cruelty of heathen hearts to devise such a mode of torture, and it continued to be practiced until the Roman emperor Constantine was converted to the Christian faith. He abolished crucifixion, and appointed hanging as the punishment for the greatest criminals.

The unhappy victim who was to be crucified was first stretched upon his cross as it lay upon the ground. His hands and feet were grasped by four soldiers; a nail was then driven through each hand, and another through both feet. Afterwards the cross was lifted up, and one end thrust with a sudden jerk into a hole prepared to receive it. The gaping wounds exposed to the air became inflamed, and the blood disturbed in its circulation, caused the head to throb and burn, and the heart to feel oppressed with an insupportable weight. *This* was the death which David, when he spoke by the Holy Spirit, had prophesied his Redeemer should suffer—"The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me; they pierced my *hands* and my feet;"—those gracious hands which had restored so many wretched objects to health and joy—those blessed *feet* which had trodden so many rough paths to save perishing sinners, and at length—the path to Calvary itself!

But did the suffering Son of man feel resentment against those who drove the nails into his blessed limbs? Listen to the words he utters when stretched upon the cross. Is it a complaint? No! it is a prayer. Does he pray *against* his enemies? No! he intercedes *for* them—"Father, forgive them; they know not what they do." He intercedes for the four soldiers who had inflicted his wounds—for the band who had mocked him—for the multitude who had cried, "Crucify him." They knew not what they did. *Caiaphas* knew what he did; *Judas* knew what he did, but the greater part of the enemies of Christ sinned through ignorance. Yet they were guilty, for they *loved* ignorance. It might have been said of them all, that they "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." What must they have felt when they *first* knew that the man they had insulted, and tormented, and executed, was the Son of God! We are told what some of them felt, and what they said. When Peter, in his sermon, declared, "Him you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain," (Acts 2:23,) three thousand were pierced in their hearts, and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Are there any of you who can remember what *you* felt when you *first* discovered against what a Savior you had been sinning all your lives long—when you first knew that while you had been piercing him by your transgressions, he had been interceding for your pardon? Then it was you looked on him you had pierced, and mourned as one that mourns for his only son. Those were *bitter* tears that you

shed at the feet of the crucified Jesus, yet they were *blessed* tears—they were the tears of repentance, which are so precious in God's sight. But it was not tears that washed away your sins; no, it was the precious blood of Christ that made your scarlet stains as white as snow.

November 28

John 19:19-22. *The Superscription.*

It was the custom to write over the cross of a malefactor the crime for which he suffered. But Pilate could find no fault in Jesus; therefore, instead of inscribing his *accusation*, he inscribed his *title*—"The King of the Jews." Did Pilate then *believe* that the man he had condemned to death was the lawful sovereign of the Jewish nation? It seems that he *did* believe it, and that he even feared that he was *more* than a King—the Son of God; for we are told, that when the Jews said, "He made himself the Son of God," Pilate was sore afraid. (John 19:8.)

How great was the crime of crucifying Him of whom he thought so highly! He may have tried to satisfy his conscience by writing this regal title over the cross; but the act only displayed his guilt in a stronger light. How many there are who imitate this part of his conduct! They *do* what they *know* to be wrong, and they imagine they atone for their fault by saying, *while they persevere in it*, that they know it to be wrong. God will not thus be mocked. He is not satisfied with acknowledgments, unaccompanied by any effort to act in a consistent manner. If Pilate did *not* believe that Christ was the King of the Jews, why did he give him that title? and if he *did* believe it, why did he not take him down from the cross? He was either a *liar* for writing what he did not think, or a *murderer*, for crucifying an innocent man. He was, in fact, a *murderer*, because he condemned one that he knew to be *innocent*—a *regicide*, because that innocent man was a *king*—and a *Deicide*, because that king was the *Son of God*. By what sliding steps had he sunk into the depth of crime!

Yet Pilate's great sin was the means of bringing glory to God. On the cross Jesus was proclaimed a King. In the three languages most generally known in Jerusalem, the glorious title was written. The Jews read it in Hebrew—the Romans in Latin—and people of all nations in Greek. Before his birth he had been announced to his mother as a King. The angel Gabriel had declared, "He shall *reign* over the house of Jacob forever." In his infancy wise men from the East had inquired throughout Jerusalem, "Where is he who is born King of the Jews?" When Nathanael first believed in the true Messiah, he exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the King of Israel." But the nation he came to save from the hands of their enemies rejected him. The throne they gave him was a cross.

But shall he *never* reign over his ancient people? Was he not descended from their beloved monarch, the victorious David? And was it not promised to David

that the Messiah should sit upon his throne? (Ps. 132.) This promise shall not fail. His own people will acknowledge him the Son of David as their king; for it is written, "Sing, O daughter of Zion, shout, O Israel; be glad, and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem; the Lord has taken away your judgments, he has cast out your enemy; the *King of Israel* is in the midst of you—you *shall not see evil any more.*" (Zeph. 3:14, 15.) And is he king of the Jews alone? When he comes again there will be "on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords." (Rev. 19:16.) What will then become of those who have refused to submit to his gentle sway?

November 29

John 19:23, 24. *The division of the garments.*

While the Lord Jesus was suffering unknown agonies on the cross, at its foot the soldiers were dividing his clothing. They little imagined that they were then fulfilling a prophecy, that had been recorded a thousand years before. It was usual for soldiers to divide the clothing of the crucified among themselves; but it was *not* usual for them to find a garment so valuable that, instead of rending, they cast lots for it. This was a very remarkable circumstance, and one of the numerous tokens by which the true Messiah was pointed out to all who remembered the word of God. But the soldiers, being heathens, could not know, when they divided the clothing, that they were fulfilling ancient prophecies. They were thinking of their petty gains, and were quite unconscious that they were performing an action which had long before been foretold, and would be forever remembered.

A description is given of one of our Lord's garments. It was a vesture without a seam. In the East a sort of cloak, with arm-holes, is still worn. A seam generally runs down the middle, or divides it across. This seam is unsightly, and those cloaks that are made without it are highly prized. It is natural to inquire how it happened, that the Son of Man, who was so poor, possessed a valuable garment. Some have conjectured that one of those pious women, who ministered to him of their substance, may have woven with her own hands the seamless vesture. In the days of the Reformers, holy women esteemed it an honor to prepare the garment in which the martyr was to be buried. How much greater was the honor to weave a vesture for Him who was the express image of the Father, and the brightness of his glory!

The clothes that Jesus wore partook of the virtue which dwelt in his sacred body. The very hem of his garment, when touched by the hand of faith, could cure desperate diseases; but now his garments were torn by unbelieving soldiers. The blood that had flowed from his stripes and his wounded brows, must have covered them with stains. It would revolt the feelings to see men casting lots near the cross of a criminal, however vile; but to see them acting thus, near the cross

of the suffering Son of God, must have been exceedingly dreadful.

Though the rapacious soldiers seized upon that clothing which might have wrapped the Savior's dead body in his grave, his Father provided for him a better covering. Linen, clean and fine, was folded round his sacred limbs, by the faithful hands of Joseph and Nicodemus. When he rose, he left even that covering in his tomb. We can form no conception of the glory with which he is *now* clothed. His vesture shall never again be stained by his *own* blood. It is the blood of his *enemies* which shall sprinkle his clothing when he comes again. For he has said, "I will tread them in my anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my clothing." (Is. 63:3.)

November 30

Matthew 27:39-44. *All men unite in mocking Christ.*

Among the sufferings of our Lord, mockings held a conspicuous place. *Four* times, in the course of a few hours, he was publicly mocked; first in the palace of Caiaphas—then in the house of Herod, next in the judgment-hall of Pilate, and last of all at Calvary, as he hung upon the cross. On this occasion men of every degree united to insult him. Rulers and people, Jews and Gentiles, soldiers and citizens, with one accord derided the Lord of Glory. Even the thieves, by their railings, showed that they thought him worse than themselves. How different from this scene on earth is that now witnessed in heaven, where beings of all orders, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers, join in one song of adoration!

The impious throng mocked the dying Savior in various ways—by scornful *gestures*, for they wagged their heads—by scornful *actions*, for the soldiers came to him, offering him vinegar—(Luke 23:36,) and, above all, by scornful *words*. It appears that none uttered more insulting speeches than the priests, scribes, and elders. Instead of addressing the Son of God himself, they spoke to each other, and to the people. It is more trying to hear our enemies speak against us to *others*, than to hear them address the same reproaches to *ourselves*. There is more contempt shown in such a way of attack than in a *direct* assault. Jesus heard these scornful men saying to those around, "He saved others; himself he cannot save." They intended to make the people doubt whether he had *really* saved others, seeing he did not save himself. But such an attempt could not succeed, when so many, rescued from blindness and disease, were to be seen in all the streets of Jerusalem; and when even one of the high priest's own servants had just experienced his healing power. If ALL whom he had saved from ETERNAL death, had appeared to bear testimony to his power, what a glorious company would have covered Calvary! They *will* appear on a *future* day, together with multitudes *then*, and even *now*, unborn—they will declare with one voice, "He saved *us*." How happy is each one now present who can truly say,

"He has saved *me!*" He is *willing* to save each of us. It was *himself* alone that he was *not* willing to save, because he knew that *if* he saved himself, he could save no other. Had *he* come *down* from the *cross*, then *we* could never come *up* from the *grave*.

Must it not have wounded his soul to hear the creatures for whom he was dying saying, "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross?" Had all the hosts of Satan joined in mocking him, their taunts would not have been so trying. How easily he could have shown his ungrateful creatures that he was the Son of God! He need only have spoken the words, and the nails would have dropped from his hands and feet. But LOVE fixed him to the place of torture—love to his Father, who seemed to have forsaken him—love to his enemies, who were uttering the most provoking speeches. Was not this astonishing love—incomprehensible love! And yet many who have heard of it, are not ashamed to declare that they do not love Jesus; and others, who say they love him, show by their conduct that they do *not*. Do any of us really love this compassionate Savior? Do we not long to love him more? It was the apostle's constant prayer for all the saints, that they might "know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge." Let us visit Calvary—sit at the foot of the cross—gaze on the bleeding Lamb. Though our hearts may once have been softened by the Holy Spirit, they will become hard again, if we keep at a distance from that scene of sorrow and of love.

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