

Chapter 86

On Calvary's Hill

Matthew 27 vv 33-43

Mark 13 vv 22-32

Luke 23 vv 32-38

John 19 vv 17-24

Look, there stand the three condemned men at Golgotha. The crosses are removed from their shoulders. Everything is made ready to carry out the sentence. The three prisoners are unclothed completely. What a disgrace, what a humiliation.

Adam and Eve also walked naked in Paradise, but then it was not shameful. We read that they were both naked, and were not ashamed. Yet, through sin it became necessary for them to be clothed, because of sin it has become shameful to walk about without clothes. God Himself made aprons for Adam and his wife.

That shame the Messiah now had to bear as a consequence of His people's sin.

Some of the Roman soldiers give some wine mingled with myrrh to the condemned men to drink. The Lord Jesus however refuses to take it. He just tastes it, but then shakes His head. He does not drink it.

Now, why does Jesus refuse that refreshment? ...

This drink was given to those who were crucified so that they would not feel so much pain. When anyone drank of it, then he was to a certain degree numbed or stupefied. And that is why the Saviour refuses it. No, He will not hang

there drugged and insensible, but He will bear God's wrath against sin, fully conscious. Perhaps the Roman soldier shrugged his shoulders, not understanding why Jesus had refused.

Then the three to be crucified are nailed each to a cross. Right through the hands and through the feet, great iron nails are driven. How agonising that must have been.

And ... while the dull thuds of the hammer blows echo over Calvary, the Lord Jesus prays. Does He ask God, His heavenly Father, to punish those cruel Romans? ... No! quite the contrary. Just listen!

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

He is praying then for forgiveness for His enemies, who are treating Him so ignominiously. That prayer was answered, for from among those enemies some were turned to God.

Here again, a prophecy was fulfilled. Do you want to know which prophecy? ... Then just look up Isaiah Chapter 53 and read the last sentence of that chapter. There it is foretold that He would "make intercession for the transgressors".

Some writers say that Jesus spoke these first words from the cross, after the crosses had been erected.

When the condemned prisoners have

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been nailed to the wood, the heavy crosses are set up on end, and there they hang, as cursed, between heaven and earth.

In the Bible we read: "And it was the third hour, and they crucified Him." The "third hour", that is by our time, nine o'clock in the morning. At that very moment in the temple of Jerusalem the smoke of the morning offering rises towards the heavens. Oh the priest who is officiating there does not realise that there outside on Calvary's hill, the "Lamb of God" is being sacrificed.

Over the heads of the victims a board is nailed, on which is written their misdeeds. There stands their accusation.

Over the head of the suffering Saviour is written in three languages, namely in Greek, Hebrew and in Latin: "THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS." The Romans do not know that this inscription is a sermon. Yes, truly, there hangs Jesus, the Messiah, the king of Israel. There He hangs to pay for the guilt of all His elect. That inscription is no accusation, it declares in three languages the truth.

So then, the Roman soldiers have for the time being completed their work. Now they need only keep watch to ensure that nobody can help or release the condemned men. They sit down at the foot of the cross. Oh yes, of course, the clothes of the condemned are still lying there. In accordance with custom they are allowed to share these between them. So that is what they do now. Each one receives his share. When however one of them holds up the coat of the Lord Jesus, they decide it would be a pity to divide that up into parts. That coat had no seam, but was woven in one piece. Perhaps the coat had been a present from one of Jesus' friends. Who can tell?

They decide unanimously not to divide that coat, but to cast lots for it fairly. Whoever wins will then take it.

Now look up Psalm 22 v 18. There David says: "They parted my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." "Upon my vesture" means "over my coat". How literally all prophecies are fulfilled, aren't they? The Romans do this unconsciously, but God is fulfilling His counsel.

The Jewish elders stand at the foot of the hill and look upon all this. Their eyes sparkle with devilish glee. They have had their wish. There hangs the hated Nazarite as one cursed, despised by all.

They are indeed annoyed about the inscription. They have been to Pilate and asked him if he will alter it.

"Write not, the King of the Jews", they said "but write, That He said, I am the King of the Jews."

Pilate, however, shakes his head decidedly. "No," says he, "what I have written, I have written."

The Jewish chief priests realise that nothing more can be done about it. Well then, it will have to remain like that. The important thing for them is that He is hanging there, in that at least they have had their way.

They cannot even now resist mocking Jesus, however.

"Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe," they shout scornfully.

And ... Does the Lord Jesus do that? ... NO. ... He remains there. What a shame, don't you think? ... You would perhaps rather hear that Jesus came down from the cross - wouldn't you?

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... Oh, how wonderful that would have been, wouldn't it?

Could He not have done so then? ... Certainly, if it had been His will, He could well have saved Himself. Is anything too wonderful for the Almighty?

But it was not His will to save Himself.

Why not then?

Surely, He would then have been praised by all? ... Surely all those mockers would have been silenced and shamed? ... Then surely His Name would echo over the whole world? Then surely, He would have left the hill of crucifixion as a conqueror?

Now, what do you think about it, boys and girls? ...

That is a difficult question, isn't it? ... I will just ask you something else. If the Lord Jesus had done just that, who would then have to endure the punishment for sin? ... Would Jesus then truly have been the Saviour? ... No, then He would not have borne the punishment due for sin. Then God's anger would not have been quenched. Then God's people would have been eternally lost. If He would merit salvation for all those who are His, if He would save them from endless ruin, then He must experience DEATH. HE must offer up His body upon the cross. That is why Jesus remains silent. That is why He remains hanging of His own free will upon the cursed tree of shame.

Not only do the elders mock Him, but the people jeer at Him too. They laugh at the Saviour and wag their heads scornfully. They think: "You can see what a deceiver He is, otherwise He would certainly save Himself." They do not realise however that the Lord through His very sufferings was atoning for the

guilt of His people.

In Psalm 22 is written: "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." Can you see that that prophecy is also fulfilled?

### Matthew 27 v 44

"If thou be Christ, save thyself and us!"

Who said that? ... The elders of the Jews? ... No! The people then? ... No! Do the Roman soldiers speak these words? ... No! Whoever is it then?... These mocking words come from the lips of BOTH of the murderers. Matthew writes: "The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." Oh, how could they dare? They themselves also hang upon a cross. Death is staring them in the face, and yet they mock. How fearful!

But ... after a little while one of the murderers no longer jeers. One of the malefactors is silent, while the other carries on mocking. Why is that? ...

Let me put it briefly: the silent murderer has been converted by God upon the cross. The Lord Jesus had prayed: "Father, forgive them", and that prayer is heard and answered by His heavenly Father. One of those mockers receives a new heart.

Through the operation of God's Spirit he learns to know himself as a sinner. His guilt is revealed to him. He acknowledges that the punishment which he is now enduring, though heavy, is just. He humbles himself before God. True and upright sorrow fills his soul. In a few hours death will come and then he will have to

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meet God, that holy, righteous God whom he was offending and reviling. But then, by the light of God's Spirit, he is given to see that the Nazarite next to him is indeed the Messiah. And while the other murderer continues to jeer, he can no longer listen to it.

He admonishes the other not to continue, "for," says he, "we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss."

Perhaps the jeering murderer looked very surprised, for he cannot understand how it comes about that his comrade has changed so suddenly. A short while ago they had both been deriding, and now he is being reprimanded. We do not read that he gave an answer.

The murderer who has been convinced of his guilt, then asks Jesus reverently: "Lord, remember me when thou contest into Thy kingdom."

Through faith he sees in Jesus the king of Israel. Through faith he sees that the kingdom of the Messiah is a heavenly Kingdom. He prays humbly for grace, for pardon of his heavy guilt.

Listen! There is the Saviour's answer: "Today shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." By "paradise" the Lord Jesus means heaven - eternal glory.

Oh children, how happy that murderer is. Within death's jaws, he is released from his heavy guilt. Heavenly peace flows into his soul. Through faith he is enabled to embrace the despised and rejected Jesus as his Surety and Saviour. Certainly he must bear the temporal punishment, but from eternal punishment he is freed. His Saviour is enduring that Divine punishment for him.

How wonderful is grace, is it not? Even a

murderer was converted. Even for such an out-and-out evildoer there is pardon still. Then for you too, children, there is still a hope of salvation. Do you believe that? ...

### John 1-1 vv 25-27

Before the birth of the Lord Jesus, an angel of the Lord had told Mary: "He shall be great." These words were not spoken by a man, but by a heavenly messenger. And now just look. ... Whatever has become of that wonderful promise? ... Nothing! ... Absolutely nothing!

"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest."

Those words seem at this moment to be mockery. There He hangs, the Messiah upon the cursed tree. There He hangs, naked and an object of mockery and shame to all who see Him. The multitude derides and laughs, ridicules and blasphemes Him. The soldiers have gambled for His clothes. The Jewish elders jeer at Him. He is despised and rejected of men.

"He shall be great!"

The words seem to be a great lie! I say SEEM TO BE, because in fact He is great, but now there is nothing to be seen of that greatness.

Mary too, the mother of the Lord, must have thought very often about those words. Look, there she stands, with a few other women, close by the cross. John, the disciple, is standing next to her. He seems to be the only one of all the disciples who is present at the crucifixion.

Do you see the pained look upon her face? Oh, what mysterious ways. Everything which is taking place is for her a great riddle.

Simeon had said in the temple: "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."

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We may well believe that all this was terrifying for the mother of the Lord Jesus. What will have gone on in her troubled mother heart? ... Nobody knows, for she does not speak. Silently she stands there, but her soul is rent by indescribable pain. There hangs her Child! That miracle Child. Everything which has occurred, from His miraculous birth until the present time, comes back to her thoughts. Her heart shrinks within her, as she sees the terrible suffering of her Child. Thousands of questions arise within her. Questions to which she can give no answer. There she stands, and she must bear her grief alone, for nobody knows.

Nobody? ... But yes, indeed! There is One that knows how her heart is torn by sorrow and grief. There is One who knows how saddened she is.

With a loving glance Jesus looks upon His mother.

All at once He says: "Woman, behold thy Son."

Then He turns His glance towards John and says: "Behold thy mother."

Now, what does the Lord Jesus mean by this? Why does He say "Woman". ... Can He not say "Mother". ... Should he not say "Mother"?

Oh no, not at all. Now you must just listen very carefully, boys and girls.

As Surety and Saviour the Lord Jesus purchased for His elect people not only eternal blessedness, but also temporal blessings. All God's children share that never failing providence. When the Lord Jesus says here "Woman", it is a proof that not only His mother, but the whole Church of God is under His care and keeping. He is speaking here as a Surety.

He has compassion upon her and that is

why He asks John to look after her. He asks John to care for her as his own mother.

The Lord's disciple understood what Jesus meant, for from that time he took the Lord's mother into his own home and there supported her. We may be quite sure that she lacked nothing in that home.

Look, there the sorely tried woman is led by John away from the cross to his dwelling, so that she need no longer witness the suffering of the Redeemer. He himself hurried back to Calvary, for in John 19 v 35 it says: "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true." From this it is evident that he saw and was present during the remaining scenes.

Evidently Mary had other children, for in God's Word it says: "Her first-born Son" and not "Her only Son".

If that is the case, why did Mary not go to the home of one of her other children? Well, we have already told you that the brothers of the Lord Jesus did not believe in Him. Mary would not have received much comfort there, while with John she would and did. Those two understood each other, for both had an inward love to the Lord Jesus.

You have now heard the first three sayings which the Lord Jesus spoke from the cross. Shall I just repeat them? ... The first was: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." The second was: "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise." And the third: "Woman behold thy son. Son, behold thy mother."

These words of the Saviour from the cross are words of mercy, in the midst of His deep suffering He thinks still about the misery of others, and He helps, where help is needed.