

Looking unto Jesus

4. "They crucified him"

Stephen Whitehouse

THERE CAME A DAY when the people of Israel were given a choice by Pilate: Christ or Barabbas. They chose the latter, the 'son of a father' (the meaning of the name Barabbas) rather than the Son of God. As for the preacher from Galilee, they cried out, "Crucify him" (Mk. 15:13). Pilate tried to reason with them, but the reply came back louder and more emphatic: "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Mt. 27:25). They had made their decision.

The leaders of Israel had done all they could to secure this outcome, for the chief priests, scribes and elders of the people had "consulted that they might take Jesus by subtilty, and kill him" (26:4). They clothed the young preacher in scarlet, crowned him with thorns and hailed him as the King of the Jews. They spat, derided, smote and mocked the Son of God. The soldiers divided his garments and cast lots for the seamless robe, just as was prophesied in Psalm 22:18. And this is all he had in this world. They exposed him to a mock coronation, and, placing the raiment back on his torn and wounded flesh, they directed him to his place of crucifixion with his cross.

The terrible deed took place on the outskirts of Jerusalem, for our Lord "suffered without the gate" (Heb. 13:12). The place was Golgotha, "a place of a skull", or Calvary, from the Latin for 'skull'. (How fitting this was, for it was quite possibly the very spot where his ancestor, David, had buried the head of the giant of the flesh, Goliath!) It was here that "they crucified him . . . And sitting down they [the Roman soldiers] watched him there" (Mt. 27:33,35,36).

The date was significant: the fourteenth of Nisan. It was the Passover, when the people of God remembered God's deliverance from the Egyptians' clutches, their first-born children being delivered by the angel of death because of the sprinkled blood upon the lintels and doorposts. This festival brought every male Israelite to the temple (Deut. 16:16), so the crowds were bustling around Jerusalem on this day. All could see the one who would offer up "one sacrifice for sins for ever" (Heb. 10:12), even "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Jno. 1:29). The Lord was to make it plain for all those

that were prepared to follow: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Indeed, this should have seen the most heart-rending moment in the history of time: the crucifixion of a man who had committed no sin, even the Son of God. Yet, for us, we behold the most wonderful and splendid moment there ever has been, just as the Apostle Paul wrote: "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

There was no cursing by the Lord Jesus Christ against those who had put him on the cross; no words of anger directed at those who had manipulated the facts; no fury at his own people. Indeed, the very opposite spirit and attitude was shown, for he said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). And in this moment of agony he could still extend compassion to one who hung there with him: "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (v. 43). Whilst others mocked Jesus' seeming inability to save himself, this thief clearly recognised that Jesus would live and rule, that his day of glory and honour would come.

All the sufferings and indignities which Jesus bore at the hands of men were small compared with what he would face from the sixth hour (noon) until the ninth hour (3.00 pm). During this time there was darkness over the whole land (Mt. 27:45) at the time of Christ's extreme suffering. Figuratively, the withdrawal of the sun was symbolic of the terrible crime that was being performed, and a symbol of the judicial blindness of the Jewish nation. Besides, it was also the darkest period of our Lord's young life. He hung in terrible agony; only his Father was with him. The battle with sin was reaching a climax.

At the conclusion of this agonizing period, our Saviour said, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). He committed his life into the hands of his Father. Then "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Mt. 27:51). The Old Covenant was rendered obsolete and the New Covenant was established in his righteous blood. The victory over sin had been secured and the head of the serpent had finally been crushed (Gen. 3:15).