

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PIERCED HEART OF JESUS.

A Sermon

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“Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was dead already, they break not his legs; but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water. And he that saw it bare record that his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken. And again another Scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they have pierced.”—St. John xix. 32-37.

WHAT a wonderful conjunction of prophecy and Providence! I want you to behold it, and admire it. Two texts of Scripture, the one in Exodus the other in Zechariah (such a long interval having occurred between the distinct records), predict, the former that not a bone of the Paschal Lamb should be broken; the latter, that he should be pierced. How were these twain to be fulfilled in the minuteness of one incident? The rough Roman soldier comes with the iron bar to break the bones of the three prisoners who have been crucified. He has orders to break their legs. The well-disciplined soldier acts almost mechanically, according to orders.

Roman discipline was of the very sternest kind. Will not the soldier, therefore, break the legs of Jesus? No. Moved by some strange impulse, he marks that one of the three, Jesus, who is called Christ, is dead already. Though commanded to break his legs, he forbears; but most likely to clear himself of all doubt on that point, he pierces his side with a spear. The wilfulness of the soldier, wavering though wanton, thus fulfilled both the prophecies of which he must have been himself totally ignorant; and this was brought about first by his not doing what he was ordered to do; and, secondly, by doing what he had not been ordered to do. Oh! how inscrutable the mystery of Providence! How marvelously does God rule the sons of men while he leaves them to their own free will! Did not this soldier act altogether as a free agent, whether following the dictates of his reason or the impulse of his temper, when he thus unwittingly, by his singular conduct, verified to the letter the words of prophecy as precisely and entirely as if he had been a mere puppet moved with wires at the instigation of another mind and another hand than his own. This was not an accidental circumstance, or a singular coincidence—it was Providence; a sublime purpose of God brought to pass by simple means. Irregularities among men do not disorganise the ordained purposes of heaven, and what we think to be chaos is a well-ordered system far beyond our ken, into which we vainly attempt to peer.

I need not detain you with any speculations arising out of the piercing of our Saviour by the spear. It has been, I think, very soberly argued, that in all probability the physical cause of our Saviour's death was a broken heart. In a scientific treatise by one who had studied the anatomy of the subject, and investigated cases which appeared after death to bear some resemblance to our Saviour's case, it has been shown that when, on the heart being pierced, a small portion of blood and water has flowed, death has been traceable to a heart broken with intense grief. So, if we may assign a physical cause to the death of our Lord, it appears most probable to have been so occasioned. It was anguish that, in the first stage, produced a bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and in the last stage ruptured his heart. Not, however, that I am inclined to attach any importance to such arguments or speculations. For my part I do not see that there is any analogy, or that analogy need be sought between the case of the Saviour and the case of any common man. The anatomist would be baffled with an analysis. The body of any ordinary person would exhibit symptoms of corruption. From this, he that hung upon the cross was exempt. When death comes, and the vital spark quits the human frame, the process of decomposition speedily begins. But our Lord saw no corruption. Overshadowed as was his virgin mother by the Spirit at her conception, his birth was predicted as "*that holy thing* which shall be born of thee." Through the entire

course of his life on earth, the Spirit rested upon him in a special manner. And even after his soul had left his body, the Spirit preserved and kept that body, so that the prophecy was fulfilled, "Neither wilt thou suffer *thine Holy One* to see corruption." Hence you search in vain for a parallel. The disparity of any instances that might be sought for is so palpable that you really have not any data to start with, or any premises to reason upon, in the effort to judge of what happened in the anatomy of the sacred body of our blessed Lord. Instead of following speculations which rather belong to the physician than the theologian, I desire the Spirit of God to conduct us into some spiritual reflections arising out of the piercing of the heart of Jesus Christ by the soldier's spear. One observation, I think, lies upon the very surface of the narrative.

I. EVEN AFTER OUR LORD'S DEATH, MEN RUDELY ASSAILED HIM.

Was it not enough that they had scourged his back? Did it not suffice that they had put a thorn crown on his head? Was it not sufficient that they had nailed his feet and his hands to the tree? And yet after they were satisfied that the life had been forfeited to the law, and the body was already dead, nothing could content human cruelty till his heart was pierced with the lance. Say, now, was not this man who pierced Christ's heart a fair, though a foul, sample of our sinful race; his heartless act a type of our headstrong profanity? We, too, after the Saviour's death have pierced him. Shall I show you how? The crime is so common that you come to condone it. His Godhead is his glory. *Deny his Deity* and you not only detract from his dignity, but you make him unworthy of our confidence. This is to thrust the spear into his very heart. Your tone is treacherous when you say, "He is but a man. Though an admirable teacher, I can only regard him as a finite creature." Oh! how many people go up and down among us professing to be members of a Protestant Church, and believers in the Scripture, who yet will not acknowledge the miracles of Christ to be authentic, wrought in token of his own personal authority, bearing the witness of his Father, and conveying a clear proof that he was the Son of God! The Lord have mercy upon those who in this respect pierce our dear Redeemer afresh. If any of us have been guilty of this sin, may we be converted from our dangerous error, and led to avow him, like Thomas, "My Lord and my God."

They pierce him, too, who *attack the doctrines which he taught*, and the testimony which he delivered. The truth was in Christ's heart; it was written there. Whatever he preached with his lips he sanctified with his life. His heart was a fountain whence came all those doctrines which reveal the Father to us. Do men attack any truth revealed to us by Christ, they do in effect what the soldier did in fact; they do spiritually as this Roman legionary did

literally; they thrust at his heart. If you disparage the words that Jesus spake, or call in question the truth that he showed to his disciples and made manifest in the word, what is there left of that mission in which he made known the will of God the Father? To proclaim this truth he came; to bear witness to this truth he died. He witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate. If you touch those doctrines, you touch the apple of his eye; nay, you pierce his heart again. How do they also thrust at his heart *who persecute his people!* And has he not often been wounded thus through all the centuries that have transpired since he ascended up on high to the Father's right hand? Saul of Tarsus pierced his heart, for Jesus said, "Why persecutest thou me?" The sufferings of the men and women, haled to prison, and beaten in the synagogue, and compelled to blaspheme, were injuries wantonly and wickedly done to Christ himself. And what shall we say of the martyrs, their groans in the prison-house, their cries at the rack, their pangs at the stake, their blood so cruelly shed; have not all these touched the Saviour's heart?

So, too, *every rude jeer and ribald jest*, every hard word and bitter taunt aimed at a follower of Christ, is a reproach of the dear Lord and Master for whose sake it is meekly borne; but on their part "who whet their tongue like a sword," it is aimed at the heart of Jesus, on whom they cannot otherwise wreak their vengeance now, for he cannot henceforth suffer, except in sympathy with the sufferings of his saints.

And there is yet another class of persons who, although Christ's sufferings are over, still continue to pierce him. *They are such as pretend to be his disciples*, but they lie and practise a foul hypocrisy. Are there any such present? I tremble as I ask the question. As there were false apostles of yore, so there are foul apostates in these days. Their profession is only the prelude to their perfidy. They make solemn pledge to obey him, but, like Judas, they only wait a suited opportunity to betray him. They will sell the Saviour for silver; only let the price be high enough, their principle is low enough; their conscience will not hesitate to "crucify the Lord afresh, and put him to an open shame." Oh! you inconsistent professors! Oh! you graceless men and women! How dare you come to the table of his fellowship? You have a name to live, and yet you are dead; you are crucifying him; you are piercing him; the guilt of the Roman soldier clings to you.

I fear me, too, there is another class that pierces his heart—it includes *those who refuse to believe in his willingness to forgive them*. When under conviction of sin, it may be difficult to believe that one can be pardoned; but when the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is revealed to us, and his infinite condescension that brought him to suffer for us, it does seem hard that any should doubt him. Yet some there are who link their chains, sit down in despair, and say, "He is not willing to forgive." So unkind, ungenerous a

thought as that he is unwilling to forgive must pierce him to the heart and cut him to the quick. I know some of you do not mean this. You are startled now that you think what you are doing. I pray the Lord you may humbly trust him. Oh! do not doubt him, the Son of God, who suffered for his enemies, surrendering his life for even the ungodly. Will you, can you still distrust him? Will you doubt the testimony which God has given concerning his Son? Were it not far better that you honoured him by casting yourselves at his feet? Angels that sing his praises night and day unceasingly do not honour him more than you will do, if, all black and defiled as you are, you will come and trust him that he can wash you and make you whiter than snow. Oh! do ye this, and pierce his heart no more!

Some men pierce the heart of Christ *through their carelessness*. They trifle and even scoff because they have not known him, or sought by any means to learn what claims he has upon their homage. They disparage those divine features of his ministry which they have never properly understood. So they pierce the heart of Christ out of ignorant prejudice. They are unacquainted with the gospel themselves. All that they have heard or read about it has been from the tongue or pen or opponent or satirist, and then, catching their temper, they have joined in reviling it. Alas! too, there are some who malign the Saviour out of mere malice. Though they know better, yet they wilfully blaspheme his name. Stop, oh! stop, and pierce him no more, I pray thee, lest he that has meekly endured so long as the Lamb of God should suddenly stir himself up as the lion of the tribe of Judah, and make *you* feel the terror of his power, who will not feel the majesty of his love. So much for our first point. Even after Jesu's death, there are those who still pierce him. Our second thought is such as I am charmed to give you.

II. THESE ATTACKS UPON THE SAVIOUR ARE OVERRULED TO DISPLAY HIS GRACE THE BETTER.

His heart is pierced, it is true, but with what result, my brethren? Does there flash from it fire? Does the peal of thundering wrath roll over the sinner's head? Ah! no; it is like the sandal tree, that perfumes the axe that wounds it. Adown that spear no sooner is it withdrawn from the wound than there gushes a fountain of blood and water. *The attacks that are made upon Jesus Christ only display his virtues*. Observe how this is brought about. If truth be attacked, and the gospel be assailed, what is the immediate consequence? Why, then, the saints search deeper into it, so they come to understand the doctrine better; they learn the arguments by which it is sustained, and they love the truth with fonder, as well as stronger convictions, till they feel moved to sacrifice themselves for it. The heart of Christ was opened by the spear, and often the heart of truth is revealed by the opposition brought to

bear against it. They think to confute our doctrines; they do but confirm our faith in their verity. Where they think they shall prove us fools, they help to make us sages. They drive us to the root of the matter, and they rather establish us in the precious truth. The March wind tears not up the oak, but roots it more firmly in its native soil. So shall it ever be with attacks made upon our Lord and Master. We shall understand him the better and discover more of the Scriptures that were fulfilled in him.

Moreover, it often happens that when Christ is opposed by persecution, *the gospel is proclaimed with more zeal*, and diffused with more rapidity. The saints who were, in early days, persecuted in Jerusalem, went everywhere preaching the Word. What if I say the spear of persecution does, as it were, set the atoning blood flowing more freely among the sons of men, and make the purifying water of the Saviour's sacrifice to be dispersed over a wider area, and amongst a larger population. Shall I compare the persecuted Church to an oppressed nation, and remind you that, like Israel in Egypt, the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied and grew? The spear let loose the blood and water from the heart of Jesus, and the spear of persecution lets loose the gospel, and compels Christian men who might have rested in inglorious ease to go forward and laboriously dispense the gospel of salvation, telling the grace of God to perishing men. So, too (but let no man turn this into evil), the very sin of men which doth wound Christ becomes the means of magnifying God's grace. Though it be a vile thing to say, "Let us sin that grace may abound," yet is it a most glorious truth that where sin aboundeth grace doth much more abound. Thus the cleansing power of the blood becomes more renowned by reason of the sin that made this wondrous sacrifice necessary. Perhaps we had never known the Saviour so well if we had not seen sin so clearly in the lives of the pardoned ones, who afterwards were washed, and cleansed, and sanctified by his purifying energy. The very opposition that comes forth is overruled for his triumph. The stronger his foes the louder the shout of victory when he returns from the strife.

And when the Church is assailed (which is one way of piercing Christ) she gets some *immediate benefit from the grievous trial*; for persecution acts like a great winnowing-fan that drives the chaff away from the floor on which the pure grain is housed; it is to the Church like a refiner's fire. The mere dross is separated. The faithless, who are among the faithful found, soon apostatise, while the sterling gold and silver—the genuine lovers of Christ—are purged and purified by the ordeal through which they are constrained to pass. Oh! blessed Saviour, they do pierce thee, and pierce thee they may, but thou art honoured; for their bitter reviling elicits thy sweet virtue. They may thrust their spears into thy very heart, but by giving forth thine own energy of love and mercy, and greeting them with salvation, thou dost conquer those

who thought to conquer thee! Put these two things together, brethren, man continuing still to wound the Saviour, and the more redundant display of the Saviour's grace as the consequence. Then find a total if you can.

Another thought, which diverges a little from the last, may help us to pursue our meditation. Since the soldier sent his spear into the Saviour's heart:—

III. THE WAY TO THAT HEART IS OPEN.

It was always open, in fact, for he always loved the sons of men; but now ye can see it open. It was no little wound that was made by the lance, for into it, we read, Thomas put his hand. What a gaping fissure must that have been into which the Apostle might put his palm! "Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side." He lives still, as none of us could live, with a passage to the heart always open. In his very flesh he testifies to us to-day that his heart is ready to receive any message that his children may choose to send, and equally ready to respond with the love that has its fountain there. Behold the open heart of Jesus! it is open that all the grace that is within it may freely flow to undeserving sinners. Think not, sinner, that thou hast need to open Jesus' side. The blood has flown freely. Say now, wilt thou come and wash in it? Thou hast not to beg for cleansing, as though it were a boon hardly to be obtained by importunity; it flows, still it flows. He is willing—as willing as he is able, and as able as he is willing, to cleanse thee from thy guilt. Whatever there may be in the heart of Christ, it all flows out. The precious liquid is kept within, but set abroad for every needy, thirsty soul. His heart is open. *It is open for the doubter* to put his hand into it now. Where art thou, Thomas? Dost thou ask some hard thing, and say, "Except I see this and that, I will not believe"? Oh! trembler, weighed down by thy sins and thy weakness, dost thou not see him this day in glory, with his heart still open towards thee? Put thy hand into the wound, and say, "My Lord and my God." Accept thy Saviour without hesitation or delay. Come and find rest in him. His side is open for thy hand to reach his heart. It is open—that side is open—for those who pierced him to look in to see what they have done, and lament it. But see how tender is his heart, and go to him without fear. Ye pierced him; look at him and mourn because ye did so. Ye sinners, though ye did put your Lord to death, his heart is open to you. He invites you to come and receive his mercy that he has treasured up for you. Oh! come, come ye! He will receive you now. His heart is open to sympathise with the griefs and woes, the prayers and pleadings, the desires and longings, of all his people. You know we have to get to some men's hearts through their ears, and through their eyes. In not a few of our callous race, these passages are choked up. You show them sorrow, and

they see it without emotion. You cannot reach their heart. If you tell them a pitiful tale of deep distress, they hear it with indifference; for somehow the story loses its way in the mazes of the ear; it does not reach the heart. Far otherwise is it with your Lord. His heart is so accessible that you need not fear he will not hear you, or that he will not heed your faintest cry. You will feel that you can come close, straight, quick to him, by a near passage; you reach his very soul at once. Say not, then, that no one sympathises with thee. Jesus does; he cannot fail to pity, solace, or to cheer. His pierced heart sympathises far more quickly than the tenderest heart that ever lived before or after. His love passeth the love of women, tender as that is. There is no love like that of him with the open heart—the love of Jesus with the opened heart—with the open side. I cannot express to you what I see in this bare fact, this blessed truth. I wish I could. But it would be better still if you could see the same. Oh! I can come to him now and put my prayers into his side—can come and put my desires into his side. Oh! Jesus, “all my desire is before thee, and my groanings are not hid from thee.” I have but five senses, thou hast a new one—thou hast a new way to thy heart, such as we poor mortals have not. My brethren may be inattentive, but thou never. Thou art he of the wounded heart—for ever sympathetic—for ever full of gentleness. I might linger on this thought, but I prefer leaving it to your meditation, lest I should darken it with words; so let us finish with a last reflection.

IV. A WOUND IN CHRIST'S SIDE REVEALS THE HEART OF JESUS IN ITS PRECIOUSNESS.

That spear did, as it were, break the alabaster box and let out the sweet perfume. What, then, was there in the Saviour's heart? Men carry in their hearts that which is dearest. The true man is what he is at the heart's core. What was our blessed Redeemer's life-thought—the constraining motive of his life-work? Upon what did he most of all concentrate the desires and affections of his heart? See you not that when pierced there flowed forth blood and water? Those two things, then, must have been the nearest to the purpose of his heart. Hence I discern that in my Lord's heart, there was, first, *a strong determination to purge sinners from their guilt by his blood.* The atoning sacrifice is not merely the hand blood of the Saviour's work, nor is it merely the foot blood of the Saviour's journeying through the vale of tears; it was his heart's blood, indicative of heart work—it was the blood of redemption shed for us. He loved that work. He was straitened till he could accomplish it. And let me tell thee it is Christ's joy to wash thee from thy sin. Start not back because thy conscience is troubled. He has opened a fountain for thy uncleanness—in

the very midst of the house of David has he opened it. He delights to take away thy guilt.

“*Dear, dying Lamb, ‘thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,’
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Is saved to sin no more.*”

It has not lost its power; then for me let it plead; to me let it be precious. Let me feel its potent virtue. By it may I have boldness. Like the Apostle, may I say, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.” Oh! to have the blood applied to the conscience. Rest not till you hear it speak peace through your whole nature, till you see the curse removed, and are assured that there is, therefore, now no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus. It is Christ’s heart work to redeem his people by his blood. Oh! that he may now see of the travail of his soul in your redemption!

Moreover, beloved, in Christ’s heart there was the water as well as the blood. *He would have his people sanctified as well as pardoned*; he would deliver them from the power as well as from the guilt of sin. I believe this is very near Christ’s heart. That he may present his Church without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing is his design as well as his desire. His spirit is working to this end. That he might not suffer so much as a single stain to rest upon the nature of his people is alike the pleasure and the purpose of Christ. He has put their guilt away by the sacrifice of himself. This is done. Yet he continues to demand their self-sacrifice, that he may put away their evil propensities, the fruit of their first father’s fall. My soul, glorify the pierced heart of Christ. Give him to see in thyself the effect of the water that flowed from his heart. “Be ye holy,” saith he, “as I am holy. Be ye perfect,” he says again, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Deny the flesh with its affections and lusts. Separate yourselves from sinners. Avoid partaking of other men’s sins. Like him, be ye “holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.” This can only be effected by the Spirit’s vital application of the Saviour’s atoning death. Stay thou at the cross-foot; live under the influence of his passion; pray that ye may rise out of this world’s fading, failing vanity into newness of life, through his pierced heart. In fine, let us stand in penitence before the Crucified One, and mourn that we pierced him; but let us stand in his propitiation, rejoicing that his piercing has procured our pardon. So let us go on our way, resolved, by his help, that we will glorify him “in all manner of holy conversation and godliness.” For “he that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe.” May you believe; may you all believe the record true! Believing, you shall have life through his name. Amen.