

The Sacrificial Glory of our Lord

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If we think of the Cross in relation to the holy nature of God and His place as Governor of the universe, and to the whole question of good and evil, it may be helpful, as widening our thought and outlook, if we meditate a little on the sacrificial glory of our Lord, as seen in the offerings and their laws, set before us in the early chapters of Leviticus. There were five altogether; one of which — the Meat offering — was bloodless. The Burnt offering, the Meat offering, the Peace, or Prosperity, offering were voluntary. The Sin offering and the Trespass offering were compulsory.

It may help us to look a little at this distinction. An offering for sin could not be voluntary, nor could a free-will offering be the result of a command. When sin is in question our God is a consuming fire: the Cross was therefore an absolute necessity. Propitiation being a work no creature could accomplish, what could be done? God's resource was to send forth His Son. What lay behind all was the eternal purpose of God. In obedience to the Father's will, the Son came forth to die as the sin-offering. This met the holy nature of God and vindicated His character with regard to sin. The submissive obedience of our Lord was perfect.

But the voluntary offerings bespeak on the part of our Lord the free offering of Himself. In the celestial chambers above the voice of the Son is heard, saying with regard to the provisional system of sacrifices, "Sacrifice and oblation Thou didst not desire: ears hast Thou prepared Me. Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast Thou not demanded. Then said I, Behold, I come, in the volume of the book it is written of Me — to do Thy good pleasure, My God, is My delight" (Ps. 40: 6-8, N. Tr.) It is to be noted that this was said long before He came down, and it was repeated in Hebrews 10, some time after He had gone on high, in virtue of having accomplished that work, which combined **both free-will offering and submissive obedience.**

To these words may be added, "Christ also hath loved us, and hath given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour" (Eph. 5: 2). It is thus we get the true Nazarite, and the greatest of all vows. For other vows, see Psalm 22: 25. Although it was in the place of sin-bearing that He offered Himself, we are far from the thought of sin here. It is Himself in all His pure, holy, intrinsic excellence, as appreciated by the Father, even at the extreme moment, when He was bearing our guilt.

It should be observed that all the five offerings meet in our Lord upon the cross. God begins from His own side with the burnt offering and comes to the meat and peace offerings. We begin with the trespass and sin offerings, and meet our God in the peace offering of Leviticus 3. This is the great communion offering; a study of its place in the consecration of the priests shows its import. It is that aspect of the death of our Lord which represents our God as making a feast at His own expense, namely, the death of His Son, at His own house. He brings us to it in the good of reconciliation, so that in moral suitability to Himself we can share His delight in His well beloved Son, and in all that He has done. In virtue of it, the whole heavens and earth will eventually be placed before God on the basis of redemption, to His eternal praise.

We have listened with chastened feelings to the utterances of the Son to the Father at His coming down into time and man's world; shall we now dwell for a moment with the same awe and reverence on some of the most touching of all communings that are bound up with His death. In Psalm 102, we may

hear the deep breathings of the heart of both the Father and the Son. In the words, "I said, O My God, take Me not away in the midst of My days," we have the utterance of the Son.

Then comes the answer of the Father, which is quoted in Hebrews 1, "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of Thine hands; they shall perish, but Thou remainest." Again He says, "Thou art the Same [a name of absolute Godhead], and Thy years shall not fail." Then further, there was the Father's voice from heaven in answer to His soul's distress, as recorded in John 12: 27, 28. And in Hebrews 5 we have recorded His strong crying and tears in Gethsemane, and He was heard "in that He feared," or, "for His piety."

But there came a time, when He was upon the cross, in which there could be no answer to His cry of abandonment. This brings us back to consider our holy Lord as the sin offering, when He was forsaken of God. This brought to light the dreadful malignity of men, who took advantage of the Divine silence to assume that they had God on their side against the holy Sufferer. What a moment it was in the history of eternity, when our blessed God, in spite of the yearnings of His heart towards His Son, the Beloved of His bosom, had to hide his face from Him in the moment of His extremity and remain silent!

Many passages give us God's estimate of His Son in that dark hour, but there is also His estimate of man — the creature that nailed Him to the tree. There Man is seen, in the Person of our Lord, to the delight of the heart of God, while on the other hand, man, the creature, is seen at his darkest and worst. This most amazing thing is seen there; man, the creature of God's predilection, the being that, renewed in Christ, will stand with Him at the very heart of His eternal plan for blessing and glory, perpetrating the most awful deed in the history of eternity.

To crucify was to put a person to a death of unending shame and ignominy. The Jews could not crucify: stoning was their way of execution according to the law. Nor could the Romans crucify a Roman citizen. This mode of execution was for slaves and foreign criminals. Hence the deep meaning of that cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." Not only must He die but His death must be accompanied by ignominy, execration and shame never to be lifted, as far as man was concerned.

But now note the solemn meaning of all this under the eye of God. The curse and death rested upon man as departed from God. Living in his guilt, he was under death as God's original sentence, and under the curse of a broken law. And, after four millenniums of Divine dealings and culture, the crucifixion of the Son of God became the crowning act of his guilt. As a Substitute the blessed Lord was bearing the guilt, the curse, the shame and the death, so that the lower He went as a voluntary and sinless Sufferer the clearer is seen not only the completeness of His work of propitiation but also God's estimate of man in the flesh. In the cross the long history of man's probation came to a close, and the words of our Lord to the fig-tree, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever," find their proper explanation. No fruit can ever be found for God in fallen man.

How sad it is that there are many who still claim that there is something good for God in fallen man. Sadder still it is to find even Christians who do not bow to the truth that man is no longer under probation, but is proved to be wholly lost. The death of our Lord has settled that question once and for all, and now the One who died lives triumphantly in glory as the Head of a new order of man, which is for the eternal pleasure of God.

In the retributory ways of God such an act could not go unpunished, for no greater insult, which developed into such a terrible assault, could be launched forth upon the Creator. Marvellous to say, that in the midst of all this devilish activity, the holy Sufferer made a way of escape for His very murderers. In dying He said, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."

In keeping with these words the Gospel of God is sent to the race that crucified His Son. Had His death been reckoned as an act of deliberate murder, God would have been compelled in His righteousness to judge us all and commit us to everlasting woe. Under the law there was a remedy provided for the manslayer — the man who killed another without intent. Even so, in the death of Christ, a means of escape was provided, so that the grace of God in salvation can righteously flow forth to all. Those who receive that grace are secure, for they have "fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Heb. 6: 18).