

John has been the only disciple of the twelve near to the cross. Apprehensions of danger, blended with withered expectations as to the sufferer's messianic claims, have caused the others to view the phenomena of their Teacher's execution from a safe standpoint. But the female friends of Jesus have stood near to the cross. To His natural mother the bleeding Victim has spoken farewell words, supplementing them with the command to John to bestow on His desolate mother a son's home and affection.

The afternoon hour of three is approaching. Since noon the sun has strangely hidden his face. Over the adjacent city a mysterious night has fallen like a vast ebon canopy. A crown of twisted thorns engirds His brow. An infuriate mob is massed about Golgotha. Blood steadily drops from His palms and feet. Every nerve quivers in agony. A long-honored and divinely protected nation is driving from Palestine the only divine Personage earth ever knew. His native love of life rises in imperial power for the final and fearful struggle. The intellectual faculties are all profoundly sympathetic with a tormented bodily nature. At last, like a wail from a broken harp, His appalling question breaks on the solemnity of the scene: "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" With reverential thought let us investigate the inquiry,

## II. WHAT IS THE IMPORT OF THIS LAMENTATION OF JESUS?

1. It is not the result of any corporeal pain being endured. It is true that Christ is hanging under an Oriental sun. His blood is both interrupted in its flow and congested. Fever and thirst are doing their work. Death swiftly approaches. But the relation of these agonies to this dismay is very remote. They do not induce or account for the alarm flashed on our vision by this question. History is sprinkled with instances where heathen and Christian martyrs, living and dying in isolation from the supporting power of eminent purity of character, have

passed on to eternal relationships unterrified through sufferings of body intenser and more protracted than those confronted with dismay by our Lord on Calvary.

Let the example of the pagan hero, Marcus Atilius Regulus, illustrate this affirmation. After years of Carthaginian captivity his captors sent him on parole, with their official envoys, to sue for peace. He had sworn to return a prisoner should his mission fail. The Roman Senate offered to accept the Carthaginian proposals for peace and an exchange of prisoners, from their affection for this illustrious patriot. He begged them to reject the overtures and continue the war. Conscious of the tortures awaiting his return, he bravely refused to violate his oath, and returned to Carthage to astonish his enemies by the moral magnificence of his fortitude and love of country. They resolved to murder him by an agonizing method. They cut off his eyelids and laid bare his naked eyes for hours under the glare and heat of a torrid sun until blindness overtook his vision. They rolled him in a cask lined with sharp nails until the great pagan died. But he never shrank from pain or death. With a corrupt moral nature he trod the bloody death-vale with victorious footsteps.

The chronicles of primitive Christianity sparkle with such records of individual courage. Jude, Bartholomew, Andrew and Peter, were crucified as inhumanly as was Jesus. Christian martyrs, before the conversion of Constantine, suffered nameless pains without complaint. Some were exultant in the midst of flames; others, when wild cattle were tossing them, and not a few while Numidian lions lapped their blood. Physical pains constitute no key to Christ's mental anguish in His last hour.

There are two primary causes for this cry: (a) In a manner beyond finite comprehension God then withheld from His dying Son, as the latest and most appalling ingredient of His atoning sufferings, a cloudless consciousness of