

The Quiet Hour.

Christ Crucified.

S. S. LESSON—Mark 15: 22-39. June 12, 1904.

GOLDEN TEXT—Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.—1 Cor. 15: 3.

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He received it not, v. 23. Jesus is the supreme Example to us of complete surrender to the will of God and unquestioning faith that God's appointments are the best for us. The divine will may seem to be leading us into the worst straits, as it brought the Son of God face to face with starvation in the wilderness, and with unspeakable sufferings on the cross. But from Him we learn that our highest good lies, not in rebelling against the hard things in our lot, but in cheerfully and lovingly accepting them from the Father's hand.

Casting lots, v. 24. Gambling at the foot of the cross! How audacious a vice is this! It respects not the eyes of a dying Saviour, and makes the very possession of His clothes depend upon the cast of a die. Few vices have borne such a train of misery behind them. Success has often started the winner on the road to ruin, and failure has not seldom driven the loser to desperation, and even suicide. The gambler, deceived by bright prospects of riches easily got, is lured on to certain moral and probable financial shipwreck.

They crucified him, v. 25. The Jews, and especially their leaders, were fully responsible for the death of Jesus. Bitter indeed is the harvest which this race has reaped. But the guilt is not theirs alone. For be it ever remembered that it was for sin the Saviour died. It was sin that nailed Him to the cruel cross. And there is sin in each one of us. We, in so far as we cherish and yield to sin, are guilty, with the Jews, of Christ's death. But blessed be His name, the blood shed on Calvary can cleanse our guilt and theirs.

THE KING OF THE JEWS, v. 26. God made choice of the Jews to be a reservoir in which His grace might be stored for distribution in life-giving streams among all nations. They mistook the divine purpose. They selfishly imagined that the favor of heaven was for themselves alone. This error was their ruin. In like manner we have been enriched with gospel privileges. What can we expect but condemnation, unless we share them with others for whom they are intended as well as for us.

Come down from the cross, v. 30. The tempter is ever with us, plying us with persuasions to avoid the hard ways, and seek success by easy and pleasant methods. Let us always go to the cross for our answer. To come down would for Jesus have meant defeat; it was by enduring that He won His victory. Not otherwise is it with us. The crown is for those who overcome.

Eloi, eloi, lama sabachthani? v. 34. These are words to be read whenever we are inclined to think lightly of sin. They reveal to us in God a hatred of sin so intense that He cannot look even on His own sinless Son bearing the load of the world's guilt. And at the same time they open up to us the depths of the divine love, which moved the Father to allow such a burden to come upon His only begotten Son. At the cross is an undying fire, to kindle afresh our hatred towards sin and our grateful love to the God

who has saved us at so great a cost.

He saved others; himself he cannot save, v. 31. No one can save others unless he is prepared to sacrifice himself. The physician can save his patient's life only by exposing himself to toil, anxiety, sometimes danger. The soldier who would save his country in the hour of peril must be ready to lay down his life. On the other hand, there is no sacrifice so small in the eyes of men that God cannot use it in saving others. Our gifts may be small in amount, but with His blessing they may bring light to some darkened soul. Our talents may be few, but if we yield them to Him, He will find a place for them in His great work of saving the world, for so God can turn even the least things to account.

Covenant Hold—A Forgotten Weapon Against Saul.

BY ANNA ROSS.

If God's covenant with Noah is still in force (and it must be, so long as the rainbow bedecks the clouds), then the one reason why famine gets hold upon any part of this earth is that Noah's sons have forgotten it. Forgetfulness is a fruitful source of loss in every direction; but when it comes to forgetfulness of such a covenant promise as this, "Seed time and harvest shall not cease," and the consequent loss of the fulfillment of the same, it is surely time that stupid memories should be stirred up into activity.

It is no new thing for man thus to forget his covenant opportunities with God. A sorrowful instance of just such forgetfulness, preceded by a signal instance of the opposite conduct, is to be found in the story of the Gibeonites.

The inhabitants of Gibeon, in the days of Joshua's conquests, in spite of difficulties that seemed insurmountable, had succeeded in securing a covenant or league with the people of Israel and the God of Israel.

It was a narrow affair, securing only their lives, not their liberties, for it left them bondmen to the sacred people. But it was like all God's covenants with men, it was sure.

As soon as it was known in Canaan that Gibeon had gone over to Israel, all the kings of the hills, and of the valleys, gathered together against them.

What could the Gibeonites do?

They knew right well what to do. *They had a covenant*, and they promptly claimed it. It was no vague cry for mercy that was sent to Gilgal. It was the bold, almost imperative, covenant claim. "Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us and help us; for all the kings of the Amorites are gathered together against us."

The answer to this covenant-prayer was just what you would expect when the covenant faithfulness of the living God was involved. Joshua, with thrilling assurances of his God in his ears, marched all night. In the morning he came upon Gibeon's enemies suddenly. "And the Lord discomfited them before Israel. . . . And the Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them. . . . Then Joshua spake, Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon, and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still and the moon stayed." All

this was God's answer to the cry of the people, who remembered in their time of need that they had a covenant, and put in their claim for its fulfilment.

But these poor Gibeonites were not always so wise. Years went by. Generation after generation lived and died, and the covenant at first so eagerly sought and so dearly prized, came to be only an old story amongst them. Israel asked a king, and God gave Saul. This warrior king was full of crooked blunders. He was slack in dealing with the Amalekites, whom God had doomed with a sentence of death; and he was cruel in his dealings with the Gibeonites, whom God had fenced round with a covenant of life.

But what did he care for the covenant made with the cities of Canaan five hundred years before? Perhaps he cared just about as much as the Balfour Government to-day would care for a treaty made with the gipsies by Richard II. one hundred years before the discovery of America, especially if the treaty was one which the gipsies themselves had forgotten. How much attention would the politicians of to-day pay to such a treaty? Just about as much did Saul pay to the covenant with the Gibeonites. If some warning voices were raised among his people he paid no heed. He looked only to the (supposed) interests of his own people, and turned his murderous might against the strangers.

What should Gibeon have done the moment she saw Saul's evil eye upon her? Just exactly what she did in Joshua's days. Right up into the ears of Jehovah she should have sent the old covenant cry, "Slack not thy hand from thy servants: come up to us quickly, and save us and help us, for the king of Israel himself has gathered his armies together against us." The Lord's hand was not shortened, neither was his ear heavy; but He listened in vain for that covenant cry, and Saul did his deadly work unhindered—deadly work for the Gibeonites, for their blood reddened the land, and deadly work for Israel, for that shed blood cried aloud to heaven for judgment and got it.

Saul's reign ended under the thunderstorms of defeat and disaster. But all these calamities did not settle for the blood of the Gibeonites. David's reign ushered in victory and prosperity, but the blood of the slaughtered Gibeonites was not brought to mind. Year after year was given to David, and his now peaceful kingdom, to call to remembrance the violated covenant. David had forgotten, as well as the Gibeonites, all about that old covenant. They all forgot that it was still in force.

But God had not forgotten. His judgments visited the land in the days of David three years, year after year. And David enquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered, "It is for Saul, because he slew the Gibeonites."

God had not forgotten, though Israel had done so, and Gibeon too. Had the harassed people remembered this covenant they could have laughed at Saul's malice, as they had in olden days defied the combined wrath of the Canaanitish kings. But they forgot their covenant, put in no covenant claim, and suffered to the death in consequence. Truly, it is a serious thing to forget a covenant. It is as though Englishmen were to forget their Magna Charta, and so lose the liberties it had deeded over to them.

Is not this latter story of the Gibeonites a perfect picture of the position of the whole human race relative to the ravages of famine? They have forgotten the Treaty of Ararat. Four thousand years have buried it out of of sight, and out of mind. The rainbow it still