

His supporting presence. Christ's sad interrogatory assumes the fact, that in some mysterious sense God had forsaken Him. For three hours He has been dying in the dark, both in the realms of nature and of mind. For three hours in the silent kingdom of His own thought, He realizes an exile's relation to Him beside whom He had sat, coequal in eternity and glory. In this crisis, as His divine errand to earth is closing, He feels that in an incomprehensible severance from His Father He is battling alone with the difficulties of redemption. The necessity of this eclipse of His Father's face, He cannot understand. For, as men deny Him water, God withholds the light of His countenance. True, a profound consciousness of personal innocency cheers Him. An intellectual apprehension of the plan of salvation sustains Him. His omniscience comprehends the progressive and final triumphs of His cross. But He now becomes aware of paternal desertion as He occupies the relation of the sinner's substitute.

(b) Track His public ministry, and He is never found murmuring as to His Father's absence. Fifty times He has announced His union with His Father. The burden of His utterances has been His union with the eternal Deity. Amid His temptations in the wilderness, God sent to Him angelic ministers. Before the Last Supper, with troubled soul He besought God to save Him from the cross, and added to His earliest cry of alarm the words, "Father, glorify thy name." The storm was beginning to brew over His soul, but a voice from heaven, heard by the people, responded, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." At once His agitated spirit rallied His normal courage for the greatest tragedy in the annals of time.

So, too, when in Gethsemane He felt the merciless sacrificial lash touch His quivering soul, He exclaimed, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." With night waving its dark sceptre over His thoughts, He cried out, as He fell to the earth, "O, my Father! if it be possible let this cup pass from me; yet

not as I will but as thou wilt." Nor did He plead unsuccessfully. God sent an angel to nerve Him for His arrest, trial and condemnation. But now, as His enemies hurry Him to the sepulchre; now, as neither men nor angels appear to befriend Him; now, as His intrepidity, from the human standpoint, is in the white heat of the crucible, Christ realizes that the Father has forsaken Him, and above the tumult of the surrounding throng the question of the text goes up to God.

In demonstration of His moral fidelity Daniel went down into the den of lions. But God was with him, and the forest monarchs watched him through the brief night season, like unto heaven-appointed sentinels. In executing the divine will Meshach and his heroic colleagues walked on the blazing tiles of the Dura furnace as though they trod on dewy grass, for with them trod a fourth One, like unto God's only Son. Hence the tall flames kissed their cheeks like evening zephyrs, and toyed with their locks like unto the fingers of a mother's love. Jesus Christ, the purest character and the most eminent martyr our planet ever knew, was the only one, dying for the Father's vindication and glory, who could not by possibility secure a consciousness of the divine presence and favor amidst the pains of martyrdom.

2. This seeming abandonment of His suffering Son was the crowning manifestation of God's wrath against sin. Let us steadily hold in the focus of thought the overshadowing fact that Christ was man's representative at Calvary. His mission was not less to publish the inherent enormity of sin than to provide a plan for human salvation. Humanity existed amidst the darkness of despair. Against transgressors the maledictions of the law of God boomed like ceaseless thunders. On human souls the chains of guilt were riveted. Between God and man there was a changeless antagonism of nature. The veracity and character of the Father demanded that every offender should suffer the penalty of the law, or an atone-