

## The Passion of the Christ

And there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, as the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the Temple was torn in two. Then Jesus called out with a loud voice and said: "Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this, He gave up His spirit.

*Arise, shine for your light has come,* the Prophet Isaiah wrote, *and the glory of the Lord has arisen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people; but over you the Lord will arise, and His glory will be seen upon you.* Now the light of the sun failed, and there was darkness over the whole land. For He who is the Light of the world was dying, He in whom is the light that is the life of men, as the holy Apostle John writes it.

Creation itself wept at the death of the Creator; creation which has been groaning and labouring in birth pangs ever since it was subjected to futility, longing to be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty for which it was made and from which it fell when Adam fell, he who had been made head of all creation.

The Light had come into the world; He in whom is the fullness of light, the Word of God who was with God and is Himself God from eternity, who once spoke: *Let there be light!*, so that all things came into being. The Light had come into the world; and men loved the darkness rather than the Light.

For their works were evil. And when the Light came into the world they would not know of the Light; they hated Him and had Him crucified.

And there He hung, hung up high for all the world to see, suffering in shame, hung up high toward Heaven, presented to God for His judgement, and judged and damned, crucified and cursed, as it was written of Him in the Law: *Cursed is He who is hanged upon a tree!* And the sun's light failed, and darkness covered the land. Creation wept at the death of the Creator. And the clouds of darkness gathered over Him.

*God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all!*, writes the holy Apostle John. God is good, and whole and complete in His goodness; and so He cannot and will not have evil in His presence. Before the goodness of God all evil must be judged and damned and die, all ungodliness and unbelief and impurity, as darkness must die in the presence of the light. And so the Son of God suffered alone, abandoned by the blessed presence of the Father, cast out from the glory of His goodness.

For He who is Himself the Light had taken upon Himself the darkness. He had had Himself baptised with the Baptism of sinners, and taken us upon Himself, and all that is us and ours, our darkness and our death, our evil and ungodliness, our unbelief and impurity. He who knew of no sin had had Himself made to be sin for us. And the judgement of God against all sin had fallen upon Him, the judgement of His own goodness against all evil. And He had cried out in His agony and anguish: *My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?*

And the light of the sun failed, and there was darkness all over the land.

*When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, we sometimes sing, Help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

Some of us have been there; have seen all earthly comforts fail, have seen all that fade in which we sought our joy in this world, and to which we set our hopes, have seen darkness lay itself as a veil over our hearts and minds, so that darkness was all there was to see. And we came to sense how cruel it really is, the shallow comfort offered by those who encouraged us to *count our blessings*, to seek comfort in how good life is, and all things good in life, all that which we now could not see, as if the darkness were not real, or our grief and pain. And we came to sense the cruelty of the shallow philosophy that *life is what you make of it*, that neither pain nor grief can ever hurt any more than you allow it to, that it is all up to yourself, so that it is your own fault if the griefs and pains of real life actually hurt.

And we came to sense the cruelty of the false promises of false preachers, of worldly wealth and health and happiness, that things will never become as they actually became, that *God would never give us any more than we could bear*, as the Koran teaches it.

If we were fortunate enough to also have had the comfort of Holy Scripture proclaimed to us, we might also have come to sense how precious that comfort is, that it is not in vain when the children of God cry out to Him: *When other helpers fail, and comforts flee, Help of the helpless, O abide with me!*; we may have sensed what precious comfort it is to look to the promises of God, and to His love, when His promises and His love are all that is left.

Our Lord Jesus saw all earthly comforts flee. He was robbed of all earthly dignity and right, unjustly judged and shamed and mistreated by those of whom He Himself is ultimately the only rightful Judge. He saw His beloved fail, and the few who remained with Him unable to be of any real help to Him in His sufferings.

And as He saw all other helpers fail Him, all other comforts flee, He found Himself abandoned even by Him who is otherwise Help of the helpless. *My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?*

Robbed of all comfort, He could but seek comfort in this, in His agony and anguish: that sufferings would be the salvation of sinners. For it was for this purpose He suffered all that He suffered; to pay for us sinners the price and penalty for our sin, for all evil and ungodliness and unbelief and impurity in our lives, and in our hearts and minds, that we might stand righteous before the judgement of God; that we might not perish for ever in His wrath, but rather live and be with Him for ever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. This was His hope in His agony and anguish; an ever more faint hope as His agony and anguish grew ever more severe, abandoned as He was by the heavenly Father in whom alone is light and life. How can there be any hope when hopelessness can be so severe? How can there be any goodness in a reality so full of agony and anguish?

And yet He would bear the agony and anguish, also, of fear and doubt and hopelessness; He would not seek comfort in His divine knowledge, the certainty that all would have to come out well for Him, Him being who He is.

He would bear the agony and anguish of fear and doubt and hopelessness in its fullness, and be content to trust in the promises of God, that He would not abandon His Anointed, that He would not leave His soul to Hell, even as He actually did that, or let His Holy One see corruption, that He would redeem His chosen One and raise Him from death, as it was said all over the Psalms. He would be content to know only in faith the faithfulness of the Father, in spite of all evidence, in spite of obvious truth, in spite of reality itself, as reality fell upon Him in all its cruelty.

He would bear the fullness of agony and anguish, the judgement of the goodness of God against all evil, until it was all borne and taken away. He would pay the price and penalty for the sin of all sinners until it was all paid in full.

And there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, as the sun's light failed. Then He called out with a loud voice and said: *Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit!* And having said this, He gave up His spirit.

When all was finished, the price and penalty paid in full for the sin of the world, all judgement borne and taken away, all evil and ungodliness and impurity judged and damned and done away with, He would finally commit Himself again into the Father's hands and die, knowing that all was now well.

And as He could, so can we. This is the promise of the price He has paid with His sufferings and death. All being finished, the price and penalty paid in full for all sin, all judgement borne and taken away, all evil and ungodliness and impurity judged and damned and done away with, we can know, also, in faith, that all is well, that nothing can ever again separate us from the love of God, not even death, nor sin itself, that nothing can or shall keep Him from making all things well for us and give us all things good and glorious in His Kingdom of goodness and glory.

Confronted with our sins and shortcomings, we may now know that the price and penalty has been paid in full, that we are right with God, and righteous before His judgement, that His goodness has outdone our evil and made all things well.

When all is lost that made life worth living, and without which life seems not to be life, we may know in faith that all is well, when all other comforts fade and fail, and all we see before us is agony and anguish; for His love is upon us, who is Himself the light of the world, and in whom is the fullness of life. He has turned all His wrath away from us, and turned it and taken it upon Himself, and borne it for us, and taken it away from us, as far as the east is from the west. And all is well.

This we may know in faith; although we can know it in faith only.

It is a false promise, that of false preachers, that we should expect to see it, and feel it in our hearts, through all the agony and anguish of life in this fallen world; as it is a false promise of other false preachers that we should expect life in this fallen world to be without agony and anguish.

Life in this fallen world remains one of suffering and sorrow. Not only is creation groaning and labouring in birth pangs, longing to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, but we ourselves must groan inwardly, as the holy Apostle Paul writes it, *while we await our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Through agony and anguish we are conformed to the image of our crucified Saviour, as we look to His love and what His love has done for us; we learn to look away from ourselves and our love for this world and commit ourselves to His love instead, until we shall see Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And we shall. Such is His promise, for which He suffered and died.

Let us pray, as He said that we could.