How a Thief Saved the World

You may have seen something in regard to the righteousness of Christ, but there is truth yet to be seen clearly, and that should be estimated by you as precious as rare jewels. You will see the law of God and interpret it to the people in an entirely different light from what you have done in the past, **for the law of God will be seen by you as revealing a God of mercy and righteousness. The atonement, made by the stupendous sacrifice of Jesus Christ, will be seen by you in an altogether different light**. {ST November 13, 1893, par. 2}

The Rejection of Jesus

Matt 26:38  Then saith he unto them, **My soul is exceeding sorrowful**, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me.

Isa 53:3  **He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:** and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

And what was to be gained by this sacrifice? How hopeless appeared the guilt and ingratitude of men! In its hardest features Satan pressed the situation upon the Redeemer: **The people who claim to be above all others in temporal and spiritual advantages have rejected You**. **They are seeking to destroy You**, the foundation, the center and seal of the promises made to them as a peculiar people. **One of Your own disciples, who has listened to Your instruction, and has been among the foremost in church activities, will betray You.** **One of Your most zealous followers will deny You**. **All will forsake You**. Christ's whole being abhorred the thought. **That those whom He had undertaken to save, those whom He loved so much, should unite in the plots of Satan, this pierced His soul. The conflict was terrible**. Its measure was the guilt of His nation, of His accusers and betrayer, the guilt of a world lying in wickedness. The sins of men weighed heavily upon Christ, and the sense of God's wrath [hiding His face] against sin was crushing out His life. {DA 687.1}

Longing for Comfort

How dark seemed the malignity of sin! Terrible was the temptation to let the human race bear the consequences of its own guilt, while He stood innocent before God. **If He could only know that His disciples understood and appreciated this, He would be strengthened.** {DA 687.3}

Rising with painful effort, He staggered to the place where He had left His companions. But He "findeth them asleep." **Had He found them praying, He would have been relieved**. DA 688.1

Now had come the hour of the power of darkness. Now His voice was heard on the still evening air, not in tones of triumph, but full of human anguish. The words of the Saviour were borne to the ears of the drowsy disciples, "O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done." The first impulse of the disciples was to go to Him; but He had bidden them tarry there, watching unto prayer. When Jesus came to them, He found them still sleeping. **Again He had felt a longing for companionship, for some words from His disciples which would bring relief, and break the spell of darkness that well-nigh overpowered Him**. DA 689,690

In the Garden there was no one to comfort Jesus.

When Jesus made the decision to save man at any cost to Himself, God had to send His angel to tell Him of His love to save Him from dying right then.

In this awful crisis, when everything was at stake, when the mysterious cup trembled in the hand of the sufferer, the heavens opened, a light shone forth amid the stormy darkness of the crisis hour, and the mighty angel who stands in God's presence, occupying the position from which Satan fell, came to the side of Christ. **The angel came not to take the cup from Christ's hand, but to strengthen Him to drink it, with the assurance of the Father's love**. DA 693.3

To Calvary…

The Saviour's burden was too heavy for Him in His weak and suffering condition. Since the Passover supper with His disciples, He had taken neither food nor drink. He had agonized in the garden of Gethsemane in conflict with satanic agencies. He had endured the anguish of the betrayal, and had seen His disciples forsake Him and flee. He had been taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas, and then to Pilate. From Pilate He had been sent to Herod, then sent again to Pilate. From insult to renewed insult, from mockery to mockery, twice tortured by the scourge,--all that night there had been scene after scene of a character to try the soul of man to the uttermost. Christ had not failed. He had spoken no word but that tended to glorify God. All through the disgraceful farce of a trial He had borne Himself with firmness and dignity. But when after the second scourging the cross was laid upon Him, human nature could bear no more. He fell fainting beneath the burden. {DA 741.4}

On the Cross

The enemies of Jesus vented their rage upon Him as He hung upon the cross. Priests, rulers, and scribes joined with the mob in mocking the dying Saviour. At the baptism and at the transfiguration the voice of God had been heard proclaiming Christ as His Son. **Again, just before Christ's betrayal, the Father had spoken, witnessing to His divinity. But now the voice from heaven was silent.** No testimony in Christ's favor was heard. Alone He suffered abuse and mockery from wicked men. {DA 746.3}

"If Thou be the Son of God," they said, "come down from the cross." "Let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God." In the wilderness of temptation Satan had declared, "If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." "If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down" from the pinnacle of the temple. Matthew 4:3, 6. And Satan with his angels, in human form, was present at the cross. The archfiend and his hosts were co-operating with the priests and rulers. T**he teachers of the people had stimulated the ignorant mob to pronounce judgment against One upon whom many of them had never looked, until urged to bear testimony against Him. Priests, rulers, Pharisees, and the hardened rabble were confederated together in a satanic frenzy. Religious rulers united with Satan and his angels. They were doing his bidding.**  {DA 746.4}

**Jesus, suffering and dying, heard every word as the priests declared, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save.** Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Christ could have come down from the cross. But it is because He would not save Himself that the sinner has hope of pardon and favor with God. {DA 749.1}

One Gleam of Hope

To Jesus in His agony on the cross **there came one gleam of comfort. It was the prayer of the penitent thief**. Both the men who were crucified with Jesus had at first railed upon Him; and one under his suffering only became more desperate and defiant. But not so with his companion. This man was not a hardened criminal; he had been led astray by evil associations, but he was less guilty than many of those who stood beside the cross reviling the Saviour. DA 749.3

There is no question now. There are no doubts, no reproaches. When condemned for his crime, the thief had become hopeless and despairing; but strange, tender thoughts now spring up. He calls to mind all he has heard of Jesus, how He has healed the sick and pardoned sin. He has heard the words of those who believed in Jesus and followed Him weeping. He has seen and read the title above the Saviour's head. He has heard the passers-by repeat it, some with grieved, quivering lips, others with jesting and mockery. DA 750.1

For long hours of agony, reviling and mockery have fallen upon the ears of Jesus. As He hangs upon the cross, there floats up to Him still the sound of jeers and curses. **With longing heart He has listened for some expression of faith from His disciples. He has heard only the mournful words, "We trusted that it had been He which should have redeemed Israel." How grateful then to the Saviour was the utterance of faith and love from the dying thief!** While the leading Jews deny Him, and even the disciples doubt His divinity, the poor thief, upon the brink of eternity, calls Jesus Lord. Many were ready to call Him Lord when He wrought miracles, and after He had risen from the grave; but none acknowledged Him as He hung dying upon the cross save the penitent thief who was saved at the eleventh hour. {DA 750.3}

The bystanders caught the words as the thief called Jesus Lord. The tone of the repentant man arrested their attention. Those who at the foot of the cross had been quarreling over Christ's garments, and casting lots upon His vesture, stopped to listen. Their angry tones were hushed. With bated breath they looked upon Christ, and waited for the response from those dying lips. {DA 751.1}

**As He spoke the words of promise, the dark cloud that seemed to enshroud the cross was pierced by a bright and living light. To the penitent thief came the perfect peace of acceptance with God. Christ in His humiliation was glorified**. **He who in all other eyes appeared to be conquered was a Conqueror.** He was acknowledged as the Sin Bearer. Men may exercise power over His human body. They may pierce the holy temples with the crown of thorns. They may strip from Him His raiment, and quarrel over its division. But they cannot rob Him of His power to forgive sins. In dying He bears testimony to His own divinity and to the glory of the Father. His ear is not heavy that it cannot hear, neither His arm shortened that it cannot save. It is His royal right to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. {DA 751.2}

**Substitute and Surety**

Upon Christ as our substitute and surety was laid the iniquity of us all. He was counted a transgressor, that He might redeem us from the condemnation of the law. **The guilt of every descendant of Adam was pressing upon His heart.** {DA 753.1}

Man’s guilt stems from his rejection of Christ. Christ was bearing the full rejection of the human race.

The wrath [hiding His face] of God against sin, the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. All His life Christ had been publishing to a fallen world the good news of the Father's mercy and pardoning love. Salvation for the chief of sinners was His theme. But now with the terrible weight of guilt He bears, He cannot see the Father's reconciling face. **The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced** **His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man**. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt. {DA 753.1}

Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, **or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice**. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. **Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race**.

Mercy only ceases to plead for those who reject God’s mercy. Those who reject God’s mercy don’t ask for it and thus it ceases to plead for them because cease to ask for it.

**It was the** **sense of sin**, bringing the Father's wrath [withdrawal – break of relationship] upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God. DA 753.2

It was man’s rejection of God and breaking the relationship with God causing the withdrawal of the Father that Christ felt.

Sin brings the Father’s withdrawal.

In the rejection of the Son of God is the rejection of the Father. The Father withdraws not because of Christ but because of the universal rejection of God by man.

**One Gleam of Hope**

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst. And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost. Luke 23:43-46

It was the thief’s expression of faith in the Saviour; it was the thief’s belief in Christ’s kingdom that gave Christ comfort and glorified Him in the face of complete rejection. It was a thief that gave Christ the gleam of hope to hold firm till the end.

A thief who was rejected by society and condemned to die with Christ.

Will it be the most rejected of society that will strength the followers of Christ as they face the rejection of the world. Will strength come to God’s people from those they least expect.

The Disciples seemed unable to express faith in Him because their expectations for Him and then appeared dashed. It took a thief who had nothing to lose and no expectations to comfort Jesus on the Cross.