

Looking on a Pierced Christ

A SERMON

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"And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced."— John 19: 37.

It will be remembered that the Lord, immediately after predicting the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem, said to his disciples, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." The word of Jesus Christ, therefore, is important to himself and also to all his loved and redeemed people. He has been sovereignly and mercifully pleased to give us a revelation of his will, of his heart and the thoughts of his mind; and, if we are hearty believers in the plenary inspiration of God's word, we know, in some respects, what the future will be, and what operations 'he will carry on in the kingdoms of nature, of providence, and of grace. Our Lord said also, while preaching a sermon on himself as the good Shepherd, "The scriptures cannot be broken and in consequence of this the expression is so frequently used, "The mouth of the Lord—the mouth of the Lord hath spoken this." The word of God lies beneath his eye as he sits upon his throne; and his hand is fulfilling his promises, his threatening, and also the hopes and expectations of his beloved people. The Old Testament was before the eye of Jesus, as the suffering Saviour of his people, he was careful to confine himself, as to his words, his conduct, his steps, and his sufferings, to what was therein predicted concerning himself and his people; consequently, in the chapter out of which I have taken my text, the fulfillment of the scripture is referred to four or five times. In the 24th verse we read, "They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it (that is the coat of the Saviour,) but cast lots for it, whose it shall be; that the scripture might be fulfilled which saith, They parted my raiment among

them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things, therefore (and the word "therefore" here is very significant and expressive): "These things, therefore, the soldiers did." It might have occurred to our minds, had it not been for this word, that the soldiers were guided by no special influence, at least, by none that was supernatural, when they said, Let us not rend it; but their minds, their mouths, and their hands were directed or overruled by a Divine power. The word of prophecy was present to the Saviour, and therefore his coat was not rent; hence, "Let us cast lots for it, whose it shall be." — "These things, therefore, the soldiers did." Then again, in the 28th verse, we read "After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, said, I thirst. It appears that the Saviour's eye was upon the writings of David; and whilst it was a fact that he thirsted, and that his thirst was penal and unspeakably intense, it was also a fact that he had regard to the immutability of Divine revelation; and said, in order to fulfill the scripture, "I thirst," Again, in the following verses, we read, that "Jesus having received the vinegar, said, It is finished! And bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews, because it was the preparation that the body should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath was an high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." Otherwise it was usual for criminals to hang upon the crosses upon which they were executed. But since the Lord Jesus was crucified at the time of the Jewish Passover, and the Sabbath following was to the Jews a very important day, they were anxious that no criminal should then be seen on Golgotha or Calvary; and believing that Christ and the thieves had not had time to die, they went to Pilate and besought him that their legs might be broken, in order to accelerate their death; and he gave them permission to do this. "The soldiers therefore went and brake the legs of the first thief and of the other that was crucified with Jesus; but when they came to Jesus to accelerate his death, they saw that he was dead already, and brake not his legs. And this again constituted a perfect fulfillment of Scripture, for "these things were done that the scriptures should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall

not be broken." We are then told that since the Lord Jesus was dead, they resolved not to break his legs, but one of the soldiers in an unaccountable and wanton manner "with his spear pierced his side, and forthwith came thereout blood and water and my text says, "Another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced."

Now just one or two words more before I try to open the text. You observe in the fact that the soldiers omitted a portion of their duty, the word of God was fulfilled. They would not have exceeded their duty had they broken the legs of the three sufferers; they had orders so to do, and it was therefore their military duty to break the legs of the two thieves, and those of Jesus also; but finding him dead already, a thought occurred to their minds—for a supernatural influence was upon them—that they would not break his legs ; and that took place, the Holy Ghost tells us, in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled: "A bone of him shall not be broken." And then, in the second place, one of the soldiers exceeded his duty. He did what he had no authority to do. He had authority from Pilate and from his captain to break the legs of Christ, and that he did not do; but he had no authority whatever for piercing him in the side; and therefore an omission of duty on the one hand, and an excess thereof on the other, fulfilled the word of God; and hence it is said, " A bone of him shall not be broken " according to the scripture; and another scripture saith, "They shall look on him whom they pierced."

I have made these introductory remarks for the purpose of trying to exalt your thoughts concerning the boundless importance of the word of God. And now leaving, the fulfillment of the Scriptures, let us limit our attention for a few minutes to the words we have read, which express a solemn fact, "They shall look on him whom they pierced."

In the first place, this might refer to the Jewish nation; for although Christ was not pierced by a Jew, but by one of the Roman soldiers, a person

is said to do that which is done in his name or by his authority, and it was the Jews that cried out, "Crucify him; crucify him!" They clamored for his death, and therefore they pierced him. The time may come, for aught I know, when a very considerable number of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, will be called by Divine grace, and look upon him whom they pierced and mourn for him. At all events, the period is coming, and may not be far distant, when the Lord of life and glory shall appear in the clouds, and every eye shall see him and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. I shall not confine my attention to the Jewish people as a nation, nor make any further remarks upon the supposition or the belief that large numbers of them may probably be called by Divine grace, but look at my text as applicable to sinners saved, or to such persons as have a humble hope that their guilt and sin were imputed to the Lord of life and glory, and that he was pierced and wounded for their transgressions and crimes; for "they shall look on him whom they pierced." This being the course which we intend taking, the subject may be divided into two branches: — First, the blessed and important object, a pierced Christ; and secondly, the solemn act,—looking on Him. They shall look on him whom they pierced. Thus, we have a marvelous object to contemplate, and a saving act to describe.

I. A few observations, in the first place, on the object—a pierced Christ, who is looked upon by every saved sinner. And the first thought here is this, the object of a saved sinner's faith is a suffering one—a pierced Christ. Some persons are continually saying, Preach Christ; and there is, I think, much meaningless talk in relation to this point. Let Christ be preached: but have we a definite and scriptural idea of what it is to preach the Lord Jesus to our fellow men? If I preach an uncrucified, un-suffering, unpierced, an un-bleeding Christ, I do not preach the Christ of the Bible, nor that Saviour which lost and ruined sinners require. And therefore, the apostle Paul has very beautifully and comprehensively put the fact before us: "I am determined to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and

him crucified." We may, if we can, look into the bosom of eternal love, and exhibit Jesus Christ as lying therein, and then we may consider the throne of eternal glory wherein he is now seated, and preach the fact that he is crowned with many crowns, and that his kingdom is an everlasting one; but if we omit his cross, his sufferings, his sweat and blood, we omit, I had almost said, the greatest and most wondrous view the sinner can have of the dear Redeemer. The cross of Jesus, his bleeding wounds, his crown of thorns, his unparalleled sufferings, and the fact that death with its ten thousand stings met him and thrust them all into his dear and precious person, constitute the cream of the gospel. And therefore, the crucifixion, sufferings, and death of Jesus are all-important matters to every inquiring sinner, or to every man and woman that is going to heaven. All suffering appears superlative at the cross of Jesus. I beg attention, beloved friends, to this point for a minute. For instance, the sufferer himself is the greatest Being that ever suffered, or that ever will or can suffer. He was incarnate God, and you are not, when contemplating Christ on the cross, to separate his divinity from his humanity; his Godhead should not be modified or lessened on account of the fact that it was obscured in some measure whilst he hung on the accursed tree. The whole of the divine nature, his whole Deity was there. All the boundless greatness and majesty of God were in the person of him whom the cruel and cursing soldier chose to pierce. It was Jehovah-Jesus that hung on the tree; and therefore, in him we have the greatest Being that ever suffered. Then, pursuing this train of thought, we have, in the next place, the greatest sufferings that were ever experienced, as well as the greatest sufferer. There is not a being in hell that suffers as the Saviour did; for all the pangs endured by the lost cannot be compared with those of the great Son of God. He suffered the hells of thousands, and on the tree he quenched that wrath which to the sinner himself would have been endless, and therefore this great Sufferer endured what had never been experienced before.

And then, in the third and last place, the greatest possible results are flowing, and will for ever flow, from these greatest sufferings of this greatest of sufferers. What are they? What is the outcome of the depths of Christ's sorrow? Why, all your life and mine. All your good hopes and mine. All those comforts which tend to make existence pleasant flow from the sufferings of the dear Redeemer; and the facts that you are prepared for heaven, that your end shall be peace, that your spirit in its departing moments shall be tranquil and serene, are all owing to the superlative sorrows and sufferings of incarnate God. And then, beloved brethren, the heaven that lies beyond all time and sin, the crowns of glory you shall for ever wear, the throne of dignity you shall for ever occupy, the robes of immortality you shall for ever wear, and those overflowing joys you shall for ever feel, may all be traced to the fact that Jesus was pierced for sinners, — for their guilt, transgression, and crime. And, therefore, we have in the pierced Christ the grand central object of the church of God, the grand central object of the universe of divine and holy minds, the very centre of that eternity of heaven and bliss which are prepared for the family of grace. The pierced Christ of God is the most glorious expression of the Father's thoughts of love concerning wretched, ruined man. "They shall look on him whom they pierced."

And, now, what were the sufferings of Jesus? They were penal. Yours and mine are not so; but those of Jesus were: that is, they were such sufferings as are experienced by the criminal in prison, or when his life is ignominiously taken for crime to satisfy justice. Go into a prison, and you see penal suffering there. Go into a hospital, you see suffering; but not that which is penal. Now Jesus suffered penally. He was punished. His sufferings were a punishment inflicted upon him to satisfy Divine justice. They were inflicted, not with a rod of correction as yours and mine are, but with a sword, and a spear, and with instruments of torture which indicated breaches of the law and transgressions of the will of God. They shall look on him who was suffered for sin. And, then, his sufferings were meritorious. You and I might suffer all the days of our life, and people might say when

they were over here, and our spirits had departed for eternity—Poor creatures! they are better off now; as if the sufferings of a sinful creature could possibly merit so great a boon as love divine, or eternal happiness and glory. No, my friends—

**“Could my tears for ever flow,
Could my zeal no respite know,
All for sin could not atone—
Christ must save, and Christ alone.”**

His precious blood was a sufficient price. All his groans and agonies only were and are current coin in the moral government of God. Christ bought us with a price, and he merits and deserves for his weeping observers, all the perfection and bliss they shall ever possess. When Jesus died, the stipulated price was fully paid, the bill was receipted, the book was cancelled and closed, and Christ said, “It is finished and bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. And, then, in the next place, the sufferings of Jesus Christ were final. I do beg attention to this, and hope to dwell upon it myself as a poor ruined sinner. I should not be comforted, and I hope I am speaking with reverence, by looking on him that was pierced, if I did not believe that his sufferings for sin and his people were final. My Christian brethren, the work of penal suffering for sin, as far as the people of God are concerned, is ended. It is all finished. Justice will never draw her sword over your soul, and never pour a curse upon your mind; and Jehovah will never judicially frown upon your troubled spirit; for he can frown, curse, smite no more. The punishment is all for ever ended, and the sufferings of the redeemed are chastisements and corrections, but not penal visitations for guilt, transgression, and crime. O that we had a stronger faith to cast ourselves on this great fact, and to look with a steadier eye on him that was pierced for sin! Well, the sufferings of Christ were meritorious and final; and since they were so, they sent a fragrance to heaven which entered that glorious world, surrounds the throne of God, envelopes Deity himself; and

impregnates for ever the very atmosphere of glory. Faith lives in it here, hope is now sustained thereby, and herein the believer dies, and ascends from the body to heaven, to live and sing for ever and ever there. A suffering object is the object of the saved sinner's faith. "They shall look on him whom they pierced." But it is time to pass away from this point, otherwise I intended to remind you of the fact that here we have the sinner's Refuge. If there is anything in the life and death of the Lord Jesus that ought to be regarded as the antitype of that cleft of the rock into which God put Moses, we have it here. Christ was pierced and wounded: and his wounds are the clefts of that rock into which God puts all his beloved people. "I will put thee," said God, to Moses, into a place which is by me here and there is now a place by God, blessed be his name, in the smitten rock, into which he puts trembling sinners, and having lodged them therein, he covers them with his hand whilst he passes by and shows them his hinder parts. They look on him whom they pierced; and, wishing they were in his wounds, God the Spirit in due time puts them therein. They look on the pierced One, and regard his wounds as the great outlets of eternal love. And as Moses smote the rock, and the waters gushed out, so, when Christ the Rock of Ages was pierced, blood and water flowed out— blood to atone for accursed crimes, and water to wash, cleanse, sanctify, and make us for ever whiter than snow. Brethren, it is sweet to look at the wounded Christ, and see the heart of Deity flowing; good to look on a smitten Saviour, and wish we were in him; sweet to be consciously placed in his bosom by the Holy Ghost; and sweet to look and regard his wounds as the accepted depository of prayer, and all our offerings. Dear Jesus, we come to thee as helped by thy Spirit, and connect our prayers, tears, services, and sermons too, with thy wounds. They, whether they be ministers or private Christians, — "they shall look on him whom they pierced," and, as it is elsewhere said, " they shall mourn for him." And here, my brother, in the fact that our Lord was pierced, we have our way to God, our way out of time into eternity, our way through death, and our way into a better world. We go through the pierced heart of incarnate God to heaven, and through the wounds of the dear Redeemer

into eternal rest. This is a living, tender, bleeding, and purifying way. We go this way to see our God. But lest we leave not ourselves time to glance at the second part of the subject, we will now leave the sufferings of Christ.

A risen Saviour is the object of the sinner's faith. They shall look on him whom they pierced—i.e., a while ago, eighteen hundred and forty years, or thereabouts. Christ on the cross is not the termination of the believer's hope and faith. Christ is not in the grave, but risen from the dead; and living again, he says, "Amen. I have the keys of hell and of death." Had not Jesus been raised from the dead, all would have been for ever lost. You cannot attribute too much importance to the resurrection of him that was pierced for you, or whom you pierced. This is the grand declaration of the fact that you are a saved man or woman, and that all in heaven is peace in relation to your soul and body. Had Christ remained in the grave under the power of death, all heaven, I had almost said, had been clothed in mourning, and God himself would have been disappointed, for full salvation would have been impossible without the resurrection of the Saviour. But on the morning of the third day, he that was pierced came out of prison or the tomb, and that fact proclaimed many delightful truths—viz., that the law was magnified, justice was satisfied, guilt was expiated, the debt was paid, and the way of salvation from the threshold of hell to the heights of glory was perfectly finished, and there was nothing more for a suffering Christ to do but go to heaven and take his crown and scepter and reign there, for the purpose of bringing the purchase of his blood to himself in a better world.

They shall look on him whom they pierced on the tree, and rejoice that he is risen from the dead, and ever liveth to make intercession for all that come unto God by him. Our dear Lord may be regarded as first, standing on the condemnation side of death, and then, secondly, as standing on the justification side thereof. He entered death from the sinner's place, passed through it as a sufferer, and rose from the grave on the opposite side, which I have called the justification shore. He rose, and Paul triumphantly says,

“He is able now to save all that come unto God by him.” We look at our pierced Christ as suffering, and mourn, and then we look at him as risen, and commit our cause into his hands, fall at his once pierced feet, pray for an interest in his intercession, and say, as did the dying thief — “Now thou in thy kingdom art, Dear Lord, remember me.”

Thirdly, he is a revealed Christ. They shall look on him; he must therefore show himself. This object, like the sun of nature, is a self-revealing one. He reveals himself declaratively in the Word; ministerially by the preaching of his sent servants; spiritually and experimentally to the hearts of his purchased people; and he ever liveth to reveal himself as the sinner’s Saviour. And, beloved friends, I beg your attention to this important fact: — every one that goes to heaven looks on the pierced Jesus, and sees him somewhere before he enters, that holy place; for it seems to me that there is no other method of practically and experimentally cleansing the mind from sin, and preparing it for the presence of eternal purity. “They shall look on him whom they pierced.” Some of you are looking for him, or feeling after him, for you want him. By-and-bye, and before you enter the world of light, whither you are going, it may be in the deep solemnities of death, he will reveal himself, and you shall look on him; and, looking on Jesus, your adoring soul shall leave your body, and glide out of time into eternity, and pass in a marvelous manner into all the bliss of being and the grandeur of your God. They shall look on him, for he is a revealed Christ. And is he not attractive? This shall be our last idea—a pierced Christ is attractive. Among millions of beings he is the most prominent. Bible history gives us an account of the solemn business which was transacted on Calvary. We see the soldiers; we see Mary and the women sitting and watching him there; we see the rabble wagging their heads and putting out their tongues, as the Psalmist has it; and we hear them sneeringly and persecuting say—“ He saved others :let him save himself.” We see all those characters; but the most prominent, the most attractive object on Calvary is the Being that was pierced; for they shall look on him. And, my brother, when he comes the

second time without sin unto salvation, he will come attended by perhaps millions and millions, but the Lord will be the most prominent of all. Some little idle talk I sometimes hear about the experience of the glorified in heaven. One says, I shall look for you, and you will look for me among the glorified; and when I arrive I shall look for my father, and my mother, and my husband, and for others. All this appears to me to be canalizing that spiritual place and state, and things which are supernatural and divine. Christ is all in all; and our heaven will not result from a sight of creatures, but from the presence of him that was pierced for us, who will then be in the midst of the throne, whose beauties and excellencies we shall gaze on for ever and ever, as the good old believer in a country town said, just before she died—" I am now going to close my eyes for ever on earthly things, and open and fix them upon Immanuel, to take them off no more for ever." Oh, heaven will consist in being with and looking on him that we pierced, the Lamb as he had been slain. Well, they shall look on him only. Mary will be there; but should the Pope of Rome, and his predecessors and their followers go to heaven, and carry their religion with them, I suppose they would look on the Virgin Mary, the apostles, and the hundreds and thousands of saints that they have canonized. Miserable trash! Abomination, mystery of iniquity, and vile idolatry! Mary, indeed! Why, she is one of the observers or spectators. Her ransomed eyes are fixed upon her once pierced Lord. And Peter with the keys of heaven—another abomination! He is there; but not as an apostle, not in official robes, but in the robe of his Saviour's righteousness, looking at him whom he pierced. Hence Christ in the midst of the throne will attract the attention and absorb the thoughts of ransomed minds for ever and ever.

II. The, act itself. They shall look on him; first, in condemnation. Sensible of the fact that they are condemned, lost, and ruined, they shall look on him that was pierced; and hence you observe the look is that of a guilty sinner, that of a criminal, that of one that is under sentence of death. Where do our criminals look, and on whom can they fix their eyes after

conviction has taken place, and sentence has been passed upon them? All before them is death, darkness, and black despair, except there may be a thought, a passing thought that probably petitions may be sent to Her Majesty, and the sentence may not be carried out; but if there is such a hope it has no just foundation, and should it be fulfilled, justice would be wronged, according to existing facts, and mercy would triumph over her. But here is a guilty sinner in a state of condemnation, and under sentence of death: he is not in absolute despair, though perhaps not far from it, for there is ground whereon he may stand and hope. He is looking upon this pierced object; and the language of his spirit is—God be merciful; for thou canst if thou wilt be merciful to me a sinner. Say unto me, I am thy salvation. And this look is a loathing one. What is meant by that? Was not that Christ is loathed, but that he that looks loathes himself and his sins. It is a look of self-loathing, of godly sorrow and repentance. It is faith, with her eyes filled with tears, looking on the Lord Jesus. The sinner loathes his sin, and hopes for mercy, and hence he does not sink into despair; he hangs between heaven and hell, looking on Jesus; he does not sink into hell, for he is looking on the pierced One: he does not rise to heaven, for he knows not yet whether the Saviour died for him or not; and, finally, he says—

**“If I die with mercy sought,
When I the King have tried,
This were to die, —delightful thought!—
As sinner never died.”**

He looks in condemnation thus on Jesus Christ, the pierced One. I should like to dwell on these points, but time forbids.

Secondly there is a looking on him in suffering—mental, physical, spiritual circumstantial, and dying. In affliction, look at the grandest Sufferer that ever tasted sorrow.

**“His way was much rougher and darker than mine:
Did Christ, my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?”**

Your pierced Lord had no dying bed; he gave up the ghost on the accursed tree. Look at his dying circumstances. Who nursed him? No one. Who moistened his burning tongue when he said—I thirst! No mother was permitted to dip a feather into wine and water to mitigate the sufferings of the dying God-man. A wretch filled a sponge with vinegar, and raised it to his parched lips. When fever burns us up, my friends, we have nurses, and are succoured; and when otherwise afflicted, we have alleviating circumstances and services; but your Lord had none, —nothing to mitigate his woes. When tempted to repine and murmur in suffering, think of and look on the pierced One. They shall look on him whom they pierced when in suffering. And then again in learning—whilst inquiring into the mysteries of the kingdom, they shall look on him. When they would know the whole about sin, they shall look upon him, for the whole appears there. When they want to know what is love divine, they shall look on him. When they would know as much as possible of justice and its inflexibility and sternness, they shall look on him; and when they would know what is hell, they shall look on him that was pierced, and around whom the flames of divine wrath raged; and when they would know what is death, and the sting thereof, they shall look on him; for a pierced Christ is the fullest and grandest exposition of the vital mysteries which constitute our grand and holy religion. Then, fourthly, they shall look at him in their conflict with the world, the flesh, and the devil. I know of no influence that can enable one to stand against the powers of darkness, but that which comes from the crucified One. The Papists, — deluded mortals,—have many methods of mortifying the flesh and sin. Let me say—Do you want to mortify sin? It must be done by a look— a daily look at him. Is the world to be crucified to you, and you to the world? It must be done in this way. They may kneel on pebbles, count beads, and pray for whole days together, put peas between the soles of their feet and their shoes, wear horsehair or sackcloth next to their skin, immure

themselves in nunneries and convents, assume a voluntary poverty, and much more, yet the "old man" will remain strong, and sin will prevail. When all these things are placed in competition with the pierced Christ of God, we say, with Paul: "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ, by whom I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me." I would sit before this pierced One as a sinner, and loathe sin, mortify it, be crucified to the world myself, and become pure; for purity emanates from the pierced One, and flows from him through faith into the spectator's heart. They shall look on him in worship; in prayer; in the ordinances of God's house, baptism and the Lord's Supper. I could not baptize any person that said he saw nothing of Jesus Christ in the ordinance, nor could I baptize one that rested therein. Be baptized for his sake; but whilst doing this look on him whom you have pierced. Let us take our seats at the Lord's table, see the elements, and look through them on him whom we pierced. In worship look; but on him only. "This, sir, is the identical cross that Christ hung upon." I do not care for that. "Here is the identical spear with which he was pierced. Here are the three nails with which he was nailed to the tree—one for each hand and one for his feet—the identical nails I do not care for them. Could I have them, and were I convinced that they were the same, I would pass them by, and come to the fact that as a guilty sinner, I want, not the spear, not the nails, but him that was pierced. And then, lastly, death will come, and we will die looking on him. Then, by-and-bye, the graves shall be opened and the dead shall be raised, and he that was pierced shall come again, and every eye shall see him, and we shall put our blood-bought, pardoned heads out of our dusty beds, and our ransomed eyes will be fixed upon him whom we pierced, and we shall say—"Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

Then shall our eyes be set upon him for ever; and "so shall we ever be with the Lord." Amen. May the Lord add his blessing, for Christ's sake.