

# **LENTEN REFLECTION – WEEK 1**

## **“WHAT JESUS SAW FROM THE CROSS”**

### **+DAY 1+**

"When Jesus leaves the praetorium, it is about twelve o'clock, in Jerusalem the sultriest hour of the day... Jesus is carrying His Cross. To His neck, probably, is attached the placard two feet square, whitened with chalk, which will be nailed to the Cross to advertise the nature of His crime. He is preceded by a mounted centurion and escorted by a band of soldiers. For company Jesus has two thieves whom they have decided to execute with Him. In front, behind, and around Him is an inquisitive or hostile mob. For some two hundred yards in a direct line, but rather more through a network of narrow streets, their way lies downhill through the town. The the road slopes upwards, always winding, bringing the total distance to five hundred yards... Immediately after He crossed the threshold, Jesus stood face-to-face with his tomb."

### **+DAY 2+**

"We have spoken of Calvary, and we have not yet located this 'mountain' which occupies so important a place in our thoughts... The fact is that Calvary is not a mountain at all; it is not even a hill, unless you would dignify by that name what is little more than a knoll in a field... This chalky mound stood not more than sixteen feet above the roads which wound around its base; it rose rather abruptly from the western side, but quite gradually from the east and southeast, the way by which Jesus approached it. However, our Lord's observation post dominates the town. When the gibbet has been erected, its highest point will be another ten feet above the level of the ground, and the gaze of the Crucified may range over the whole horizon... In front of Him Jesus will see the Gate of Ephraim at a distance of eighty yards, the Temple at a quarter of a mile... Then He will see the surrounding country... To the right the Mount of Olives, across the brook Kedron, is a strip of burnt and arid desert, behind which you can smell the Dead Sea... Here are memories of the great fast, of the Baptism and the voice from the heavens; here is Mount Nebo, whence Moses saw the Promised Land from afar ... To the west, high hills close in the view, hills that lead up to what today is called Mount Zion, and bound the curving valley of Gehenna... Such is the place where Jesus went to meet His death."

### **+DAY 3+**

"And here is the Cross. It is a square-hewn beam, with a crosspiece. It is probably ten feet high; Rome likes to make an exhibition of her condemned criminals, for the sake of example. Jesus alludes to this when He says, 'If I be lifted up from the earth I will draw all things to myself'. What is intended for His infamy He makes an instrument of glory... What kind of tree was privileged to provide the wood upon which the world's most precious fruit should hang? It is not certain... A praetorium contained a whole collection of crosses, but they bore no labels to indicate the place from which they came. In fact, the Liturgy is better inspired when it abstracts from the material origin of a wood which is so permeated with spiritual significance: 'Faithful Cross, O tree all beautiful; Tree all peerless and divine; Not a grove on earth can show us; Such a flower and leaf as thine. Sweet the nails and sweet the wood; Laden with so sweet a load.' ... When we speak of the Cross as a piece of wood, we do not think of its growth nor of its situation. Its situation is the universe; its growth dates from the 'Sixth Day', unless you would rather say that it exists and grows in the heart of the Christian when he unites himself to his divine Master. The Cross is necessary for the salvation of the world: happy the land, happy the soul willing to pay the price of it!

### **+DAY 4+**

"Having established the site of Calvary and described the Cross, the question still remains, in what direction was the Sufferer facing? ... Jesus faced the gate by which He had come forth, through which came His insulters and those who were greedy for a spectacle. He offered Himself to those who hated and mocked Him. He lent Himself to the convenience of His executioners... the new Man looked toward the beginnings, toward that end of the earth from which came civilization together with the light. He faced as the apse of a church faces, having before His eyes the rampart of a world beyond which He had passed, although He had not forsaken it. His final glance saluted the Temple, His Father's house, and the rising sun. And so the Cross is erected in its proper place, facing in the right direction, according to all the rules. The chalky soil offers a good grip; the beam holds; and now the inscription surmounts the gibbet. He who is to die has been stripped of His garments, first bound to the Cross, and then nailed to it. His crown has been left upon His head, presumably intended as a commentary upon the derisive inscription, but in truth consecrating Jesus as king of hearts and king of the universe."

### **+DAY 5+**

"The first spasms shake the body already mercilessly torn by the scourging and by a night of torment; the victim has been raised roughly upon His gibbet; the blood flows in thin streams from His hands and feet, oozes from His forehead, and stripes His breast and members along the marks of the lashes. The cruelly strained position allows no movement but the soul is unfettered, and the great shudders that rack the body leave the mind in full possession of its powers. There is still a little more of this great life to be lived, a life which in the narrow confines of Judea embraces all the world: a cry or two more, a few more words of sovereign power, and one more lament that asks compassion of earth and Heaven: of earth, to recompense it with mercy to us, of Heaven, to grant us its blessings. And through it all is that glance which sees beyond all things, that glance which we shall follow as far as our sight can reach. But it goes infinitely beyond our vision, for it passes through the visible and invisible worlds and penetrates to their source, to the very depths of God."

## **+DAY 6+**

"After the Cross has been erected, Calvary stands still for a moment, shocked into immobility by the spectacle of supreme pain. The inevitable reaction affects even the executioners. But above all it affects the Sufferer. After the terrible jolt with which the Cross fell into the rocky hole, sending a shudder through the beam and through the members of the victim, the Crucified welcomes as a sort of relief the dull, continuous agony which now ensues and will only later reach its paroxysm. The noises of the city make themselves heard fitfully through this furtive silence. The cries of donkey drivers fill the void left by the silenced blasphemers... The hand of death, for a moment hesitating, relaxes its pitiless hold on the breast of Jesus. And then, the Master opens His eyes."

## **+DAY 7+**

"It is a remarkable fact that the whole of the history of the Cross and its consequences is written in the Hebrew books. Zion is not only the place of preparation; it is also the place of prophecy. Israel foresees and foretells; her religious genius has a spirit that is unshackled by the bonds of time, and her Yahweh speaks close to her ear. Under the pen of prophets, psalmists, chroniclers, sages, and lawgivers, the history of this day, and of the eternal day that is its outcome, is anticipated and set forth sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, without apparent coherence or plan, yet in such a manner that when the event happens, recalling these memories and coordinating them, there arises a complete and striking description to vindicate those voices of long ago. The coming of the Messiah, His characteristics, His work, His life and death, His resurrection, His glory, His eternal rule over the elect, are described clearly in a few rapid sentences... It is certain that Jesus thought of these things as He hung upon the Cross. His cry of anguish, 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' is the first sentence of a long prophetic Psalm... Jesus lives upon these ancient prophecies. He proclaims them; He comments upon them in the synagogues; He explains them to His disciples; and at Emmaus He weaves them into one discourse."