

Alas! And did My Savior Bleed?



*And when He had taken
a cup and given thanks,
He gave it to them, saying,
“Drink from it, all of you;
for this is My blood of
the covenant, which is
poured out for many for
forgiveness of sins.”*

Matthew 26:27-28

MAN, BY NATURE, thinks well of himself. Given time it is easy and natural for him to believe that he is all-sufficient in himself, the pinnacle of goodness, and his own savior. Even the believer can, over time, begin to rise higher in his own estimation, paying mere lip-service to his Maker even as he makes God smaller in relation to his own magnificence. It is in man's nature to forget. It is in man's nature for his own brilliance to throw into shadow the Light of God.

It is at the cross that man is brought back to hard reality. The truth is, at the cross we are reminded in a most uncomfortable way that Jesus suffered a hideous death on our behalf. He, the spotless Lamb, was brutally slaughtered, because it was for that “end” He was born.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”

John 15:12-13

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed?
And did my Sovereign die?
Would He devote that sacred head
For such a worm as I?*

*Was it for crimes that I have done
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!*

*Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in,
When Christ, the mighty Maker, died
For man, the creature's sin.*

At that moment of realization, whatever pedestal we have erected for our own glory begins to crumble beneath our feet. No sane believer can remain proud and unmoved before the truth of what Jesus did. For that reason we humans of short memory must periodically and often revisit Golgotha—that sickening place where Jesus hung and died. There, at the foot of the cross, we are, every one of us, Barabbas...

If the depravity and misery of Sheol had been painted into plaster by the finest artist, it still would not have captured the depravity and misery of the scene in which I stood. Two brave men—my comrades and friends—hung dying, gasping for breath upon the implements of their destruction. Between them, upon the third, the man who had taken my place.

On the left was Naboth—brave, defiant Naboth. Even now, as he struggled to fill his tortured lungs with air, he used what little air he had to curse the lives of his Roman executioners. For a moment my heart filled with pride at his unwillingness to bow—even in death—before our oppressors. But then he turned to the man called Jesus, and spat his venom at him. In his fierce struggle to sustain his life, he was now reviling an innocent, and I wept over what my friend had become.

"They say you are the Christ," Naboth sneered at Jesus. "You say you are the Christ. Well? Save us then! If you really are the One—save *all* of us!"

Jesus remained silent, as he had the other times I had seen him. But

poor little Caleb, struggling to upright himself to force air into his sagging lungs, hanging there like a limp doll to the right of Jesus—Caleb gasped at Naboth, "Are you mad? Give it up, man!" My friend sagged in exhaustion, then heaved himself back up to speak. "Have you no fear of God in this hour? We deserve this death—we've *earned* it. But this man is *innocent*!"

Naboth turned away, still angry, still struggling not only for life, but to free himself from the bonds that held him in place. If he could only free himself, he might die with honor, fighting hand-to-hand those he despised.

But Caleb turned his gaze back toward the one hanging between them. "Jesus," he gasped, "Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom." And the frail, helpless body of my friend sagged in defeat.

Then, for the first time, I heard the voice of Jesus—a voice so tender, yet strong—a voice though human, seemed to be borne on wings of light. "Believe me, my friend, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

In that moment my senses at last burst free of their bonds of anger and pride. In that awful moment I realized, to my hope and dismay—I *was staring at God*. This was no ordinary man hanging before me. Everything about Him was of another place, another time, another plane of existence. While we all bore on our backs the weight of our own arrogance and pride, He bore all of that and more. Having none of His own, He bore instead the weight of man's depraved devotion to self. Being God, He could not sin, so instead took on all the sin of everyone else.

I fell to my knees in shame. On my face in the dirt, every bit of arrogance

leached out of me. Every bit of pride and boasting and conceit spilled out and flowed to mix with the blood spilling down that hideous cross. In a moment I revisited all of my sins: my wretched life, the pain and death I had caused in the name of my own righteousness. I was the most base among a people that were base, and I realized that of all people, it was I that deserved to be hanging from that cross. I could not control my weeping, but sobbed my helpless grief into my hands.

The agony of the cross was written across the face of Jesus. There was nothing in Him that would turn away from the pain of dying as one of us. There was also in that face an agony I could not explain, or even identify—something far higher and more terrible than anything I might imagine. But even in that, Jesus retained all of his faculties; the insanity of the cross had not purchased His soul.

Instead, even in the final moments of His clarity, while all hell was breaking loose around Him and heaven stood before Him, Jesus turned to look down upon me. Without saying a word, without uttering a sound, His quiet gaze bore down into the very depths of my heart, as if to say, "I'm dying for you, Barabbas. I'm dying for you."

*Thus might I hide my blushing face
While His dear cross appears,
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt my eyes to tears.*

*But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give my self away—
'Tis all that I can do.*

Isaac Watts

