

A Meditation on the Passion of Christ

by W.R. Inge

The Passion of Christ is a road to Godhead, revealing God's love and mercy, and providing a means of spiritual growth and transformation through imitation.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:3, Matthew 26:39, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 3:10, 1 Peter 2:21

Topics: "Christ's Passion", "Imitating Christ"

Description

W.R. Inge preaches about the loving sufferings endured by the Eternal Wisdom for the sake of humanity, from the agony in the garden to the crucifixion, emphasizing the necessity of embracing the bitterness of Christ's humanity to reach the sweetness of His divinity. The sermon delves into the profound love and sacrifice displayed in Christ's Passion, highlighting the importance of imitating Christ's life and Passion, even in the face of adversity and dryness in spiritual experiences.

Transcript

THEN said the Eternal Wisdom to the servitor, Attend and listen dutifully, while I tell thee what sufferings I lovingly endured for thy sake.

After I had finished My last Supper with My disciples, when I had offered Myself to My enemies on the mount, and had resigned Myself to bear a terrible death, and knew that it was approaching very near, so great was the oppression of My tender heart and all My body, that I sweated blood; then I was wickedly arrested, bound, and carried away. On the same night they treated Me with insult and contumely, beating Me, spitting upon Me, and covering My head. Before Caiaphas was I unjustly accused and condemned to death. What misery it was to see My mother seized with unspeakable sorrow of heart, from the time when she beheld Me threatened with such great dangers, till the time when I was hung upon the cross. They brought Me before Pilate with every kind of ignominy, they accused Me falsely, they adjudged Me worthy of death. Before Herod I, the Eternal Wisdom, was mocked in a bright robe. My fair body was miserably torn and rent by cruel scourgings. They surrounded My sacred head with a crown of thorns; My gracious face was covered with blood and spittings. When they had thus condemned Me to death, they led Me out with My cross to bear the last shameful punishment. Their terrible and savage cries could be heard afar off: "Crucify, crucify, the wicked man."

Servitor. Alas, Lord, if so bitter were the beginnings of Thy passion, what will be the end thereof? In truth, if I saw a brute beast so treated in my presence I could hardly bear it. What grief then should I feel in heart and soul at Thy Passion? And yet there is one thing at which I marvel greatly. For I long, O my most dear

God, to know only Thy Godhead; and Thou tellest me of Thy humanity. I long to taste Thy sweetness, and Thou showest me Thy bitterness. What meaneth this, O my Lord God?

Wisdom. No man can come to the height of My Godhead, nor attain to that unknown sweetness, unless he be first led through the bitterness of My humanity. My humanity is the road by which men must travel. My Passion is the gate, through which they must enter. Away then with thy cowardice of heart, and come to Me prepared for a hard campaign. For it is not right for the servant to live softly and delicately, while his Lord is fighting bravely. Come, I will now put on thee My own armour. And so thou must thyself also experience the whole of My Passion, so far as thy strength permits. Take, therefore, the heart of a man; for be sure that thou wilt have to endure many deaths, before thou canst put thy nature under the yoke. I will sprinkle thy garden of spices with red flowers. Many are the afflictions which will come upon thee; till thou hast finished thy sad journey of bearing the cross, and hast renounced thine own will and disengaged thyself so completely from all creatures, in all things, which might hinder thine eternal salvation, as to be like one about to die, and no longer mixed up with the affairs of this life.

Servitor. Hard and grievous to bear are the things which Thou sayest, Lord. I tremble all over. How can I bear all these things? Suffer me, O Lord, to ask Thee something. Couldst Thou not devise any other way of saving my soul, and of testifying Thy love towards me, so as to spare Thyself such hard sufferings, and so that I need not suffer so bitterly with Thee?

Wisdom. The unfathomable Abyss of My secret counsels no man ought to seek to penetrate, for no one can comprehend it. And yet that which thou hast suggested, and many other things, might have been possible, which nevertheless never happen. Be assured, however, that as created things now are, no more fitting method could be found. The Author of Nature doth not think so much what He is able to do in the world, as what is most fitting for every creature; and this is the principle of His operations. And by what other means could the secrets of God have been made known to man, than by the assumption of humanity by Christ? By what other means could he who had deprived himself of joy by the inordinate pursuit of pleasure, be brought back more fittingly to the joys of eternity? And who would be willing to tread the path, avoided by all, of a hard and despised life, if God had not trodden it Himself? If thou wert condemned to death, how could any one show his love and fidelity to thee more convincingly, or provoke thee to love him in return more powerfully, than by taking thy sentence upon himself? If, then, there is any one who is not roused and moved to love Me from his heart by My immense love, My infinite pity, My exalted divinity, My pure humanity, My brotherly fidelity, My sweet friendship, is there anything that could soften that stony heart?

Servitor. The light begins to dawn upon me, and I seem to myself to see clearly that it is as Thou sayest, and that whoever is not altogether blind must admit that this is the best and most fitting of all ways. And yet the imitation of Thee is grievous to a slothful and corruptible body.

Wisdom. Shrink not because thou must follow the footsteps of My Passion. For he who loves God, and is inwardly united to Him, finds the cross itself light and easy to bear, and has nought to complain of. No one receives from Me more marvellous sweetness, than he who shares My bitterest labours. He only complains of the bitterness of the rind, who has not tasted the sweetness of the kernel. He who relies on Me as his protector and helper may be considered to have accomplished a large part of his task.

Servitor. Lord, by these consoling words I am so much encouraged, that I seem to myself to be able to do and suffer all things through Thee. I pray Thee, then, that Thou wilt unfold the treasure of Thy Passion to

me more fully.

Wisdom. When I was hung aloft and fastened to the wood of the cross (which I bore for My great love to thee and all mankind), all the wonted appearance of My body was piteously changed. My bright eyes lost their light; My sacred ears were filled with mocking and blasphemy; My sweet mouth was hurt by the bitter drink. Nowhere was there any rest or refreshment for Me. My sacred head hung down in pain; My fair neck was cruelly bruised; My shining face was disfigured by festering wounds; My fresh colour was turned to pallor. In a word, the beauty of My whole body was so marred, that I appeared like a leper--I, the Divine Wisdom, who am fairer than the sun.

Servitor. O brightest mirror of grace, which the Angels desire to look into, in which they delight to fix their gaze, would that I might behold Thy beloved countenance in the throes of death just long enough to water it with the tears of my heart, and to satisfy my mind with lamentations over it.

Wisdom. No one more truly testifies his grief over My Passion, than he who in very deed passes through it with Me. Far more pleasing to Me is a heart disentangled from the love of all transitory things, and earnestly intent on gaining the highest perfection according to the example which I have set before him in My life, than one which continually weeps over My Passion, shedding as many tears as all the raindrops that ever fell. For this was what I most desired and looked for in My endurance of that cruel death--namely, that mankind might imitate Me; and yet pious tears are very dear to Me.

Servitor. Since then, O most gracious God, the imitation of Thy most gentle life and most loving Passion is so pleasing to Thee, I will henceforth labour more diligently to follow Thy Passion than to weep over it. But since both are pleasing to Thee, teach me, I pray Thee, how I ought to conform myself to Thy Passion.

Wisdom. Forbid thyself the pleasure of curious and lax seeing and hearing; let love make sweet to thee those things which formerly thou shrankst from; eschew bodily pleasures; rest in Me alone; bear sweetly and moderately the ills that come from others; desire to despise thyself; break thy appetites; crush out all thy pleasures and desires. These are the first elements in the school of Wisdom, which are read in the volume of the book of My crucified body. But consider whether anyone, do what he may, can make himself for My sake such as I made Myself for his.

Servitor. Come then, my soul, collect thyself from all external things, into the tranquil silence of the inner man. Woe is me! My heavenly Father had adopted my soul to be His bride; but I fled far from Him. Alas, I have lost my Father, I have lost my Lover. Alas, alas, and woe is me! What have I done, what have I lost? Shame on me, I have lost myself, and all the society of my heavenly country. All that could delight and cheer me has utterly forsaken me; I am left naked. My false lovers were only deceivers. They have stripped me of all the good things which my one true Lover gave me; they have despoiled me of all honour, joy, and consolation. O ye red roses and white lilies, behold me a vile weed, and see also how soon those flowers wither and die, which this world plucks. And yet, O most gracious God, none of my sufferings are of any account, compared with this, that I have grieved the eyes of my heavenly Father. This is indeed hell, and a cross more intolerable than all other pain. O heart of mine, harder than flint or adamant, why dost thou not break for grief? Once I was called the bride of the eternal King, now I deserve not to be called the meanest of his handmaids. Never again shall I dare to raise mine eyes, for shame. O that I could hide myself in some vast forest, with none to see or hear me, till I had wept to my heart's desire. O Sin, Sin, whither hast thou brought me? O deceitful World, woe to those who serve thee! Now I have thy reward, I receive thy wages--namely, that I am a burden to myself and the whole world, and

always shall be.

Wisdom. Thou must by no means despair; it was for thy sins and those of others that I came into this world, that I might restore thee to Thy heavenly Father, and bring thee back to greater glory and honour than thou ever hadst before.

Servitor. Ah, what is this, which whispers such flattering things to a soul that is dead, abhorred, rejected?

Wisdom. Dost thou not know Me? Why art thou so despondent? Art thou beside thyself with excessive grief, My dearest son? Knowest thou not that I am Wisdom, most gentle and tender, in whom is the Abyss of infinite mercy, never yet explored perfectly even by all the saints, but none the less open to thee and all other sorrowing hearts. I am he who for thy sake willed to be poor and an exile, that I might recall thee to thy former honour. I am He who bore a bitter death, that I might restore thee to life. I am thy Brother; I am thy Bridegroom. I have put away all the wrong that thou ever didst against Me, even as if it had never been, only henceforth, thou must turn wholly to Me, and never again forsake Me. Wash away thy stains in My blood. Lift up thy head, open thine eyes, and take heart. In token of reconciliation, take this ring and put it on thy finger as My bride, put on this robe, and these shoes on thy feet, and receive this sweet and loving name, that thou mayst both be and be called for ever My bride. Thou has cost Me much labour and pain; for that cause, the Abyss of My mercy toward thee is unfathomable.

Servitor. O kindest Father, O sweetest Brother, O only joy of my heart, wilt Thou be so favourable to my unworthy soul? What is this grace? What is the Abyss of Thy clemency and mercy? From the bottom of my heart I thank Thee, O heavenly Father, and beseech Thee by Thy beloved Son, whom Thou hast willed to suffer a cruel death for love, to forget my impieties. . . .

Now, O Lord, I remember that most loving word, wherewith in the book of Ecclesiasticus[43] Thou drawest us to Thyself. "Come to me, all ye who desire me, and be filled with my fruits. I am the mother of beautiful affection. My breath is sweeter than honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb." "Wine and music rejoice the heart, and above both is the love of Wisdom." [44] Of a surety, O Lord, Thou showest Thyself so lovable and desirable, that it is no wonder that the hearts of all long for Thee, and are tormented by the desire of Thee. Thy words breathe love, and flow so sweetly, that in many hearts the love of temporal things has wholly dried up. Therefore, I greatly long to hear Thee speak of Thy loveliness. Come, O Lord, my only comfort, speak to the heart of Thy servant. For I sleep sweetly beneath Thy shadow, and my heart is awake.

Wisdom. Hear, My son, and see; incline thine ear, forgetting thyself and all other things. Lo, I in Myself am that ineffable Good, which is and ever was; which has never been expressed nor ever will be. For although I give Myself to be felt by men in their inmost hearts, yet no tongue can ever declare or explain in words what I am. For verily all the beauty, grace, and adornment which can be conceived by thee or by others, exists in me far more excellently, more pleasantly, more copiously, than any one could say in words. I am the most loving Word of the Father, begotten from the pure substance of the Father, and wondrously pleasing am I to His loving eyes in the sweet and burning love of the Holy Spirit. I am the throne of happiness, the crown of souls: most bright are Mine eyes, most delicate My mouth, My cheeks are red and white, and all My appearance is full of grace and loveliness. All the heavenly host gaze upon Me with wonder and admiration; their eyes are ever fixed upon Me, their hearts rest in Me, their minds turn to Me and turn again. O thrice and four times happy is he, to whom it shall be given to celebrate this play of love amid heavenly joys at My side, holding My tender hands in happiest security, for ever and ever to

all eternity. Only the word that proceeds out of My sweet mouth surpasses the melodies of all the angels, the sweet harmony of all harps, and musical instruments of every kind. . . .

Servitor. There are three things, O Lord, at which I marvel greatly. The first is, that although Thou art in Thyself so exceedingly loving, yet towards sin Thou art a most severe judge and avenger. Alas, Thy face in wrath is too terrible; the words which Thou speakest in anger pierce the heart and soul like fire. O holy and adorable God, save me from Thy wrathful countenance, and defer not till the future life my punishment.

Wisdom. I am the unchangeable Good, remaining always the same. The reason why I do not appear always the same, is on account of those who do not behold Me in the same way. By nature I am friendly; yet none the less I punish vice severely, so that I deserve to be feared. From My friends I require a pure and filial fear, and a friendly love, that fear may ever restrain them from sin, and that love may join them to Me in unbroken loyalty.

Servitor. What Thou sayest pleases me, O Lord, and it is as I would have it. But there is another thing at which I greatly marvel--how it is that when the soul is faint from desire of the sweetness of Thy presence, Thou art wholly mute, and dost not utter a single word that can be heard. And who, O Lord, would not be grieved, when Thou showest Thyself so strange, so silent, to the soul that loves Thee above all things?

Wisdom. And yet all the creatures speak of Me.

Servitor. But that is by no means enough for the soul that loves.

Wisdom. Also every word that is uttered about Me is a message of My love; all the voices of holy Scripture that are written about Me are letters of love, sweet as honey. They are to be received as if I had written them Myself. Ought not this to satisfy thee?

Servitor. Nay but, O most holy God, dearest Friend of all to me, Thou knowest well that a heart which is on fire with love is not satisfied with anything that is not the Beloved himself, in whom is its only comfort. Even though all the tongues of all the angelic spirits were to speak to me, none the less would my unquenchable love continue to yearn and strive for the one thing which it desires. The soul that loves Thee would choose Thee rather than the kingdom of heaven. Pardon me, O Lord: it would become Thee to show more kindness to those who love Thee so ardently, who sigh and look up to Thee and say: Return, return! Who anxiously debate with themselves: alas, thinkest thou that thou hast offended Him? That He has deserted thee? Thinkest thou that He will ever restore thee His most sweet presence, that thou wilt ever again embrace Him with the arms of Thy heart, and press Him to thy breast, that all thy grief and trouble may vanish? All this, O Lord, Thou hearest and knowest, and yet Thou art silent.

Wisdom. Certainly I know all this, and I watch it with great pleasure. But I would have thee also answer a few questions, since thy wonder, though veiled, is so great. What is it which gives the greatest joy to the highest of all created spirits?

Servitor. Ah, Lord, this question is beyond my range. I prithee, answer it Thyself.

Wisdom. I will do as thou desirest. The highest angelic spirit finds nothing more desirable or more delightful than to satisfy My will in all things; so much so, that if he knew that it would redound to My praise for him to root out nettles and tares, he would diligently fulfil this task in preference to all others.

Servitor. Of a truth, Lord, this answer of Thine touches me sharply. I perceive that it is Thy will that I should be resigned in the matter of receiving and feeling tokens of Thy love, and that I should seek Thy glory alone, in dryness and hardness as well as in sweetness.

Wisdom. No resignation is more perfect or more excellent, than to be resigned in dereliction.

Servitor. And yet, O Lord, the pain is very grievous.

Wisdom. Wherein is virtue proved, if not in adversity? But be assured, that I often come, and try whether the door into My house is open, but find Myself repulsed. Many times I am received like a stranger, harshly treated, and then driven out of doors. Nay, I not only come to the soul that loves me, but tarry with her like a friend; but that is done so secretly, that none know it save those who live quite detached and separated from men, and observe My ways, and care only to please and satisfy My grace. For according to My Divinity I am purest Spirit, and I am received spiritually in pure spirits.

Servitor. So far as I understand, Lord God, Thou art a very secret Lover. How glad would I be if Thou wouldest give me some signs, by which I might know Thee to be truly present.

Wisdom. By no other way canst thou know the certainty of My presence better, than when I hide Myself from thee, and withdraw what is Mine from thy soul. Then at last thou knowest by experience what I am, and what thou art. Of a surety I am everlasting Good, without whom no one can have anything good. When therefore I impart that immense Good, which is Myself, generously and lovingly, and scatter it abroad, all things to which I communicate Myself are clothed with a certain goodness, by which My presence can be as easily inferred, as that of the Sun, the actual ball of which cannot be seen, by its rays. If therefore thou ever feelest My presence, enter into thyself, and learn how to separate the roses from the thorns, the flowers from the weeds.

Servitor. Lord, I do search, and I find within myself a great diversity. When I am deserted by Thee, my soul is like a sick man, whose taste is spoiled. Nothing pleases me, but all things disgust me. My body is torpid, my mind oppressed; within is dryness, without is sadness. All that I see or hear, however good in reality, is distasteful and hateful to me. I am easily led into sins; I am weak to resist my enemies; I am cold or lukewarm towards all good. Whoever comes to me, finds my house empty. For the House-Father is away, who knows how to counsel for the best, and to inspire the whole household. On the other hand, when the day-star arises in my inmost heart, all the pain quickly vanishes, all the darkness is dispelled, and a great brightness arises and shines forth. My heart laughs, my mind is exalted, my soul becomes cheerful, all things around me are blithe and merry; whatever is around me and within me is turned to Thy praise. That which before seemed hard, difficult, irksome, impossible, becomes suddenly easy and pleasant. To give myself to fasting, watching, and prayer, to suffer or abstain or avoid, in a word all the hardnesses of life seem when compared with Thy presence to have no irksomeness at all. My soul is bathed in radiance, truth, and sweetness, so that all its labours are forgotten. My heart delights itself in abundant sweet meditations, my tongue learns to speak of high things, my body is brisk and ready for any undertaking; whoever comes to ask my advice, takes back with him high counsels such as he desired to hear. In short, I seem to myself to have transcended the limits of time and space, and to be standing on the threshold of eternal bliss. But who, O Lord, can secure for me, that I may be long in this state? Alas, in a moment it is withdrawn from me; and for a long space again I am left as naked and destitute as if I had never experienced anything of the kind; till at last, after many and deep sighings of heart, it is restored to me. Is this Thou, O Lord, or rather I myself? Or what is it?

Wisdom. Of thyself thou hast nothing except faults and defects. Therefore that about which thou askest is I Myself, and this is the play of love.

Servitor. What is the play of love?

Wisdom. So long as the loved one is present with the lover, the lover knoweth not how dear the loved one is to him; it is only separation which can teach him that.

Servitor. It is a very grievous game. But tell me, Lord, are there any who in this life no longer experience these vicissitudes of Thy presence?

Wisdom. You will find very few indeed. For never to be deprived of My presence belongs not to temporal but to eternal life.

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