

WHEN  
GOD  
DIED



WHEN  
GOD  
DIED

HERBERT  
LOCKYER



WHITAKER  
HOUSE

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Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the author's emphasis.

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## PREFACE

It is more than likely that some readers of this volume will take exception to its title. How could God, the deathless One, die? To declare that, at the cross, God was actually slain is to impugn the eternal unity of the Godhead.

Well, is it more difficult to believe that the second Person of the Trinity died at Calvary than it is to hold that He was made man at His birth? Could God have a birth? Could He—a Spirit—become a man? We readily accept the fact although we cannot explain the mystery of it, that God, the Son, had a birth; that He not only assumed a human form, as in some of His theophanic appearances, but that He was actually made man. He was born of a woman! As God, He was manifest in the flesh! The Ancient of Days had a birthday! The everlasting Father became a “*babe wrapped in swaddling clothes*” (Luke 2:12).

Believing, then, in the wonder of the incarnation, surely it is not harder to accept the sublime revelation that He who was God’s equal and had full deity died upon the tree. Here are a few passages to ponder:

*God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering.*

(Genesis 22:8)

*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*

(John 1:29)

*...the church of God, which he [God] hath purchased with his own blood.*

(Acts 20:28)

What is this but the death of Deity! God spilling His blood in order to acquire the church! “*God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself*” (2 Corinthians 5:19). God in Christ? Yes, not only representatively but intrinsically. Christ Himself was God. “*I and the Father are one*” (John 10:30).

There are some who vainly try to separate our Lord’s two natures, claiming that it was Jesus, the human One, who died. God within His body was dismissed before His decease. Such, however, is false reasoning, for the fusion of deity and humanity in the Virgin’s womb was of an indissoluble nature.

Did Christ die as God, or did He die as man? The answer to such a question is that He died as neither. What gives efficacy to the cross is the fact that Christ died as the God-man. Thus a more correct caption for the following “Passion” messages might be “When the God-man Died.”

How slow we are to learn that the incarnation of our Lord brought about a distinct change in the composition of the Trinity. Hitherto, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were coequal in that each was a spirit. None of the Persons of the Godhead possessed permanent corporeality. Since the entrance of Christ into our humanity, however, the Trinity has been composed of two Members who retained their eternal spirit form and one Member who surrendered His spirit form for corporeality.

Christ is no longer a spirit. Beholding Christ after His resurrection, His frightened disciples took Him to be a spirit, but with that assuring voice of His, Jesus said, “*Handle me, and see;...for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have*” (Luke 24:39). Flesh and bones are part of the Trinity now. O the wonder of it! There is a body in the Godhead, seeing that the Godhead is in a body. (See Colossians 2:9.)

Think for a minute of the marvelous work of the Holy Spirit within Mary. It was he who was commissioned to bring about the merger of deity and humanity. Laying hold of God, the Son, the Spirit wove Him into the texture of Mary’s flesh, thereby becoming the love knot between our Lord’s two natures. Thus Christ appeared among men not

as God exclusively or as Man exclusively but as the God-man, the Holy Spirit's superb creation. And in this unique form, He lived among men and ultimately died upon the cross. The blood He shed, therefore, has abiding efficacy, seeing that it was the blood of an extraordinary nature, namely, the blood of God and Man combined. If He died simply as a man, then the blood He shed has no more efficacy than the blood that streamed from the riven veins of the two thieves who were His companions in death that dark day.

And, let it never be forgotten that the perpetual wonder of heaven since the Ascension has been some of humanity's dust, glorified, seated upon the throne. Within the Godhead is now a Great High Priest, touched with the feelings of our infirmities, seeing that He took back to His position in the Trinity the human body the Holy Spirit gave Him at His birth. What else can we do but adore the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for Their bountiful provision on our behalf!

Alas! and did my Savior bleed,  
And did my Sovereign die!  
Would he devote that sacred head  
For sinners such as I?

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Well might the sun in darkness hide,  
And shut its glories in,  
When God, the mighty maker, died  
For his own creature's sin.<sup>1</sup>

—*Herbert Lockyer*

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1. Isaac Watts, "Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed," 1707.



# THE CHRIST OF THE CROSS

*“Behold the man!”*  
—John 19:5

Each of the four Gospels is necessary to give us a perfect portrait of Him who exceeds all description. Each of the Gospels gives us a different view of the Lord Jesus Christ. Matthew, for example, cries, “Behold the King!” Mark, “Behold the Servant!” Luke, “Behold the Man!” John, “Behold the God!”

The chapter, however, from which our basic verse is taken combines so many sublime presentations of Christ. In a masterful way, John depicts the many-sided person of the Lord he dearly loved. His profiles of Christ are introduced by the exclamation “Behold.” (See, for example, John 19:4–5, 14, 26–27.) And this simple yet significant term calls attention to something striking, unique, and wonderful. Wherever it occurs, there follows an arresting thought, fact, or message. (See Revelation 3:20.)

Quite recently, I found it interesting to trace the use of this exclamation in John’s gospel. Take, for instance, the first and last appearances, and note their connection. “*Behold the Lamb of God*” (John 1:29) and “*Behold my hands*” (John 20:27). The first was uttered before the cross, the latter after the cross. The first reveals the One who was ready and who was soon to be offered; the latter shows us the slain, victorious Lamb. Thomas saw the nail prints John the Baptist preached of but never witnessed.

## HIS HOLINESS

Thrice over John affirms the sinlessness of Jesus. “Behold...[there is] *no fault in Him*” (John 19:4). What a coveted reputation to have! Without fault or flaw. Dr. Weymouth translates it, “*No crime in him*” (John 19:4 WEY). There was no proof, whatever, of treason against Caesar. No fault! No crime! What a confession for a heathen monarch to make! It is possible for us to be blameless but not faultless. Jesus, however, was both blameless and faultless. In all His dealings with God and man, there was absolute rectitude. So beholding Him as the sinless One, we believe Him. There He stood in Pilate’s hall, God’s perfect Man, man’s perfect God. (See Hebrews 7:26.)

## HIS HUMANITY

“*Ecce homo!*” “*Behold the man!*” (John 19:5) Language fails to describe the utter humiliation of our blessed Lord as He trudged the bloodred way leading to His cross. Let us try to depict the scene before us. There stands the faultless One—pale, bleeding, exhausted, and helpless. Pilate, as a last resort, appealed to the crowd for pity. Will no one in the throng lift up his voice in mercy and plead to save this sorry spectacle of suffering from death? No, the bound and bleeding form of Jesus could not elicit any sympathy. Pilate’s appeal fell on deaf ears. In fact, his voice was hardly heard amid the insistent cries for the blood of the innocent Man standing before him.

But is there not a deeper truth in the ruler’s exclamation, “*Behold the man!*”? Truly, He became the Man Christ Jesus. He wrapped Himself with the garment of our humanity to win and save mankind. And as a Man, sorrows, weariness, pain, tears, hunger, and other physical needs were His. We behold Him as the Man tempted in all points like as we are. As the Man, He understands all about our human needs; and as God, He can meet them all.

## HIS HONOR

Seeing that his appeal for pity fails, Pilate now poured scorn upon Christ’s rejecters. He goaded them with the cynical taunt “*Behold your*

*King!*" (John 19:14). There Jesus rose to a position where all the Jews could see Him. What a pitiable sight He presented on that dark day! Hands bound, thorn crowned, clad in an old military cloak, and yet Pilate cried, "*Your King!*" It may be that he heard of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem but a few days before, when the populace acclaimed Him as Messiah. Or possibly he thought of our Lord's own claim, "*Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born*" (John 18:37).

In the original, the "*your*" is emphatic. The people, however, had reached the depth of degradation in their abandonment of messianic hopes, hence their rejection of Christ and their desire for His death.

Let us behold this King standing there clad in the mock insignia of royalty. What a travesty of a coronation for One who was a king indeed!

If He is a King, then He must have a throne; and He had it in the stump over which He was placed as His back was lashed.

If He is a King, then He must have a crown; and He had it in the thorn-circlet adorning His brow.

If He is a King, then He must have a robe; and He had it in some gaudy military jacket discarded by a soldier.

If He is a King, then He must have a scepter; and He had it in the reed, the symbol of weakness, thrust into His hand.

If He is a King, then He must have homage; and He had it in the mock worship of those who cried, "*Hail, King of the Jews!*" (Matthew 27:29; Mark 15:18; John 19:3).

His anguish has passed, however, and we see Jesus crowned with honor and glory as the result of His cross. (See Hebrews 2:9.) May we never be guilty of crucifying the King, or of giving Him a mock coronation! This we do when we honor Him with our lips but have hearts that are far from Him. Let us endeavor to be among the true subjects who, loving Him, bring forth the royal diadem and crown Him Lord of all.

## HIS HEROISM

"*Behold thy son!*" (See John 19:26.) This dying word of Christ's has a twofold significance. First of all, it can apply to John, the beloved

disciple. Seeing his companion whom He dearly loved, Jesus said to Mary, His mother, "*Behold thy son!*" (John 19:26). As if to say, "I am of no further use to you, but here is John, My favorite disciple. He will fill My place and do duty as a son." Take note that our Lord did not employ the term *mother*, lest He identify her with Himself and thereby expose her to danger and to the ridicule of the crowd. But with characteristic tenderness, He committed Mary to the care of one He loved beyond others, because, beyond others, John had received His love. Thus, in some measure, John stepped into the vacant place left by his Friend.

The exclamation before us can also be applied to Jesus Himself. Such a statement—"*Behold thy son!*"—can indicate not only our Lord's humanity but the fact that He was Mary's own Son, and that, therefore, they were very dear to each other. No matter what others may have thought of Christ as He endured the agonies of the cross, to Mary, He was her Son. And who knows, perhaps our Lord drew attention to Himself in this way hoping that the heroic way in which He was dying, the innocent for the guilty, would inspire His mother to bravely watch by Him, as she did to the bitter end.

It may be fitting to observe that twice over Jesus called His mother "*Woman*" (John 2:4; John 19:26). In His day, there was nothing disrespectful about the term, for it was used to address women of highest rank, as we use the term *lady* today.

"*Woman, what have I to do with thee?*" (John 2:4). Such a question was not uttered in the spirit of faultfinding, as if Christ were rebuking His mother for her interference. Another version translates the passage, "*Leave the matter in my hands*" (John 2:4 WEY).

"*Woman, behold thy son!*" (John 19:26). It would seem as if there was a contradiction between these two statements. In the first occurrence, Jesus disclaims any connection with His mother; in the second, He affirms it. Yet there is no contradiction between the two. Ties hitherto were bound to give way to higher obligations. Now His movements must be determined by the counsels of God, and He became subject to such, even as He had been subject to His mother. But when, with the cross, the will of God had been realized, Christ brings Mary back

again to the human side and reveals how heroically He could die both as God's Son and her Son. And so, Mary stood by the cross to pay her last respects to her illustrious Child, and then help to bury the One she had been privileged to bear.

## HIS HUMANENESS

Addressing John the beloved, Jesus said, "*Behold thy mother!*" (John 19:27). What tender consideration is emphasized here! How thoughtful Jesus is! He was not so wrapped up in His own suffering as to forget the future of her who had shielded Him for thirty happy years. Thus, amid the shame and sorrow of His bitter death, His humaneness and His thoughtfulness for others relieve the utter brutality expressed in other directions. And do we not learn from our Lord's example the necessary lesson of consideration? When the dark shadows fall, we must not allow them to shut out all thought of others.

But this beautiful word that fell from the parched lips of Jesus also instructed John to act the part of son to Mary after His death. Thus, Jesus exhorts him to take His place. And here is a double committal, for John is to *find* as well as to *give* sympathy. Sympathy in their common loss was to be a source of love to each other.

Jesus knew what a heartbroken, lonely woman His mother would be after He was gone, for had He not experienced the pang of parting as He left the ivory palaces for a world of sin and woe? He knew that Simeon's word about a sword piercing Mary's heart was about to be fulfilled, as with tearful eyes, she lovingly beheld her Son. But as He gazed on her, He showed the utmost consideration by providing her with a future home. He revealed His tender care by consigning her to the tender protection of His bosom friend, John.

He had no silver or gold or possessions to leave His mother, yet He did the next best. Plundered of all, the Lord had nothing to bequeath, but what precious gifts He bestowed—pardon for His murderers, paradise for His companion in suffering, a loving home with His beloved friend for His mother, Mary.

If we are called upon to shelter, succor, and care for another, affording him the comfort of a home whether he has any claim on us or not, then may we know that by our provision, we are but following the steps of Him who desired a home for the sorrowing mother who had birthed Him.

No mention of Joseph, Mary's husband, may indicate that he had died. In fact, legend has it that he passed away when Jesus was but a lad and that the burden of home and business fell upon His shoulders. If Joseph had been alive at Christ's death, there would have been no need for Christ to commit Mary to the care of another.

It is affirmed by some scholars that the "*brethren*" mentioned in John 2:12 were stepbrothers, suggesting that after Joseph's decease, Mary remarried, and the children from this marriage became the opponents of Christ's claim. Sometimes there are ill-feelings and lack of true love and sympathy among stepsiblings from homes of remarriage. But there are many happy exceptions.

Apart from these conjectures, however, the fact remains that our Lord was ever thoughtful of His mother, and that in committing her to John, He knew that she would be content to live with him because of their mutual love for Jesus. And, because spiritual friends are ever the best ones to have, let us cultivate the fellowship of such. By helping and praying for one another, we thereby enable each other to bear the unresponsive relationships of life. We live in a cold, loveless world; and often, there is not humaneness on the part of children toward their parents as Jesus manifested when He provided a comfortable abode for His mother, who was in His thoughts as He died.

What necessary lessons affecting the ordinary relationships of life we can learn from the Christ of the cross! He is ever our Exemplar, and we are wise indeed if we are willing to plant our feet in His footprints and follow such wherever they may lead.