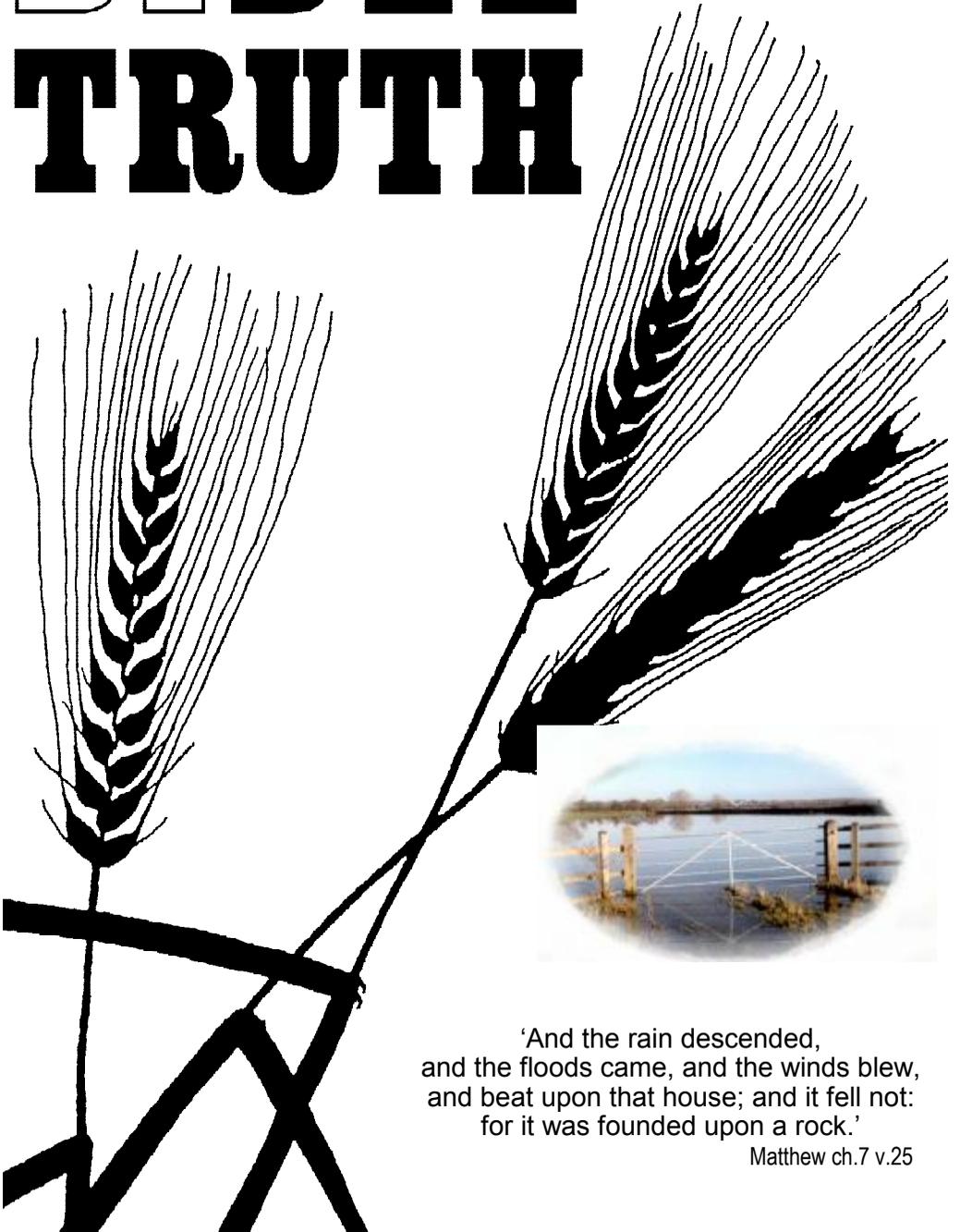


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'And the rain descended,
and the floods came, and the winds blew,
and beat upon that house; and it fell not:
for it was founded upon a rock.'

Matthew ch.7 v.25



The Hardest Part

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In Mark's Gospel may be read the account of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ as follows.

'And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And some of them that stood by, when they heard it, said, Behold, he calleth Elias. And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down. And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost. And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God.'

Mark ch.15 vv 33-39

This dreadful scene was the pivotal point of all of time and eternity and it had been foretold — every word, every action, every emotion for ages past.

We can read of the Saviour's suffering in the book of Psalms.

'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? ... But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. ... Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the

midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.'

Psalm 22 vv 1, 6-8 & 12-18

Through the eyes of prophecy, David the Psalmist was actually there, an eyewitness to this awful scene; for he recorded in great detail the events of that dreadful day, right down to the very thoughts of the suffering Saviour, and even His exact words upon the cross, even though that day would not come for yet another millennia.

The Prophet Isaiah, too, wrote of the desperation and the remarkable ugliness of that day with all the authority of an eyewitness when he wrote these words.

'... his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: ... he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.'

Isaiah chs 52 v.14 & 53 vv 2-6

What horrible suffering! What agony! The sin of the world was placed upon His shoulders that dark day: and what the brazen serpent in the wilderness had been in type (see Numbers 21 vv 5-9), He became in reality that day. Yet the most horrible of all, and that which evokes the most pity in this preacher's heart for the Master, are those words which our precious Lord uttered in those final moments upon that cruel cross of His affliction, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

This was without doubt the hardest part of His suffering. He had endured the rest, the beating, the scourging, the mocking, the plucking of His beard and the crown of thorns, with miraculous strength. But this was, of all, the most horrible, the most difficult, the most painful to bear.

Throughout all eternity, He had ever been with the Father without the slightest separation. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God' (see John ch.1 vv 1-2). Now, for the first time in all the ages past, He was separated from the Father and as the Father, who cannot look upon sin, turned His head, and our Lord felt the horrible loneliness and alienation from God that sin affords, and it killed Him. 'And Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost' (see Mark ch.15 v.37), and the earth shuddered and convulsed as its very creator died.

What have we to learn from this dreadful scene? Behold here, in darkest colours, the awful justice of God, which could be satisfied with no less a sacrifice. The Bible declares that without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin (see Hebrews ch.9 v.22). It had been this way from the dawn of time. And now it was the very Blood of God that was spilled for the redemption of His people. Think of that. Behold in brightest colours, the amazing love of Jesus, who yielded Himself up, a willing sacrifice, for the sins of His people. It was for this purpose that He came, to become not only the Son of God, but also the Lamb of God, who would bear, as the Passover Lamb, the sins of His people, just as John the Baptist declared, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (see John ch.1 v.29). That Lamb was '...the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world' (see Revelation ch.13 v.8). 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (see John ch.3 v.16). Oh praise His blessed Name forever!

Let ungodly sinners here learn what weight of vengeance shall fall upon them, if they obtain not an interest in what Jesus has done, and suffered. Just as at the first Passover the families of Israel placed the blood of the Passover lamb upon the door posts and lintels of their homes and all those in the house were thus saved from judgement, so only those in Christ will be saved from destruction. It was not enough that our ancient ancestors were Israelites, they had to be in the house with the blood applied. So it is today. Let the redeemed of the Lord here learn lessons of love, gratitude, and hatred of sin. Let them weep before the cross, while they behold mercy's streams, in streams of His precious blood.

Love, yes, the greatest love should well up in the heart of each and every one of us as we ponder the awesome love that He has for us; and with that love, deep, heartfelt gratitude. But not only that, as we contemplate the horror of our Lord's suffering, the greatest and purest hatred of sin should also well up in our hearts, for with each and every sin, He endured just that much more sorrow and suffering. If we were truly mindful of this, it would be of utmost benefit to us in our walk in holiness and chastity.

Let us now, with deepest gratitude and utmost devotion, give heartfelt thanks to our precious Redeemer and Saviour for all that He endured on our behalf, and in obedience to the Father; and sing within our hearts the words of that old hymn, 'Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all'.

The darkest scene in the history of the world yielded forth the sweetest day of all creation, for on the third day, our Lord arose triumphantly from the grave, His terrible mission accomplished once and for all. He is our eternal High Priest, and now ever liveth to make intercession for us. As we live our lives in devotion and faithfulness to Him, He is ever with us, by His Spirit, to lead, guide, and direct us unto the day of His appearing.

Let us, then, resolve to live solely and completely for the One who died for us, and give Him our unwavering obedience and devotion both now and forevermore. Amen.

'For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.'

2 Corinthians ch.5 vv 14-15