

TALMAGE SERMON

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Chicago, Nov. 9.—The supremacy of Christ in the realms of government, learning and religion is asserted by Rev. Frank De Witt Talmage in this sermon on the text Luke xxiii, 33, "And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, This is the King of the Jews." Capital punishment has been in vogue among all nations, both civilized and barbaric. But of all modes of capital punishment, whether by the hanging, or by decapitation, or slow strangulation, or by burning at the stake, the most horrible way for any criminal to die is by the crucifixion mode—that form of public execution which was practiced among the Jews. Yet we see Christ as a common criminal, hanging upon the cross and dying by the most intense and agonizing form of suffering, mental and physical.

But though Jesus Christ is dying upon the cross as a common criminal there is one vivid distinction which singles his death out from among all the crucifixions. That exception is the style of the superscription nailed above the cross. It was customary among the Jews to place above the heads of the dying a written statement descriptive of the crimes for which they were being executed. But instead of declaring that Jesus Christ was dying an ignominious death for the sin of murder, or of blasphemy, or of insurrection against the throne of Caesar, the board over the head of Christ had written upon it in three different languages this one striking sentence: "This is the King of the Jews." Even in his degradation, humiliation and death God seems to have so ordered events that the very man who condemned him to death should have acknowledged his royalty, and thus proclaimed to all the generations of all times the great purpose for which Christ was born as a babe in Bethlehem of Judaea, for which he lived as a boy in Nazareth, and for which he died upon the cross for the salvation of men.

Let me describe how the three languages—the Greek, the Latin and the Hebrew—which were united in the superscription upon the cross are symbolic of the universality of Christ's reign.

The Intellectual Realm.
Greek was the language of learning. In that realm our Divine Saviour is king—lord of the intellect, besides being ruler of the heart. He is to be the dominating power in our great universities and institutions of learning as well as in our Christian Endeavor societies and humble meeting houses in the backwoods: he is to be the companion of the scientist, like Henry Drummond, who goes forth into the great temple of nature to find "A Natural Law in the Spiritual World," as well as the companion of David Livingstone, whose greatest ambition was to tell the simple story of the nativity to the ignorant black man living among the African swamps or upon the banks of the Congo; he is to be the inspiration of Hugh Miller's geological crowbar and Agassiz's laboratory and Isaac Newton's scientific instruments and William Herschel's telescope, as well as the hope of the poor young girl dying in the springtime of youth who accepts him as "the evidence of things not seen." The superscription must be in Greek because Christ has a mission to the learned, the cultured, the refined. The Greek language has always been the symbol of culture and refinement. It is the language of the poet and sculptor and architect and musician and philosopher and statesman; it is the language of intellectuality, because in the time of Christ it was exclusively the tongue of the literati, as the French language during the nineteenth century was the court language of all Europe. So in the Greek superscription written over the cross in symbol Christ seems to say, "The gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ shall successfully appeal to the intellectual man as well as to the ignorant, to the calm, cold, carefully weighing, scientific mind as well as to the impulsive love of the little child."

But though the superscription over the cross had the sentence, "This is the King of the Jews," written in the Greek language, there are thousands and tens of thousands of infidel scoffers who continually sneer at Christ's name and at the word of God. They pretend to think that the religion of the Lord Jesus never appeals to the brain. They assert that the gospel is only a relic of the superstitious and barbaric ages, fit only for shallow, effeminate men, sentimental women and sick children. They assert that the Bread of Life is only fit for the one purpose of being rolled up into small, harmless pellets to be fed to invalids to calm their nerves when they are very sick or hopelessly dying. These scoffing infidels seem able to study every science and law, calmly and deliberately and intelligently, and yet are not able to intelligently investigate the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ. These scoffers, who refuse to read the Greek superscription over the cross are, to a great extent, in the mental condition in which the French infidel Duroc lived. One day, when he was making a bitter attack upon the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ and sneering at it as a gospel fitted only for the ignorant and superstitious, Napoleon Bonaparte turned to him and said:

"Duroc, I am much surpris'd at your statements. You seem to be an intelligent man, and yet you shut your eyes to every one of the evidences of Christianity. Though you charge Christians with being unreasonable in their beliefs, you yourself are so unreasonable that you are willing to accept any theory and believe any absurdity as long as it is not found in the Bible." Such is the mental and spiritual conditions of many of those men who will not read the Greek superscription above the cross.

The Bible Stands Every Test.
If the Bible does not satisfy the intellect, how can you account for the fact that it has commanded the admiration of the greatest thinkers of the ages? If this book, which acclaims Christ, does not bear the investigation of the mind, how was it that Sir William Jones, the greatest linguist human encyclopedia who ever lived, once said in reference to that Bible, "I have carefully and regularly perused the Scriptures and am of the opinion that this book, independent of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history and finer strains of eloquence than can be collected from all other books, no matter in what language they may have been written." If Christ's Bible does not appeal to the brain, how can you account for the fact that Thomas Carlyle, a great intellectual leader of the English speaking world, whose dyspeptic stomach made him chronically growl at everybody and everything, once declared that the book of Job was the finest prose poem ever written, or that Lord Jeffrey, the hard headed critic of the Edinburgh Review, always carried in his side pocket St. John's Apocalypse because he felt that it was a masterpiece of literature? Ah, those testimonies do not tend to prove that Christ only influences the ignorant and the mentally superstitious.

If this Bible does not appeal to the brain, how is it that science and revelation, by the statements of the Bible, are daily becoming more and more harmonized? As intelligent men, do you not know that, though the scientists have for centuries been squabbling, these differences are gradually passing away and that science and revelation are coming into closer and more harmonious relations in regard to many things whereon they formerly disagreed? It is only within a few weeks that Professor Sayce, writing on the latest archaeological discoveries, said, "In every case where we can test the Bible story by contemporaneous monuments, the authenticity of which is doubted by no one, we find it confirmed and explained, even in the minutest points." Do you not know, as intelligent men and women, that many recent discoveries of the archaeologists prove that the leaves of the Bible, some of them written 3,000 years ago, are absolutely in accord with scientific facts which are continually being revealed?

That the Bible and modern scientific statements are being more and more harmonized by recent investigations and discoveries is illustrated by an incident which happened some years ago in the city of Philadelphia while I was preaching there. If you ever have had any dealings with medical students, you know that there is proportionately more infidelity among them as a class than among any other body of young men. Most of this infidelity, I believe, is caused by the evil influences of the dissecting room. One day, when a medical professor, while lecturing upon the body, quoted the well known passage in Job, "I am escaped with the skin of my teeth," a titter of derision ran around the classroom. The college professor raised his hand for silence and said: "Tut, tut, gentlemen; there is no need for laughing. I am not a minister, nor the son of a minister, nor am I a professing Christian, but I here and now want to state that the more I study that Bible the more it appeals to my intelligence as an inspired book. I am as firmly convinced that the Bible is inspired as was the centurion convinced of the divinity of Christ, when at the foot of the cross he cried out in awe, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.' This very passage just quoted displays a knowledge which could not have been acquired by the man who wrote it in any other way than by revelation. For centuries scientists ridiculed Job's simile about the skin of the teeth. But a few years ago a microscope was invented with such powerful lens that, much to the surprise of the scientists, it was found that Job was right. Over the tooth there is a thin skin, the infinitesimal part of an inch in thickness. No body was ever able to see this skin with the naked eye, yet Job saw it in inspiration thousands of years before the microscope was invented."

The Second Superscription.
The superscription on the cross was written also in Latin. This implies that Christ will one day be the supreme ruler of the world as well as the king of the intellect and the ruler of the heart. Rome means conquest. In that one word of four letters we have the tramp of the invading legions of a Julius Caesar triumphing over the Gauls or of the Augustan hosts annexing the kingdom of a Cleopatra to the empire, or we see the gleaming spears of a Scipio driving the mighty Hannibal over the Alps and hurling him back across the seas, or we hear the huge battering rams of a Titus crashing in the gates of the Davidic capital. As England today, on account of her great navy and numerous mercantile fleets, is called the "mistress of the seas," so Rome, on account of her great armies and navies, could claim to be ruler of the seas as well as the "mistress of the world."

This homage of earthly rulers to the Heavenly King is not an allegiance which is only to be given to Christ in the dim future. It is becoming more and more universal year by year. Some

people are apt to picture the greatest of conquerors as a Sesostris or an Attila or an Alexander or a Charlemagne marching at the head of a great host, while the heavens are raining blood and the highways are paved with corpses. But an earthly conqueror's throne is nearly always short lived and is soon toppled over. Napoleon blazed and burned himself out in less than twenty years. As soon as the conqueror of the crusaders was dead a staff officer, at the command of his departed chief, rode through the camp, waving a white shroud upon the end of a long spear as he cried: "Behold, this is all that is left of the great Saladin! Behold, this is all that is left of the great Saladin!" Attila's kingdom was soon scattered and divided when the northern ruler had died as the result of a debauch.

But, though the kingdoms of earthly rulers may be soon swept away, there is a spiritual conqueror, who, for the last two millenniums, has been continually increasing the size of his temporal as well as spiritual domains. He is now striding across the five continents and is planting his foot upon the islands of the seas. The people are flocking to his standard by thousands and hundreds of thousands. What is his battle shout? Why, it is the songs of Zion being sung in all the little meeting houses all over the land. Where is his blood of carnage? It is the symbol of the blood of Christ being lifted to the lips at the holy communion. My Lord and my Christ as the conqueror whose name God hath exalted "above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things under the earth," can we not see thee? Can we not touch thee? Can we not confess thee King of kings and Lord of lords?

One night some years ago, after a day spent among the ruined palaces of Rome, I had two visions which brought before my imagination in vivid contrast the beginning and the consummation of Christ's kingdom. In one I saw the helplessness of the few Christians in that great city during the period following the crucifixion; in the other I saw in imagination the time of the millennium, when all peoples shall acclaim Christ Lord of all.

The Two Visions.

Scene the First.—I was standing in a dark Roman dungeon excavated under another dungeon. It is called Paul's dungeon. There is a little hole in the roof about two feet square. Through this little aperture the prisoners used to be lowered by ropes. Riveted into the stone wall was an iron ring, to which the helpless victim could be chained. The walls of that dungeon, even on that hot summer day, were damp and cold. As I stood there I wanted to place myself as nearly as possible in Paul's position. I bade my guide leave me and take away the light. I wanted to be alone. As the guide left the loneliness became appalling. Even the echoes of the departing footsteps seemed to make those prison walls the more awfully and hopelessly grewsome. As the light disappeared the darkness rushed in and seemed to press my eyeballs like living coals of fire into my throbbing brain. Then in imagination I thought I could see crouching by the iron ring riveted into the wall a little, old Jew. His shriveled limbs were drawn up by rheumatism, the result of his prison confinements. His weak eyes were now straining themselves to catch a glimpse of the executioner, who came nearer and nearer to the aperture above, as my guide with the lantern approached the hole. Then in imagination as my guide spoke I seemed to hear the executioner call out in a harsh, cruel voice: "Paul, Paul, come up! Caesar says thou art to die. Come up; come up!" Then the little old Jew answered in a weak though firm voice, "And now I am ready to be offered." "The vision was one of the conquest of wrong over right."

Scene the Second.—It is midnight. I am standing upon the top of the great Coliseum. Before me are crowded together 100,000 men and women, a great mass of humanity, rising tier above tier, and height above height. Yonder sits the emperor, surrounded by his chief military officers and by the members of the famous senate. There is the place reserved for the vestal virgins. Here are the rooms of the peasants and the middle classes. All the sightseers are flushed and excited. The roses in the young girls' cheeks blush even to a deeper red than the drunken flush on the faces of their intoxicated lords. As the entertainment goes on the bodies of the slain begin to accumulate. Attendants now rush in and drag the bleeding corpses out of the arena. Then the blood soaked sand is sprinkled with precious powders to allay the odor. Now an awning is drawn over the assembly to protect the nobility from the fiery rays of the eastern sun. Now the air is redolent with aromatic perfumes. This is a national holiday. Caesar is celebrating the victories of the Roman armies. Now the arena is flooded with water. The ships float in. There is a naval battle. Now the gladiators cut and slash and wrestle and die.

The Scene in the Arena.

After awhile even this sport becomes tame. For what are they waiting? They are saving the best until the last. They are now going to let loose the wild beasts upon the Christians. The twilight is coming on. Some of the Christians are bound and fastened to poles and covered with pitch and set afire to make human torches with which to light the dusk. While these flaming torches leap and splutter and play, in the center of the arena are huddled together scores of men and women who are about to die. While the merciless multitudes look on, the doomed Christians all kneel, except one old patriarch with long, white beard, who stands in their midst to lead in

prayer. Now the iron gates are swung back. With one mighty leap, a huge lion lands upon the sands. At first the flaming torches blind his eyes and compel him to blink. Then he looks around upon the 200,000 human eyes watching him. Then the starving brute suddenly sees the trembling Christians in the center of the arena. He squats. His claws begin to work convulsively. He crawls nearer and nearer to his prey. He makes one leap. There's a woman's scream. Then with savage ferocity the African monster drags off the body and begins to munch the bones.

Again the sport grows tame. The people are beginning to disperse; the human torches are going out; darkness is blotting out everything. With folded arms I turn to go down the steps, saying to myself as I go, "Is it not awful that all these Christians should have been slain for nothing; that all this blood should have been uselessly spilt?" But as I soliloquized thus a young girl touches my arm. I turn and look at her. She has a sweet face. She says, "You do not know me?" "No," I answer; "I have never seen you before." "Well," she says, "I know you. I saw you when you read my epitaph this morning in the catacombs. My father and mother were eaten in this massacre, but they are not dead. Come, let me show you something. The Coliseum at this time is deserted." But as the young girl speaks suddenly a strange light appears. The walls of the Coliseum begin to enlarge. They grow so high that they lift themselves above the clouds; they grow so wide that they are larger than two hemispheres. Then this huge Coliseum begins to fill up. Angels and archangels and all the redeemed of heaven fill the galleries. Men and women of all nationalities—white and black and yellow and brown—crowd into the seats which fill the arena. The Eskimos of the arctic are there; the black men of the tropics are there; all peoples are there. Then a musical leader takes his place in the center of the arena and lifts his baton. Suddenly all these voices swell into one great chorus as they sing:

Must Jesus bear the cross alone
And all the world go free?
No; there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me.

While that great multitude is singing I turn to my companion and say, "Who are these and whence came they?" "These," she answers, "are the hosts of heaven. Those in the arena are the members of the living human race which are bending the knee to the name of Jesus Christ. That chorus is the echo of Paul's valedictory in the dungeon. This scene was depicted in the superscription which was written over the cross and which, in the Latin language, told the Jews that Jesus was to be the temporal as well as the spiritual king." Oh, my brother and sister, as Christ is some day to rule personally over the two hemispheres, shall not you and I, by consecrated lives, try to hasten this glorious millennial day? Shall not our voices be lifted in praise, so that they shall some day find their full diapason in the song of Moses and the Lamb?

The Message of the Cross.

But the Hebrew superscription ought to be the most important to us all. It ought to be the most important because the Hebrew language has always been the symbol of God's protecting and pardoning love. The Hebrews were God's favored people. So, when we read the superscription of the cross in the Hebrew tongue, God seems to say to us as individuals, "I have sent my only begotten Son into the world that by his blood you may be pardoned of your sins and become part of my new kingdom." We might believe that Christ is the Son of God. We might even believe that some day he shall rule from sea to sea, but that belief will not make him our individual King and Saviour unless we can read our atonement in his death and his resurrection, which was by symbol written in the Hebrew inscription nailed upon the top of the cross. Can you not and will you not, by the Hebrew message, believe and accept the statement that Jesus Christ died to save you as individuals? He died to save you, oh, man, oh, woman, just as though you were the only sinner in all the universe.

By the Hebrew superscription nailed to the cross I proclaim a universal pardon and salvation for all sinners. Jesus Christ once said, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." So today I lift high the Hebrew superscription of the cross. I cry out in the words of Revelation, "The Spirit and the Bride say come, and let him that heareth say come, and let him that athirst come, and whosoever will let him come and take of the water of life freely." Sinner, today, through the atonement as proclaimed in the Hebrew superscription, will you come and worship the Christ of coming universal domain, and also the Christ who died that we might all have a part in his future rulership?

Would that we might one and all be able to interpret the three superscriptions over the cross in the way that the dying Christians tried to interpret them. The watcher by the bedside heard her mother whisper: "Bring! Bring!" The daughter said to the dying woman, "Mother, what shall I bring?" "Oh," answered the dying woman, "Bring! Bring!" Then the daughter asked again, "But, mother, what shall I bring?" "Why," cried the dying woman, "bring forth the royal diadem and crown him Lord of all." May we one and all, by the blood of Jesus Christ, which was shed for sin, crown Christ King of the heart, King of the head and King of the two hemispheres. May we crown him a King of heaven and of earth, even as the superscription over the cross declared in three different languages that Christ was the King of the Jews.

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