

THE INSTRUMENTS OF CHRIST'S PASSION

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THE INSTRUMENTS OF CHRIST'S PASSION©

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Presented in the New Orleans Baptist Seminary Chapel
with appropriate hymns and solos
1962

Prelude:

THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Psalm 22 (selected)

My God, my God, why halt 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,

Commit thyself unto the Lord;
let him deliver him;
Let him deliver him, seeing he delighteth in him.

But thou art he that took me out of the womb:
Thou didst make me trust when I was upon my mother's breasts.

Be not far from me;
for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.

They gape upon me with their mouth,
As a ravening and 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 evil-doers have enclosed 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 upon my vesture do they cast lots.

But be not thou far off, O Lord:
O Thou my succour, haste thee to help me.
I will declare thy name unto my brethren:

In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto the Lord;
And all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

A seed shall serve him;
It shall be told of the Lord unto the next generation.
They shall come and shall declare his righteousness.
Unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

Isaiah 53 (selected)
Who hath believed our report,
and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?

For he grew up before him as a tender plant,
and as a root out of a dry ground:
he hath no form nor comeliness;
and when we see him,
there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised, and rejected of men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:
and as one from whom men hide their face 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.

First:
THE SCOURGE

And Pilate, willing to content the multitude, released unto them Barabbas, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. Mark 15:15

Enter the dimly lit hall where ghostly shadows dance,
shadows of men who are shadows, not men;
shadows of cruel weapons,
shadows glancing from wall to wall –
large and fearsome --
as distorted in half-light as the wounds they inflict.

There it is, the loathsome pillar
darkened by many bleedings of malefactors,
and high up on it the horrid ring.

Greedy hands strip off his clothes.
Quickly! for they must enjoy their sport fully.
The rope slips through the ring,
the hands of Jesus fly high,

his body hangs taut.

They scourge him!
Dare we look?
Not once, but often with measured force
the wretched thongs curl round his body
'till it scarce resembles a man.
The tragic becomes the appalling.

Do they scourge because he scourged them out of their temple?
because he rebuked sterile religion and its potentates?
because he usurped the power of Rome?

No! Not for these.
They scourge because they love cruelty.
Here is their treat,
their sport,
their playtime.

They scourge because the human heart scourges.
Man speaks to God's revelation of love.
Who can measure man's endless capacity for wrong?
He sins because he loves the evil.

Hear the plaintive cries of men and women
ground under the heels of injustice,
measure the suffering of little children abused or forsaken.
Boast not of modern enlightenment:
Look about --
The tide of evil surges wide and strong.
Look within --
What man is, made Calvary.

Christ gave his life.
God enfleshed.
Wounded for our transgressions.
Bruised for our iniquities.
Himself both priest and victim.
Himself both offerer and sacrifice
for the sins of the world.

Christ also hath once suffered for sins
the just for the unjust
that he might bring us to God.

Second:
THE CROWN

The soldiers took him inside the courtyard (that is, the praetorium) and got all the regiment together; they dressed him in purple, put on his head a crown of thorns which they had plaited, and began to salute him with "Hail, O king of the Jews!" They struck him on the head with a stick and spat upon him and bent their knees to him in homage. Then, after making fun of him, they stripped off the purple, put on his own clothes, and took him away to crucify him. Mark 15: 16-20, Moffatt translation.

They tire of their vicious sport
and set aside the scourge,
but reserve their victim for more.

He suffers now to the full
not in body only

but in spirit.

How skillful is man in the art of torture
the most vicious rods are for the mind, not the body.

Here's the worn purple robe,
the dress suit of some Roman captain long since discarded
and they clothe him.
The gown befits him not in heavenly splendour
but that glory which bears the reproach of earth.

Bring as well the crown of thorns
those cruel thorns
and wind them about his head.
Crowned!
Truly crowned, the Man of sorrows.
Then with magnificent insolence
and devilish gravity
they bow the knee
"Hail! King of the Jews."

Is he a King?
No!
But He is King.
No other claims this splendour
that through suffering and death
he is crowned with glory and honor.

They would make and unmake him a king.
But he is the eternal King
of the everlasting Kingdom.

They make gods of men
and of the will of man the will of God.
But he is the will of God incarnate.

They assume prerogative over life,
to allow it, or to take it,
to crown, or to depose.
Man's impiety rises stark and fierce
against the Lord and against his anointed.
But his suffering was for us,
leaving us an example
to follow in his steps.

Third:
THE NAILS

And they bring him unto the place Golgotha,
which is, being interpreted,
The place of a skull.
And they offered him wine mingled with myrrh:
but he received it not.
And they crucify him,
and part his garments among them,
casting lots upon them,
what each should take.
And it was the third hour,
and they crucified him. Mark 15:22-25

The summit of the ragged hill is just ahead

we go no further
there is nowhere else to go
we've scaled the heights of human infamy
the deed of the heart must now become the act of the hand.

Swiftly the horror moves to its conclusion.
Rough hands stretch Jesus upon the Cross
They reach for nails from the forge of hell.
Cruel nails.
More cruel the hammer blows. O curious anomaly!
O measureless infamy.
Can this job be well done?

The awful silence speaks.
Silence reigns between hammer blows
that reverberate among the hills!
Man proclaims his pitiable liberty.
Can God restrain man?
Can God be omnipotent and man not?
This is man's hour,
man's will,
man's prerogative.
Is God omniscient?
Is God omnipotent?
Here is God, fixed to a point.
Man is omnipotent,
and declares his power.
The devil has won.

O mysterious Cross, speak to us of thy grace.
O hands of Jesus, pierced and bleeding, heal the sin of our lives.
God is victor in Christ's passion.
The Cross is God's Cross, not man's.
The cost is His, the forgiveness is ours.
Christ died for our sins.
God sent His son;
God was in Christ.

Reckoned with sinners, yet pure.
He is the only green tree amongst the stubble of our deadness.
Behold the Cross!
Behold the Lamb of God who bears away the sin of the world:

Fourth:
THE SPEAR

One of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and straightway there came out blood and water. And he that hath seen hath borne witness, and his witness is true, and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye also may believe. John 19:34-35

Nature rebels at man's iniquity.
Lowering clouds and trembling earth
signal the end of these portentous events.
His life ebbs away, but it is offered.
His life is taken, yet He gives it.

Religious people come,
men of scruples.
Though they do violence to the living embodiment of righteousness,
are constrained to treat dead bodies well.
Such deeds are for every day but not for holy days.
These strain at gnats but gulp down camels.

Death is not quick enough for them.
The Sabbath comes.
Let us be done with this business in time for Church.

With sure, quick stroke the soldier thrusts the lance
deep into the Savior's side.
Man's final act.
They join contempt to their last stroke of power.
The final anarchy seals the temper of their spirit
and the issue of their plot.
Jesus dies alone.

Lord Jesus, speak to my heart of thy passion.
He hangs for me.
He dies the death of my sin
and my death for sin.
He dies my death to sin
and I in him.
Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law,
being made a curse for us.

Lord Jesus,
lift up our trembling hands
raise up our bowed-down heads
strengthen our feeble knees
that we may come to thee.

Postlude:
FROM DEATH TO LIFE

Consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of
Sinners against himself, that you wax not weary,
Fainting in your souls. Hebrews 12:3

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him;
he hath put him to grief:

when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,
he shall see his seed,
he shall prolong his days,
and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.

He shall see of the travail of his soul,
and shall be satisfied:
by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many:
and he shall bear their iniquities. Isaiah 53:10-11

I beseech you therefore, brethren,
by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies a living sacrifice,
holy, acceptable to God,
which is your reasonable service. Romans 12:1