

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
12:27-33

27. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour. 28. Father, glorify thy name. Then a voice came from heaven *saying*, I have both glorified *it* and will glorify *it* again. 29. Therefore the people who stood by and heard *it* said that it had thundered. Others said, And angel has spoken to him. 30. Jesus answered and said, This voice did not come because of me, but for your sakes. 31. Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out. 32. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. 33. This he said, signifying by what death he would die.

27.--[*Now is my soul troubled, etc.*] This remarkable verse comes in somewhat abruptly. Yet the connection is not hard to trace. Our Lord had just been speaking of His own atoning death. The thought and prospect of that death appears to draw from Him the expressions of this verse, which I will now examine in order.

[*Now is my soul troubled.*] This sentence implies a sudden, strong mental agony, which came over our Lord, troubling, distressing, and harassing Him. What was it from? Not from the mere foresight of a painful death on the cross and the bodily suffering attending it. No doubt human nature, even when sinless, naturally revolts from pain and suffering. Yet mere bodily pain has been endured for weeks by many a martyr, and even by heathen fanatics in India, without a groan or a murmur. No! It was the weight of the world's imputed sin laid upon our Lord's head which pressed Him downward and made Him cry, "Now is my soul troubled." It was the sense of the whole burden of man's transgression imputed to Him, which, as He drew near to the cross, weighed Him down so tremendously. It was not His bodily sufferings, either anticipated or felt, but our sins which here, at Gethsemane and at Calvary, agonized and racked His soul.

Let us notice here the reality of Christ's substitution for us. He was made "a curse" for us, and sin for us, and He felt it for a time most deeply (Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21). Those who deny the doctrine of substitution, imputation, and atonement can never explain the expressions before us satisfactorily.

Poole remarks: "There is a vast difference between this trouble of spirit in Christ and that which is in us. Our troubles are upon reflection for our own sins and the wrath of God due to us therefor; His troubles were for the wrath of God due to us for our sins. Our troubles are because we have personally grieved God; His were because those given to Him had offended God. We are afraid of our eternal condemnation; He was only afraid by a natural fear of death, which naturally rises higher according to the kind of death we die. Our troubles have mixture of despair, distrust, sinful horror; there was no such thing in His trouble. Our troubles, in their natural tendency, are killing and destroying (only by accident and the wise ordering of Divine providence do they prove advantageous and lead us to

Him); His trouble, in the very nature of it, was pure, and clean, and sanative, and healing. But that He was truly troubled and that such a trouble did truly agree to His office as Mediator, and is a great foundation of peace, quiet, and satisfaction to us, is out of [beyond] question. By some of these stripes we are healed."

We should remember and admire the prayer in the Litany of the Greek Church: "By Thine unknown sufferings, good Lord, deliver us."

Rollock observes here: "If you ask me what the Divine nature in Christ was doing when He said, 'My soul is troubled,' and whether it was divided asunder from His human nature, I reply that it was not divided but contained itself, or held itself passive, while the human nature was suffering. If it had exercised itself in its full power and glory, our Lord could not possibly have suffered."

(The whole of Rollock's remarks on this difficult verse are singularly good and deserve close study.)

Hutcheson observes: "The rise and cause of this trouble was thus, the Godhead hiding itself from the humanity's sense, and the Father letting out not only an apprehension of sufferings to come but a present taste of the horror of His wrath due to man for sin. Christ was amazed, perplexed, and overwhelmed with it in His humanity. And no wonder, since He had the sins of all the elect laid upon Him, by imputation, to suffer for."

Hengstenberg remarks: "The only solution of this extreme trouble is the vicarious significance of the sufferings and death of Christ. If our chastisement was upon Him in order that we might have peace, then in Him must have been concentrated all the horror of death. He bore the sin of the world, and the wages of that sin was death. Death therefore must to Him assume its most frightful form. The physical suffering was nothing compared to the immeasurable suffering of soul which impended over the Redeemer, and the full greatness and depth of which He clearly perceives. Therefore, in Heb. 5:7, 'a fear' is described as that which pressed with such awful weight upon our Lord. When God freed Him from that, He saved Him from death. Thus, when the suffering of Christ is apprehended as vicarious and voluntary, all the accompanying circumstances can be easily understood."

Let us note the exceeding guilt and sinfulness of sin. The thing which made even God's own Son, who had power to work works that none else did beside Him, groan and cry "My soul is troubled," can be no light thing. He who would know the full measure of sin and guilt should mark attentively this verse, and the expressions used by our Lord at Gethsemane and Calvary.

It is worth noticing that there are only three places in the Gospels where our Lord speaks of "My soul"--this verse, Matt. 26:38, and Mark 14:34.

The word "now," I suspect, is emphatic: "Now, at this special time, my soul has begun to be specially troubled."

[*And what shall I say?*] These words are thought by some, as Theophylact,

Grotius, Bloomfield, and Barnes, to be wrongly translated in our English version. They would render them, "And what? What is my duty? What does the hour require of Me? Shall I say, Save Me," etc. I much prefer our English version as it is. I believe the question is strongly significant of the agony and conflict through which our Lord's soul was passing. "What shall I say under this sense of pressing, overwhelming trouble? My human nature bids me say one thing, acting alone and urging me alone. My knowledge of the purpose for which I came into the world bids me say another thing. What, then, shall I say?" Such a question as this is a strong proof of our Lord's real, true humanity.

Rollock observes: "'What shall I say?' is the language of the highest perplexity and anxiety of mind. In the height of anguish is the height of perplexity, so that a man knows not what to say or do. The Lord found deliverance in prayer. But the perpetual cry of the lost will be, 'What shall I say? What shall I do?' From that perplexity and anguish they will never be delivered."

Bengel remarks: "Jesus says, 'What shall I say?' not, 'What shall I choose?' Compare with this the different expression of St. Paul: 'What I shall choose I know not, for I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart.'"

Ecolampadius thinks the question means, "In what words shall I unfold my pain, or the bitterness and ingratitude of the Jews?" I prefer taking it as the language of perplexity and distress.

The presence of two natures in our Lord Jesus Christ's person seems clearly taught when we compare the language used by our Lord in this verse with the language of the 5th and 17th chapters of this Gospel. *Here* we see unmistakably our Lord's true humanity. *There*, on the other hand, we see no less plainly His divinity. Here He speaks as man; there as God.

[*Father, save me from this hour.*] This is undoubtedly a prayer to be saved from, or delivered from, the agony and suffering of this hour. It is the language of a human nature which, though sinless, could suffer, and instinctively shrank from suffering. It would not have been real human nature if it had not so shrunk and recoiled.

The idea of the prayer is just the same as that of the prayer in Gethsemane--"Let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39).

Let us learn from our Lord's example that there is nothing sinful in praying to be delivered from suffering, so long as we do it in submission to the will of God. There is nothing wrong in a sick person's saying, "Father, make me well," so long as the prayer is offered with proper qualification.

Rollock observes: "In agony there is a certain forgetfulness of all things except present pain. This seems the case of our Lord here. Yet even here He turns to His Father, showing that He never loses the sense of the Father's love. The lost in hell will never turn to the Father."

It is worth noticing that our Lord speaks of "the Father" and "My Father" at least 110 times in John's Gospel.

[*But for this purpose I came to this hour.*] This sentence is an elliptical way of declaring our Lord's entire submission to His Father's will, in the matter of the prayer He had just prayed. "But I know that for this cause I came into the world and have reached this hour, to suffer as I am now suffering, and to agonize as I am now agonizing. I do not refuse the cup. If it be Thy will, I am willing to drink it. Only I tell Thee my feelings, with entire submission to Thy will."

We may surely learn from the whole verse that Christians have no cause to despair because they feel trouble of soul (because they feel perplexed and know not what to say in the agony of inward conflict), because their nature shrinks from pain and cries to God to take it away. In all this there is nothing wicked or sinful. It was the expression of the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and in Him was no sin.

Rollock says: "This is the language of one recollecting himself, and collecting his thoughts to remember something besides his agony and pain."

28.--[*Father, glorify thy name.*] This passage seems the conclusion of the strife and agony of soul which came over our Lord at this particular period. It is as though He said, "I leave the matter in Thy hand, O My Father. Do what Thou seest best. Glorify Thy name and Thy attributes in Me. Do what is meet for setting forth Thy glory in the world. If it be for Thy glory that I should suffer, I am willing to suffer even unto the bearing of the world's sins."

I see in the whole event here described a short summary of what took place afterward more fully at Gethsemane. There is a remarkable parallelism at every step.

(a) Does our Lord say here, "My soul is troubled"? Just so He said in Gethsemane, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death" (Matt. 26:38).

(b) Does our Lord say here, "Father, save Me from this hour"? Just so he says in Gethsemane, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me" (Matt. 26:39).

(c) Does our Lord say here, "For this cause came I unto this hour"? Just so he says in Gethsemane, "If this cup may not pass away from Me except I drink it, Thy will be done" (Matt. 26:42).

(d) Does our Lord say, finally, "Father, glorify Thy name"? Just so our Lord says, lastly, "The cup which my Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" (John 18:11).

The brief prayer which our Lord here offers, we should remember, is the highest, greatest thing that we can ask God to do. The utmost reach of the renewed will of a believer is to be able to say always, "Father, glorify Thy name in Me. Do with Me what Thou wilt, only glorify Thy name." The

glory of God after all is the end for which all things were created. Paul's joyful hope, he told the Philippians when a prisoner at Rome, was "that in all things, by life or by death, Christ might be magnified in his body" (Philip. 1:20).

Rollock says: "This is the language of one who now forgets the agony and pain, remembers only His Father's glory, and desires it even together with His own passion and death." He also remarks that the experience of God's saints in great trouble is in a sense much the same. For a time they forget everything but present pain. By and by they rise above their sufferings and remember only God's glory.

[*Then a voice came from heaven.*] This voice was undoubtedly a great miracle. God the Father was heard speaking audibly with man's voice to the Son. Three times in our Lord's ministry this miracle took place: first, at His baptism; secondly, at His transfiguration; thirdly, just before His crucifixion. Rarely has the voice of God been heard by large crowds of unconverted men. Here, at Mount Sinai, and perhaps at our Lord's baptism, are the only three occasions on record.

Of course, we can no more explain this wonderful miracle than any other miracle in God's Word. We can only reverently believe and admire it. The intimate nearness of the Father to the Son all through His ministry is one of the many thoughts which may occur to our minds as we consider the miracle. Our Lord was never left alone. His Father was always with Him, though men knew it not. How could it be otherwise? So far as concerned His Divine nature, He and the Father were "one."

How anyone in the face of this passage can deny that the Father and the Son are two distinct Persons, it is very hard to understand. When one person is heard speaking to another, common sense seems to point out that there are two persons, and not one.

Hammond maintains that there really was a loud clap of thunder as well as a voice from heaven. Burkitt also seems to think the same and compares it to the thunder which accompanied the giving of the law at Sinai.

[*I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.*] This solemn sentence--far more solemn in the pithy and expressive Greek language than it can possibly be made in our translation--admits, as Augustine says, of being interpreted two ways.

(a) It may be applied solely and entirely to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It would then be a special declaration of the Father to the Son: "I have glorified my name in Thy incarnation, Thy miracles, Thy words, Thy works. I will yet glorify it again in Thy voluntary suffering for mankind, Thy death, Thy resurrection, and Thy ascension."

Lightfoot thinks there is a special reference to our Lord's conflict with the devil. "I have glorified my name in the victory Thou formerly did obtain over Satan's temptation in the wilderness. I will glorify my name again in the victory Thou shalt have in this conflict also."

(b) It may be applied to the whole course of God's dealings with creation from the beginning. It would then be a declaration of the Father: "I have continually glorified my name in all the dispensations which have been-- before the flood, in the days of the patriarchs, in the time of Moses, under the law, under the judges, under the kings. I will yet glorify it once more at the end of this dispensation by finishing up the types and figures, and accomplishing the work of man's redemption."

Which of these views is the true one, I cannot pretend to decide. Either makes excellent divinity and is reasonable and consistent. But we have no means of ascertaining which is correct. If I have any opinion on the point, I lean to the second view.

29.--[*Therefore the people, etc.*] This verse apparently is meant to describe the various opinions of the crowd which stood around our Lord, about the voice which spoke to Him. Some who were standing at some little distance, and were not listening very attentively said it thundered. Others who were standing close by and paying great attention declared that an invisible being, an angel, must have spoken. Both parties entirely agreed on one point: something uncommon had happened. An extraordinary noise had been heard which to some sounded like thunder and to others like words. But nobody said they heard nothing at all.

That the voice must have been very loud seems proved by the supposition that it was "thunder." That the reality and existence of angels formed part of the popular creed of the Jews seems proved by the readiness of some to take up the idea that an angel had spoken.

Some think that the Greeks before mentioned, not knowing the Hebrew language in which probably the voice spoke, fancied the voice was thunder, and the Jews of the crowd thought it an angel's voice.

30.--[*Jesus answered...but for your sakes.*] In this verse our Lord tells the Jews the purpose of this miraculous voice. It was not for His sake--to comfort Him and help Him, but for their sakes--to be a sign and a witness to them. The voice could tell Him nothing that He did not know. It was meant to show them what they did not know, or doubted. The sentence would be more literally rendered, "Not on account of Me was this voice, but on account of you." It was just one more public miraculous evidence of His Divine mission, and apparently the last that was given. The first evidence was a voice at His baptism and the last a voice just before His crucifixion.

Augustine remarks: "Here Christ shows that his voice was not to make known to Him what He already knew, but to them to whom it was meet to be made known."

31.--[*Now is the judgment of this world.*] This is undeniably a difficult saying. The difficulty lies principally in the meaning of the word "judgment."

(a) Some, as Barnes, think that it means, "This is the crisis, or most important time in the world's history." I cannot receive this. I doubt

whether the Greek word used here will ever bear the signification of our word "crisis." That our Lord's atoning death was a crisis in the world's history is undoubtedly true. But that is not the question. The question is, what do the Greek words mean?

(b) Some, as Theophylact and Euthymius, think it means, "Now is the vengeance of this world." "I will cast out him by whom the world has been enslaved." I doubt this also.

(c) Some, as Zwingle, think that "judgment" means the discrimination or separation between the believing and the unbelieving in the world. (Compare John 9:39.)

(d) Some, as Calvin, Brentius, Beza, Bucer, Hutcheson, Flacius, and Gualter, think that "judgment" means the reformation, or setting in right order of the world.

(e) Some, as Grotius, Gerhard, Poole, Toletus, and à Lapide, think "judgment" means the deliverance and setting free from bondage of this world.

(f) Some, as Pearce, think it means, "Now is the Jewish world or nation about to be judged or condemned for rejecting Me."

(g) Some, as Bengel, think it means, "Now is the judgment concerning this world, as to who is hereafter to be the rightful possessor of it."

I take it that the word we render "judgment" can only mean condemnation, and that the meaning of the sentence is this: "Now has arrived the season when a sentence of condemnation shall be passed by my death on the whole order of things which has prevailed in the world since the creation. The world shall no longer be let alone and left to the devil and the powers of darkness. I am about to spoil them of their dominion by my redeeming work, and to condemn and set aside the dark, godless order of things which has so long prevailed upon earth. It has been long winked at and tolerated by my Father. The time has come when it will be tolerated no longer. This very week, by my crucifixion, the religious systems of the world shall receive a sentence of condemnation." This seems Bullinger and Rollock's view, and I agree with it.

In order to realize the full meaning of this sentence, we must call to mind the extraordinary condition of all the world, with the exception of Palestine, before Christ's death. To an extent of which now we can form no conception, it was a world without God, plunged in idolatry, worshipping devils--in open rebellion against God. (Compare 1 Cor. 10:20.) When Christ died, this order of things received its sentence of condemnation.

Rollock says: "I understand, by this judgment, the condemnation of that sin of which the world was so full when Christ came, and which had reigned from Adam to Moses." Of this undisturbed reign of idolatry Christ's advent made an end.

Augustine, on this verse, says: "The devil kept possession of mankind,

holding men as criminals bound over to punishment by the handwriting of their sins, having dominion in the hearts of the unbelieving, dragging them, deceived and captive, to the worship of the creature for which they had deserted the Creator. But by the faith of Christ, confirmed by His death and resurrection, through His blood shed for the remission of sins, thousands of believing persons obtain deliverance from the dominion of the devil, are joined to the body of Christ, and quickened by His Spirit as faithful members under so great a Head. This it was that He called *judgment.*"

[*Now shall the prince...be cast out.*] In this remarkable sentence there can be no doubt that Satan is meant by the "prince of this world." Up to the time of our Lord's redeeming work, the entire world was in a certain sense completely under his dominion. When Christ came and died for sinners, Satan's usurped power was broken and received a deadly blow. Heathenism, idolatry, and devil-worship no longer governed all the earth, except Palestine, as they had done for four thousand years, because undisturbed. In a wonderful and mysterious manner Christ on the cross "spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them" (Col. 2:15). To this victory our Lord clearly refers. "Now in this week, by my vicarious death as man's Redeemer on the cross, Satan, the Prince of this world, shall receive a deadly blow and be dethroned from his supremacy over man and cast out. The head of the serpent shall be bruised."

Of course, our Lord did not mean that Satan would be "cast out" of this world entirely and tempt it no more. That will be done at the second advent, we know from Rev. 20; but it was not done at the first. It only means that he should be cast out of a large portion of the dominion, and power, and undisturbed authority he had hitherto exercised over men's souls. The result of the change which took place in this respect, when Christ died, is perhaps not enough considered by Christians. We probably have a very inadequate idea of the awful extent to which Satan carried his dominion over men's souls before the "kingdom of heaven" was set up. Bodily possession, familiar spirits, wizards, heathen oracles, heathen mysteries--all these are things which before the crucifixion of Christ were much more real and powerful than we suppose. And why? Because the "prince of this world" had not yet been cast out. He had a power over men's bodies and minds far greater than he has now. When Christ came to the cross, He did battle with Satan, won a victory over him, stripped him of a large portion of his authority, and cast him out of a large portion of his dominion. Does not the whole of the vision in Rev. 12:7-17 point to this? This view is supported by Lightfoot.

This sentence shows clearly the reality and power of the devil. How anyone can say there is no devil in the face of such expressions as "the prince of this world" is strange. How anyone can scoff and think lightly of a being of such mighty power is stranger still. The true Christian, however, may always take comfort in the thought that Satan is a vanquished enemy. He was stripped of a large part of his dominion at Christ's first advent. He is still "going to and fro" seeking whom he may devour, but he shall be completely bound at the second advent. (1 Pet. 5:8, Rom. 16:20, Rev. 20:2.)

The whole verse appears to me inexplicable unless we receive and hold the doctrine of Christ's death being an atonement and satisfaction for man's sin and a payment of man's debt to God. That thought underlies the deep statement here made of the mighty work about to be done by our Lord, in the week of His crucifixion, against the prince of this world. Once adopt the modern notion that Christ's death was only a beautiful example of self-sacrifice and martyrdom for truth, like that of Socrates, and you can make nothing of this verse. Hold, on the other hand, the old doctrine that Christ's death was the payment of man's debt and the redemption of man's soul from the power of sin and the devil, and the whole verse is lighted up and made comparatively clear.

Augustine observes: "The Lord in this verse was foretelling that which He knew--that after His passion and glorifying, throughout the whole world many a people would believe, within whose hearts the devil once was, whom when by faith they renounce, then is he cast out." He also says that what formerly took place in a few hearts, like those of the patriarchs and prophets, or very few individuals, is now foretold as about to take place in many a great people.

Euthymius remarks, that as the first Adam by eating of the tree was cast out of Paradise, so the second Adam by dying on the tree cast the devil out of his usurped dominion in the world.

Bucer thinks there is a latent reference to our Lord's former words about the "strong man armed keeping his house" till a stronger comes upon him and spoils him. (Luke 11:21,22.)

32.--[*And I...draw all men unto me.*] In this remarkable verse our Lord plainly points to His own crucifixion, or being lifted up on the cross. It is the same expression that He used with Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:15).

The promise, "I will draw all men unto Me," must, I think, mean that our Lord after His crucifixion would draw men of all nations and kindreds and tongues to Himself, to believe on Him and be His disciples. Once crucified, He would become a great center of attraction and draw to Himself, and release from the devil's usurped power, vast multitudes of all peoples and countries to be His servants and followers. Up to this time all the world had blindly hastened after Satan and followed him. After Christ's crucifixion great numbers would turn away from the power of Satan and become Christians.

The promise doubtless looks even further than this. It points to a time when every knee shall bow to the crucified Son of God, and every tongue confess that Jesus is the Lord. The whole world shall finally become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ.

Of course, the words must not be pressed too far. We must not think that they support the deadly heresy of universal salvation. We must not suppose them to mean that all men shall be actually saved by Christ's crucifixion any more than we must suppose that Christ actually "lights" everyone in the

world. (See John 1:9.) The analogy of other texts shows plainly that the only reasonable sense is that Christ's crucifixion would have a "drawing" influence on men of all nations, Gentiles as well as Jews. Scripture and facts under our eyes both show us that all persons are not actually drawn to Christ. Many live and die and are lost in unbelief.

The word "draw" is precisely the same that is used in John 6:44: "No man can come to Me except the Father draw him." Yet I doubt whether the meaning is precisely the same. In the one case it is the drawing of election, when the Father chooses and draws souls. In the other case it is the drawing influence which Christ exercises on laboring and heavy-laden sinners, when He draws them by His spirit to come to Him and believe. The subjects of either "drawing" are the same men and women, and the drawing in either case is irresistible. All who are drawn to believe are drawn both by the Father and the Son. Without this drawing no one would ever come to Christ.

The idea of some--that the verse may be applied to the lifting up or exalting of Christ by ministers in their *preaching*--is utterly baseless and a mere play upon words. That the preaching of Christ will always do good, more or less, and draw souls to Christ by God's blessing, is no doubt true. But it is not the doctrine of this text and ought to be dismissed as an unfair accommodation of Scriptural language.

Euthymius observes that the mission of Christ began to draw souls at once, as in the case of the penitent thief and the centurion.

33.--[*This he said...death he would die.*] This explanatory comment of St. John on our Lord's words is evidently intended to make His meaning plain. He spoke of "being lifted up" with a special reference to His being lifted up on the cross. Of course, it is just possible that the reference is to the drawing all men, and that it means, "He spoke of drawing all men, with a reference to His death being a sacrificial and atoning death, which would affect the position of all men." But I doubt this being so correct a view as the other.

"He should die" is literally, He was "about to die."

It is curious that in the face of this verse some, as Bucer and Diodati, maintain that our Lord by "being lifted up" refers to His exaltation into heaven after His resurrection. They think that then, and not till then, could He be said to "draw" men. I cannot see anything in this. Our Lord appears to me to teach plainly that after His crucifixion, and through the virtue of His crucifixion, He would draw men. That "lifting up" means crucifixion is, in my judgment, plainly taught by John 3:15.