VII.

Why Weepest Thou?

"Woman, why weepest thou?"—JOHN. xx. 13.

MARY, to whom these words were addressed, stood by the tomb of Jesus. It was a dark hour to her grief-struck heart. Hopes, long indulged, seemed forever disappointed; the fondest expectations had given place to unmingled sorrow. She had stood by the Cross of Jesus, and heard him, in preparation for his death, commit to the care of the beloved disciple her who gave him birth. This last act of filial affection, performed on the Cross itself, seemed like the dying farewell that the departing spirit leaves for those it loves.

The Lord had been crucified. The faith of his followers was shaken. The enemies of Jesus were exulting, and his friends covered with mourning. Amidst the insults of an unbridled populace he had expired; suffering that kind of punishment and death which even Roman cruelty never allowed to be inflicted upon a Roman citizen, however criminal, but reserved for the despised foreigner and the meanest slaves. Little seemed to remain but the mournful duty of rendering funeral

honors to the dead. It is a sad office to visit the tombs of those we love. Then the recollection of past endearments swells in gushing tenderness over the soul! The one who loved and cherished us is gone. Senseless beneath the sod we gaze upon, the heart that once yearned over us is still. Never again shall it swell in the fondness of its affection, or sadly throb when hurt by our unkindness. We cannot call back from the grave the loved one, to requite his kindness, to confess our follies, and atone for the errors which so often pained the living. Our tender regrets can only be acknowledged to the tomb. There we may confess our errors, may testify our penitence, may indulge our grief, and bedew with our tears the tomb of one we loved.

On such an errand of sadness and affection, Mary had gone early to the tomb. *She loved much, for she had much forgiven.* While living, Jesus Christ had witnessed the affection that she bore to him, and now he was dead she would breathe the same affection, though in sadness, by the cold rock where he slumbered, and water his tomb with her tears.

But though the friends of Jesus on earth were sad, the heavens had not forgotten him. Angels robed in white came down to the guarded sepulchre. They rolled away the stone, and Jesus Christ, the conqueror of the grave, arose.

It is a sad solace to mourn by the grave of departed friends, still, there *is* a solace in bedewing their ashes with our tears. To know they are sleeping in the quiet house, no longer disturbed by the afflictions of life, no longer distressed by the unkindness and cruelty of a thankless world, to feel that ingratitude and hatred and bitter malignity shall no more assail them, soothes at

least the poignancy of our grief, gives a calmer tenderness to the melancholy that spreads over the soul. But even this sad solace is denied to her who *came when it was yet dark to the sepulchre.* She *seeth the stone taken away*, and her affectionate pilgrimage to the grave of Jesus only enhances her grief. She announces the fact to his disciples; they visit the tomb themselves, and depart *for their own home.* But Mary still remains. She has abandoned herself to grief, and, in the forgetfulness of disappointed affection, still lingers by the lonely tomb. At this moment of sorrow, the heavenly messengers address her, *Woman, why weepest thou?* So absorbed by the thoughts of her Lord that she is unterrified by the vision and the voice of angels, she replies, *Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.* Immediately Jesus Christ himself puts the same question, *Woman, why weepest thou?* She replies, not knowing to whom she speaks, *Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him!* Jesus makes himself known to her by simply pronouncing the name, *Mary!* It was the voice of him she had known and loved, and whom she expected to find slumbering in the tomb.

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are cardinal doctrines of Christianity. Strike out these from the system, and I confess I should not value all that is left. The moral precepts would still be beautiful, but where would be their divine enforcement? the dogmas of philosophic heathenism would be able to compete with them. The disclosures of another world would still be grand, but what would prove their truth? the dreams of poetic fancy would claim an equality. The strain of its sentiments would still be interesting, but they

would interest only like a fable—what would testify their truth? And more than all, what would comfort the sinner? The soul that is burdened with guilt needs something to relieve it from its load. The heart oppressed with grief needs some solace for its sorrows. The mind, agitated and distressed with fears, cannot be comforted with uncertain conjecture. And the conscience, tormented with awful forebodings as the light of truth comes in upon its darkness, can gather secure peace from nothing save the love of Christ.

It is the high privilege, and the dearest, choicest joy of our ministry, to speak comfort to the afflicted. Standing by the tomb of the risen Saviour, we would say to all who love our Lord, and who seek him even in his deepest humiliation, *Why weepest thou?* We would comfort the distressed, soothe the fearful, encourage the timid to hope, and pour the kindness of divine compassion into the soul sorrowful for sin. There is no trouble of the afflicted soul that may not find its remedy in the love of Christ. To every weeping, despairing sinner, we may say, *Why weepest thou?*

Come, then, mourning sinner, open your heart to the consolation of the gospel? We stand here to announce to you mercy that knows no limit among men, grace that is without discrimination to the penitent, and eternal life bought by the blood of Christ. We announce to you that Saviour whose love has stilled the sighs of many a heaving bosom, and we say to you, *Whosoever cometh to him he will in no wise cast out.*

1. In spite of the darkness and ignorance that sin spreads over the human mind, there is still light enough to convince man that he is a sinner. If we examine the history of the human race, from the earliest ages and

through the darkest periods, we find the proof of this position written as with sunbeams upon its page. The most ignorant and the most enlightened; the vicious and the moral; the philosopher, moving so proudly through the halls of science, and by achievments of intellectual greatness demonstrating the greatness of the human soul, and the degraded, debased, uninstructed, almost unnoticed barbarian, whose whole efforts seemed confined to shielding his body from hunger and inclement skies; those scorched by southern suns and those chilled by northern cold; in short, all mankind, in all ages, have professed the conviction that their God was not at peace with them. We do not deny that there have been some whose individual speculations have led them to the opinion that man is not guilty, and God not displeased. But there have been no classes or societies of people whose sentiments have not been opposed to these speculations. The belief that man, that dying man, is a sinner, that the Deity, or deities, which rule over him are offended, has been the common belief of all *nations*, and is still the sentiment of all *individuals* whose native darkness has not been deepened by the follies of unfounded conjectures. Hence we find the heathen philosopher, whose studies could investigate and arrange and classify the various objects of earth, and whose scientific skill could measure the heavens, and foretell the times of the darkened sun and laboring moon; and the savage, whose mind, chained in ignorance, knows not the sublimity of its powers,—we find them equally conscious of their danger, and alike worshipping as sinners at the altar of some imagined deity. Hence we find the unequalled Cicero, whose learning and eloquence swayed haughty Rome in the days of her brightest splendor.

robed in the vestments of the high-priest, and wielding the pontific axe around the altars of his heathen deities. Hence, too, the vales of our own land have witnessed the frenzy of the Indian prophet, when, painted for the work of death, he danced wildly around his victims, and wildly howled; and its mountains have echoed the death-shrieks of that victim as he fell beneath the tomahawk. Hence the blood of the sacrifice has dyed the snows of the Esquimaux, and congealed in the frosts of Patagonia. It has moistened the sands of Africa and Arabia, has dripped from the altars of the Druid, and gushed around the senseless Juggernaut.

This common sentiment of mankind—'tis nature speaking out nature's want—this universal *conviction* of sinfulness, I am unable to regard as much less than, itself alone, positive and sufficient proof of the fact. Were it not so, would the Creator of the human soul have allowed it to be so indelibly written on the soul itself? Could a feeling, productive of so much misery, (and of no felicity, if untrue,) have been suffered by the God of goodness to take such strong hold of the mind, if there were no foundation for it in mournful fact?

But all the devices of heathen superstition have been unable to satisfy the mind that the sinner could be forgiven, and his God reconciled. The sacrifices of idolatry and ignorance could never be relied upon with unshaken confidence. Though the distressed sinner presented victims of more and more value, till, having exhausted the treasures of his wealth, he devoted to death the children of his love, still his conscience was not at peace, and nothing told him his sins were forgiven. The truth that man feels himself a sinner is not more plainly recorded in his actions, than the truth that all his at-

tempts to satisfy his conscience and satisfy his heart have been ineffectual. These attempts were only the efforts of ignorance and despair. Hope hardly smiled on them, and conscience never said, It is enough. The mistaken votary went back from the sacrifice of his children, to find his God still an enemy and his home vacant of its murdered inmates.

But the darkness and the despair of sin vanish before the light and hope of the gospel. Here we *behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.* The victim slain, when viewed in the light of unadulterated truth, is seen to be sufficient for all transgression, and the pacified conscience drinks in joy from that truth, *The blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.*

I am unable to conceive in what manner the conscience, the mind, the heart of any sinner could rest upon the atonement of a created Saviour. That idiot dream would strip me of every hope, and leave me as sad as if I mingled in heathen rites, and wept over the cold corpses of my children slain in sacrifice. I am unable to conceive how any rational mind can suppose a created being *capable* of doing any thing more than his duty to his Maker; how such a mind could ever believe that any creature of God could serve God better than his creation required, and thus not only be just himself before his Maker, but be *more* than just—bring his Creator *in debt* to him, and have a righteousness sufficient for the souls of others. If God is my Creator, he has a claim upon all I am and all I can do,—and I can never do *more* than my duty,—and, when I have saved myself, plead before God my righteousness to exculpate some less happy fellow-creature. Nor could I rest my salvation on a created arm; I should always feel inse-

cure, and I could almost as soon gather hope from the offerings of the blinded heathen, the blood of self-ordered sacrifices. And why should I not as soon rest my soul upon these as on the merits of any created being? *Both* are *creatures* of God, and I cannot understand why one, as an offering to God, should not in itself be as acceptable as the other. It is, indeed, derogatory to the Deity to suppose he is to be *worshipped* as though he needed any thing, and to suppose him propitiated by costly sacrifices of his own creations is very much like supposing him to resemble one of us. Such costly sacrifices, when furnished by ourselves, might testify how much we *desired* his favor, but, when furnished by him from his own finite creatures, are not susceptible of any explanation. It is the Deity of our Saviour that gives value to his sacrifice. It is this alone that enables me to rely upon it; and sooner than rest my hopes of forgiveness upon any created being, I would cut myself loose from such moorings, and venture on the ocean of eternity without a friend and without a Saviour. Sooner could I hope, myself, to be righteous before God, than expect another creature to be more than righteous, and God his debtor.

In the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we have every thing the heart can desire. He is the *mighty God*, the *prince of peace*, and the sinner need not fear to rest his soul in his keeping.

There are times when the heart is more than usually filled with sadness. It is one effort of the adversary to deprive the Christian of his comfort. Perhaps some poor sinner here finds the memories of his sins coming in a cloud of gloom over his soul. He thinks of their countless number, he dwells upon their high enormity,

he considers their varied character, and he asks, Can such iniquities ever be forgiven, and such a sinner saved?

Why weepest thou? The *blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. 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.* Here, then, you may find all you need; you may rest your soul upon the divinity of his sacrifice, and mingle your tears with his blood. We love to say to you, mourning sinner, that there is no limit to his mercy. But seek not your consolation by concealing your guilt. Tell over all your sins, weigh their enormity, and measure their aggravations; let the catalogue swell before you as it will, and the recollection of your guilt gather deeper sadness upon your heart. Still, *Why weepest thou?* Jesus Christ is ready to forgive. Pour your sorrows into his bosom; mingle your sighs with his groans; dry your tears by his tomb, or blend the peace of believing with the godly sorrow of the heart. Jesus Christ would not have you forget your sins; neither would he have you forget his sacrifice. Never attempt to gain consolation in any other way than by pleading guilty and praying for peace. You need not mourn in despair: *Why weepest thou? there is balm in Gilead, a physician there.*

2. But notwithstanding this fulness of forgiveness vouchsafed in the atonement of Jesus, there are times when the heart does not distinctly receive it; a cloud intervenes between the soul and the Sun of righteousness; the heavens are turned into brass, and the cries of the sinner seem to be sent back into his own bosom. Though he believes in Jesus Christ, and would seek him even at his tomb, yet a sense of his loving-kindness is

withdrawn, and, like Mary, he laments, *They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.*

If there *is* in the sorrows of human nature one feeling of sadness deeper than any other, it is simply this. This is the desertion of the soul. It is the heart robbed of its hopes; it is the lonely widowhood of the bereaved spirit, abandoned to its own sorrows. It is unlike the sadness of the desponding sinner that never hoped, never loved, and never rejoiced. It is a deeper wretchedness, a more tender agony, more cheerless distress. The joy which it has *known* and *valued* is taken away; it feels what it has *lost*, not the want of what it never had, and whose worth it never knew. I suppose it is the same kind of feeling that Jesus Christ had upon the Cross, in those hours of darkness when the sun refused its light, and when the dying Saviour, forsaken of his Father, cried, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

And if any of us find ourselves in this sorrowful condition, if we have lost the sense of the love of Christ, and seem deserted and abandoned of heaven, let us go, like Mary, to the sepulchre. No sinner ever went there to weep in vain. *Why weepest thou?* is the language of the gospel, of angels, of Jesus Christ himself, to the sinner that seeks him early at the tomb. If we keep at a distance from Jesus Christ, ashamed of the humility of discipleship, ashamed of the *nature* and recoiling from the *strictness* of the duties he enjoins, we shall find no diminution of our darkness. We may, indeed, in the delirium of the world, and the forgetfulness of heaven, chase away for a moment our gloom, but our joy will be of a deceitful character, and serve only to enhance our sadness. Like the lightning that plays upon the cloud of the midnight heavens, it will only reveal the gather-

ing terrors of the storm, and vanish, to leave us darker still. Let us, then, follow Jesus Christ, though in darkness and to the grave. *Why weepest thou?* will be the language of his mercy. And this is the high privilege of *all* who, in *any* manner, have lost the joys and consolations of their religion. You need not be always in fear and sadness. *Why weepest thou?* Jesus Christ is of tender mercy; follow him, and sorrow shall be lost in joy! *Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.*

3. But the soul that sorrows is ingenious to increase its sorrows. Its own unworthiness is often made to furnish an argument of gloom.

Those who have no doubt of the ability and readiness of Christ to save, and no doubt that he possesses a fulness of grace and consolation *now* to bestow upon the believer, often deprive themselves of every consolation by mistaking the methods of his grace. They suppose there is loving-kindness for others, but none for them. Others are more worthy than they; others do not possess a heart of so much insensibility and sin; others are very pure and nigh to God, and the joys of his love are not denied to them. But *they* are afar off! too unworthy to be noticed of heaven! They dare not approach Jesus Christ, and rest upon his mercy! But the methods of grace are forgotten when we indulge such thoughts. *Why weepest thou?* Jesus Christ does not console because we are worthy of his consolation,—because we have any goodness in ourselves to recommend us to him,—but because we cast ourselves upon him, and trust his unmerited compassion. We honor him

most when we trust in him most perfectly; and we exercise such trust when we feel our sinfulness most strongly. The sinner is never so well prepared for the exercise of consoling faith as when he finds he can do nothing. The very *feeling* of *unworthiness* which sometimes troubles the heart of the poor penitent is the only *worthiness* that Jesus requires. We are none of us worthy of the least of his mercies, and would to God that we felt it more deeply! we should not then live so far from him, and walk so carelessly before him; we should not then pray so feebly for his grace, and come so coldly to the sacramental board. God would teach every soul he deigns to bless, that his blessings are all unmerited, and what he requires of us is to know and feel that they are so. And there is no evidence of our being the real disciples of Christ better than this strong, deep feeling of our entire unworthiness of any of his mercies. If we feel ourselves worthy of him, it is certain proof that we are not so, for it shows that we are ignorant of our own nature, and have not been taught of the Holy Ghost.

And if any of you have been afflicted with the fear that Jesus Christ would show you no mercy because you were not more worthy of him, though you desire his salvation and are willing to forsake the world and follow him, let me say to you, in the language of the blessed Jesus, *Why weepest thou?* Fear not, broken spirit! there is mercy in heaven, there is tender compassion in Jesus Christ. Only live nigh to him; rest your heart upon him; carry your unworthiness and your sins to his sepulchre, and dry your tears in converse with your risen Saviour.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the joy of the

infant church. His followers, dispersed and disheartened by his death, lived to see him again in their circles, and listen to the instructions of his lips. He *rose* to give joy on earth. The first words he uttered were words of consolation. Standing by the vanquished grave robed in the spoils of death, he speaks to the waiting believer, *Why weepest thou?* He suffered not the tender bosom to heave with uncertainty. *He drieth the mourner's tears.* The earliest at the tomb was the earliest to be consoled; and she who came weeping in bitterness, retired, weeping for joy.

And think you Jesus is not still the same tender friend, the same compassionate, consoling Saviour? *Why weepest thou?* Gather all your afflictions, your fears, your distressing doubts and despondency, and bring them to the grave of Jesus, and he will say to you, *Why weepest thou?*

This affecting sympathy of the dying and of the risen Saviour is worth more than worlds. Let the joys of earth depart; let the *hopes*, even, of the world decay; let these eyes grow dim, this frame bend downward with the weight of years; let earthly friends forsake me, swept away in death and carried to the grave—but leave, oh! leave me the compassion of the blessed Jesus! These eyes, gushing with tears—this bosom, heaving with sobs—this heart, distressed with sorrows—still I will not despond while I can hear the language of Jesus, *Why weepest thou?*

It is no ordinary friend that you are called to remember. It is he who was crucified for you, and who burst from the cold, damp vault of death to speak to you in consoling accents. Honor him by confidence equal to his consolation. Distrust not his readiness to save.

Accept the comfort he offers you, and drink in the tenderness of his language, *Why weepest thou?*

Celebrate the praises of your risen Lord. Call heaven and earth to witness your gratitude. Renew your covenant with God. Come to his Table with a penitent and believing heart, and whatever may be your sins, whatever may be your sorrows, whatever fears gather in sadness over the soul, *fear not*—it is Jesus who speaks to you,—*Why weepest thou?*

My dear friends, I know this is a tearful world. Distress and fear are natural to us as the breath of life. We think of God, and are troubled. We know the cold grave will soon be our bed, and that the God we shall meet in eternity is a holy God; and not a sin of our life, of our hearts, will be kept out of sight at the judgment seat of Almighty God. But, oh! what a difference it makes to us when we see Jesus Christ going up upon the throne of judgment! With bloody side and wounded hands he sits there in judgment for us—yea, for us! If he were a creature we might tremble, but he is the *mighty God.* He knows what the redemption of a sinner demands, and he knows he has rendered it. Oh! it will be sweet for the believer to rush to the judgment seat of Christ—his best friend is on it!

And why need the believer fear to die? Jesus Christ died, and death is now a vanquished enemy. When we die, Jesus Christ will know it. *He will come again and receive us to himself.*

Then why should we stand *by the sepulchre weeping?* This ought to be a day of solemn joy in the tabernacles of the righteous. You are going to anticipate heaven You are going to meet the risen Jesus to-day. You are

going to remember his death—the redemption of sinners—and to rejoice in the open fellowship of God. Be not afraid! Old communicant and young communicant, be not afraid! Love God—love Jesus Christ. You have no other friend who loves you like the Saviour, and your fellowship in his love to-day is designed to cheer and comfort your hearts, and fit you for death and heaven. The Lord meet us at his board, and bless us; and to his name be eternal praises! Amen.