

The Sacrifice | George Herbert

*Oh all ye, who pass by, whose eyes and mind
To worldly things are sharp, but to me blind;
To me, who took eyes that I might you find:
Was ever grief like mine?*

The Princes of my people make a head 5
Against their Maker: they do wish me dead,
Who cannot wish, except I give them bread;
Was ever grief like mine?

Without me each one, who doth now me brave,
Had to this day been an Egyptian slave. 10
They use that power against me, which I gave:
Was ever grief like mine?

Mine own Apostle, who the bag did bear,
Though he had all I had, did not forbear 15
To sell me also, and to put me there:
Was ever grief like mine?

For thirty pence he did my death devise,
Who at three hundred did the ointment prize,
Not half so sweet as my sweet sacrifice: 20
Was ever grief like mine?

Therefore my soul melts, and my heart's dear treasure
Drops blood (the only beads)[†] my words to measure:
O let this cup pass, if it be thy pleasure:
Was ever grief like mine?

These drops being temper'd with sinners tears 25
A Balsam are for both the Hemispheres:[†]
Curing all wounds, but mine; all, but my fears:
Was ever grief like mine?

Yet my Disciples sleep; I cannot gain 30
One hour of watching; but their drowsy brain
Comforts not me, and doth my doctrine stain:
Was ever grief like mine?

Arise, arise, they come. Look how they run!
Alas! what haste they make to be undone!
How with their lanterns do they seek the sun! 35
Was ever grief like mine?

With clubs and staves they seek me, as a thief,
Who am the Way and Truth, the true relief;
Most true to those, who are my greatest grief: 40
Was ever grief like mine?

*Judas, dost thou betray me with a kiss?
Canst thou find hell about my lips? and miss
Of life, just at the gates of life and bliss?
Was ever grief like mine?*

See, they lay hold on me, not with the hands 45
Of faith, but fury: yet at their commands
I suffer binding, who have loos'd their bands.
Was ever grief like mine?

All my Disciples fly; fear puts a bar
Betwixt my friends and me. They leave the star, 50
That brought the wise men of the East from far.
Was ever grief like mine?

Then from one ruler to another bound
They lead me; urging, that it was not sound
What I taught: Comments would the text confound.[†] 55
Was ever grief like mine?

The Priest and rulers all false witness seek
'Gainst him, who seeks not life, but is the meek
And ready Paschal Lamb of this great week: 60
Was ever grief like mine?

Then they accuse me of great blasphemy,
That I did thrust into the Deity,
Who never thought that any robbery:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

Some said, that I the Temple to the floor 65
In three days raz'd, and raised as before.
Why, he that built the world can do much more:
Was ever grief like mine?

Then they condemn me all with that same breath,
Which I do give them daily, unto death. 70
Thus *Adam* my first breathing rendereth:
Was ever grief like mine?

They bind, and lead me unto *Herod*: he
Sends me to *Pilate*. This makes them agree;[†]
But yet their friendship is my enmity: 75
Was ever grief like mine?

[†]22 *the only beads*: The beads that Christ used to count his prayers were drops of his own blood.

[†]26 *both the Hemispheres*: the whole world

[†]55 *Comments would the text confound*: The opponents of Christ insist that his teachings undermine the Scriptures.

[†]63 *never thought that any robbery*: Philippians 2:6: "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped."

[†]74 *This makes them agree*: Luke 23:12: "That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies."

Herod and all his bands do set me light,[†]
Who teach all hands to war, fingers to fight,[†]
And only am the Lord of Hosts and might:
Was ever grief like mine? 80

Herod in judgment sits, while I do stand;
Examines me with a censorious hand:
I him obey, who all things else command:
Was ever grief like mine?

The *Jews* accuse me with dispitifulness;
And vying malice with my gentleness,
Pick quarrels with their only happiness:
Was ever grief like mine? 85

I answer nothing, but with patience prove[†]
If stony hearts will melt with gentle love. 90
But who does hawk at eagles with a dove?[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

My silence rather doth augment their cry;
My dove doth back into my bosom fly,
Because the raging waters still are high:[†]
Was ever grief like mine? 95

Hark how they cry aloud still, *Crucify:*
It is not fit he live a day, they cry,
Who cannot live less then eternally:
Was ever grief like mine? 100

Pilate, a stranger, holdeth off; but they,
Mine own dear people, cry, *Away, away*,
With noises confused frightening the day:
Was ever grief like mine?

Yet still they shout, and cry, and stop their ears, 105
Putting my life among their sins and fears,
And therefore wish *my blood on them and theirs:*
Was ever grief like mine?

See how spite cankers things. These words aright
Used, and wished, are the whole worlds light: 110
But honey is their gall, brightness their night:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

They choose a murderer,[†] and all agree
In him to do themselves a courtesy:
For it was their own case who killed me: 115
Was ever grief like mine?

And a seditious murderer he was:
But I the Prince of peace; peace that doth pass
All understanding, more than heav'n doth glass:[†]
Was ever grief like mine? 120

Why, Caesar is their only King, not I:
He clave the stony rock, when they were dry;[†]
But surely not their hearts, as I well try:
Was ever grief like mine?

Ah! how they scourge me! yet my tenderness 125
Doubles each lash: and yet their bitterness
Winds up my grief to a mysteriousness:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

They buffet him, and box him as they list,[†]
Who grasps the earth and heaven with his fist, 130
And never yet, whom he would punish, miss'd:
Was ever grief like mine?

Behold, they spit on me in scornful wise,
Who by my spittle gave the blind man eyes,
Leaving his blindness to my enemies: 135
Was ever grief like mine?

My face they cover, though it be divine.
As *Moses'* face was veiled, so is mine,
Lest on their double-dark souls either shine:
Was ever grief like mine? 140

Servants and abjects flout me; they are witty:
Now prophesy who strikes thee, is their ditty.
So they in me deny themselves all pity:
Was ever grief like mine?

And now I am deliver'd unto death,
Which each one calls for so with utmost breath, 145
That he before me well nigh suffereth:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

[†]77 *do set me light*: They do not think Christ is powerful.

[†]78 *fingers to fight*: Psalm 144:1: "Praise be to the LORD my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle."

[†]89 *prove*: test, to find out if something is true

[†]91 *hawk at eagles with a dove*: Who would use a dove as a hunting bird to capture an eagle? The dove is a symbol of peace and love.

[†]95 *the raging waters still are high*: Christ's *dove* (mentioned in the previous stanza), like that of Noah, returns to him because it has no safe place to land.

[†]109–111 *These words etc*: In the previous stanza, the Jews say, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!" (Matt 27:25). *These words*, when used rightly, speak of salvation and grace; the intent of the crowd, however, brings condemnation on themselves.

[†]113 *a murderer*: Barabbas

[†]119 *more than heav'n doth glass*: The Prince of Peace brings peace that transcends all bounds.

[†]122 *He clave etc*: Jesus rebukes the Jews with irony: it is he himself, not Caesar, who gave them water in the wilderness.

[†]127 *Winds up my grief to a mysteriousness*: Each stroke from the soldiers is as two strokes, because Christ is so tender, and the bitterness of the soldiers multiplies Christ's grief beyond comprehension.

[†]129 *as they list*: as they wish

[†]146 *That he before me well nigh suffereth*: Those who call for Christ's death do so with such vehemence that it seems they may die before he does.

Weep not, dear friends, since I for both have wept
When all my tears were blood, the while you slept: 150
Your tears for your own fortunes should be kept:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

The soldiers lead me to the common hall;
There they deride me, they abuse me all:
Yet for twelve heav'nly legions I could call: 155
Was ever grief like mine?

Then with a scarlet robe they me array;
Which shows my blood to be the only way
And cordial left to repair mans decay: 160
Was ever grief like mine?

Then on my head a crown of thorns I wear:
For these are all the grapes *Sion* doth bear,
Though I my vine planted and watered there:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

So sits the earth's great curse in Adam's fall[†] 165
Upon my head: so I remove it all
From th' earth unto my brows, and bear the thrall:
Was ever grief like mine?

Then with the reed they gave to me before,
They strike my head, the rock from thence all store 170
Of heav'nly blessings issue evermore:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

They bow their knees to me, and cry, *Hail king*:
What ever scoffs or scornfulness can bring,
I am the floor, the sink, where they it fling: 175
Was ever grief like mine?

Yet since man's scepters are as frail as reeds,
And thorny all their crowns, bloody their weeds;
I, who am Truth, turn into truth their deeds: 180
Was ever grief like mine?

The soldiers also spit upon that face,
Which Angels did desire to have the grace,
And Prophets, once to see,[†] but found no place:
Was ever grief like mine?

[†]151 *Your tears for your own etc*: Luke 23:28: "Jesus turned and said to them, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.'"

[†]162–163 *For these are all the grapes etc*: God often speaks of Israel as a garden that he is cultivating. Instead of grapes, Israel has produced (a crown of) thorns.

[†]165 *the earth's great curse in Adam's fall*: Part of the curse following Adam's sin was the growth of thorns and thistles (Gen 3:18). In this stanza, Christ bearing the thorns on his head pictures his taking the entirety of the curse upon himself.

[†]170–171 *the rock from thence etc*: The beating of Christ releases blessing, as the striking of the rock in the wilderness released the water.

[†]182 *Which Angels did desire...And Prophets*: 1 Peter 1:10–12: "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace

Thus trimmed, forth they bring me to the rout, 185
Who *Crucify him*, cry with one strong shout.
God holds his peace at man, and man cries out:
Was ever grief like mine?

They lead me in once more, and putting then
Mine own clothes on, they lead me out again. 190
Whom devils fly, thus is he toss'd of men:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

And now weary of sport, glad to engross
All spite in one, counting my life their loss,
They carry me to my most bitter cross: 195
Was ever grief like mine?

My cross I bear my self until I faint:
Then Simon bears it for me by constraint,
The decreed burden of each mortal Saint:[†]
Was ever grief like mine? 200

O all ye who pass by, behold and see,[†]
Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree;[†]
The tree of life to all, but only me:
Was ever grief like mine?

Lo, here I hang, charg'd with a world of sin, 205
The greater world o' th' two; for that came in
By words, but this by sorrow I must win:
Was ever grief like mine?

Such sorrow as, if sinful man could feel,
Or feel his part, he would not cease to kneel. 210
Till all were melted, though he were all steel:
Was ever grief like mine?

But, *O my God, my God!* why leav'st thou me,
The son, in whom thou dost delight to be?
My God, my God————— 215
Never was grief like mine.

that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care.... Even angels long to look into these things."

[†]191 *Whom devils fly etc*: Christ makes demons flee, and yet he himself is ordered around by mere men.

[†]199 *The decreed burden*: Jesus commands all of his followers to take up the cross.

[†]197 *O all ye who pass by etc*: Both here and line 1 of the poem echo Lamentations 1:12: "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look around and see. Is any suffering like my suffering that was inflicted on me, that the LORD brought on me in the day of his fierce anger?"

[†]198 *Man stole the fruit, but I must climb the tree*: Although Adam sinned in taking the fruit from the tree, it is Christ who takes the curse of being hung on a tree (Deut 21:23; Gal 3:13).

Shame tears my soul, my body many a wound;
Sharp nails pierce this, but sharper that confound;
Reproaches, which are free, while I am bound.
Was ever grief like mine? 220

Now heal thy self, Physician; now come down.
Alas! I did so,[†] when I left my crown
And father's smile for you, to feel his frown:
Was ever grief like mine?

In healing not my self, there doth consist 225
All that salvation, which ye now resist;
Your safety in my sickness doth subsist:
Was ever grief like mine?

Betwixt two thieves I spend my utmost breath,
As he that for some robbery suffereth. 230
Alas! what have I stolen from you? Death.
Was ever grief like mine?

A king my title is, prefixt on high;
Yet by my subjects am condemn'd to die
A servile death in servile company: 235
Was ever grief like mine?

They give me vinegar mingled with gall,
But more with malice: yet, when they did call,
With Manna, Angels' food, I fed them all:
Was ever grief like mine? 240

They part my garments, and by lot dispose
My coat, the type of love, which once cur'd those
Who sought for help,[†] never malicious foes:
Was ever grief like mine?

Nay, after death their spite shall further go; 245
For they will pierce my side, I full well know;
That as sin came, so Sacraments might flow:[†]
Was ever grief like mine?

But now I die; now all is finished.
My woe, man's weal:[†] and now I bow my head. 250
Only let others say, when I am dead,
Never was grief like mine.

[†]222 *I did so*: Jesus did *come down*, in his incarnation and suffering.

[†]242–243 *My coat...which one cur'd*: A reference to the woman healed of her bleeding by touching Jesus's coat (Matt 9:20–22 and parallels).

[†]247 *so Sacraments might flow*: From Christ's pierced side flowed blood and water; Herbert sees these as picturing the Lord's Table and baptism, respectively.

[†]250 *weal*: good, or benefit