

Title: The Gospel According to Marmeladov

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In chapter 2 of *Crime and Punishment*, Marmeladov recounts the woeful prehistory of his impoverished family, the sufferings of his daughter Sonya, and his own baseness, depravity, and crimes. The sordid contents of his confession clash with its lofty, ornate style, replete with rhetorical flourishes and biblical quotations and allusions. Most of the latter relate to Jesus Christ (the divine “Word ...made flesh” [John 1:14]) and His doctrine of selfless love, compassion, forgiveness, and redemption. These biblical references commence with the phrase “Behold the man!”—Pilate’s words while judging the innocent Jesus (John 19:5), which Marmeladov ironically applies to himself, highlighting his own culpability. His speech culminates in a vision of the Last Judgment prophesying that Jesus will forgive and save not just Sonya but also her most unworthy father. This is Marmeladov’s version of the Gospel—the proclamation of redemption brought by the Word which is the central content of Christian revelation.

That selfsame Word is clearly yet unobtrusively manifested in Marmeladov’s plain, unadorned account of Sonya’s self-sacrificial deeds. Her actions reveal her to be what the apostle James called a “doer of the word” (James 1:22), in contrast to her father, who merely preaches it. The Word proclaimed by Marmeladov and bodied forth by Sonya directly opposes Raskolnikov’s “own new word” (mentioned in passing in chapter 1)—the godless ideas justifying his brutal murder of Alyona Ivanovna. The demise of Raskolnikov’s “new word” is foreshadowed here, as Dostoevsky plants the seeds of his protagonist’s ultimate salvation.

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