

## Taking Up the Cross

Andrew Murray:

When the Lord told his disciples that they must take up the cross to follow him, they could have little understanding of his meaning. He wished to rouse them to earnest thought and so prepare them for the time when they should see him carrying his cross. From the Jordan, where he had presented himself to be baptised and reckoned among sinners, onward, he carried the cross always in his heart. That is to say, he was always conscious that the sentence of death, because of sin, rested on him, and that he must bear it to the uttermost. As the disciples thought on this and wondered what he meant by it, one thing only helped them - it was the thought of a man who was sentenced to death, and carried his cross to the appointed place.

Christ had said at the same time: 'He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it' (Matt. 10.39). He taught them that they must hate their own life. Their nature was so sinful that nothing less than death could meet their need; it deserved nothing less than death. So the conviction gradually dawned upon them that the taking up of the cross meant: 'I am to feel that my life is under sentence of death, and that under the consciousness of this sentence I must constantly surrender my flesh, my sinful nature, to death.' So they were slowly prepared to see later on that the cross which Christ had carried was the one power to deliver truly from sin, and that they must first receive from him the true cross spirit. They must learn from him what self-humiliation in their weakness and unworthiness was to mean; what the obedience was which crucified their own will in all things, in the greatest as well as in the least; what the self-denial was which did not seek to please the flesh or the world. 'Take thy cross and follow me' (see Matt. 16.24; Mark 8.34; 10.21; Luke 9.23) - that was the word with which Jesus prepared his disciples for the great thought that his mind and disposition might become theirs, that his cross might in very deed become their own.

### Crucified with Christ

The lesson which the Lord wished his disciples to learn from his statement concerning the taking up of the cross and the losing of their life finds its expression in the words of Paul, after Christ had died on the cross and had been exalted on high, and the Spirit had been poured out. Paul says: 'I am crucified with Christ'; 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world' (Gal. 2.20; 6.14). He wished every believer to live so as to prove that he was crucified with Christ. He wished us to understand that the Christ who comes to dwell in our hearts is the crucified Christ, who will himself, through his life, impart to us the true mind of the cross. He tells us that 'our old man is crucified with him' (Rom. 6.6). Yea, more, that 'they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh' (Gal. 5.24). When they received by faith the crucified Christ, they gave over the flesh to the death sentence which was executed to the full on Calvary. Paul says 'we have been planted together in the likeness of his death' (Rom. 6.5), and that therefore we must reckon that we are dead to sin in Christ Jesus.

These words of the Holy Spirit, through Paul, teach us that we must abide constantly in the fellowship of the cross, in fellowship with the crucified and living Lord Jesus. It is the soul that lives ever under the cover and shelter and deliverance of the cross that alone can expect constantly to glory in Christ Jesus and in his abiding nearness.

### The fellowship of the cross

There are many who place their hope for salvation in the redemption of the cross who understand little about the fellowship of the cross. They rely on what the cross has purchased for them, on forgiveness of sin and peace with God; but they can often live for a length of time without fellowship with the Lord himself. They do not know what it means to strive every day after heart communion with the crucified Lord as he is seen in heaven - 'A Lamb in the midst of the throne'. Oh, that this vision might exercise its spiritual power upon us, that we might really experience every day that as truly as the Lamb is seen there on the throne, so we may have the power and experience of his presence here!

Is it possible? Without doubt it is. Why did that great miracle happen, and why was the Holy Spirit given from heaven, if it were not to make the glorified Jesus - 'the Lamb standing, as slain, in the midst of the throne' - present with us here in our earthly surroundings? Let us endeavour to make this more plain in our further meditations.