

(Cross of Christ) 2. UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

A.B. Simpson:

"This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19).

This inscription placed by the hands of the Master over the Feast of Love might well be made the watchword of our whole Christian life. The Lord's Supper is a sort of microcosm, or miniature, of the believer's life, and over every moment, every word and every action we may well inscribe, "Do this in remembrance of me."

After good Archbishop Darboy had been murdered by the Paris Communists, they found upon the walls of his dungeon the sketch of a rude cross, with these four words marking its extreme dimensions: height, depth, length, breadth. To his devout spirit the cross seemed to measure the love of God and the grace of Christ in its height and depth and length and breadth.

The arms of that cross are wide enough to cover every need and every experience of our daily lives. Its foundations are deeper than our deepest sorrows, and our loftiest heights of rapture can never reach above its heavenly altitude. It is God's measure not only of His love, but of our lives.

The medieval saints used to erect, in the center of the market square of every town, a simple cross, so that it came to be known as the Market Cross; and it may still be seen in many of the older towns of Europe. The simple and beautiful idea was that the cross should dominate all the business of earthly life, and that all transactions, interests and concerns should ever be under that shadow of the cross.

"Under the shadow of the cross" -- how much this phrase suggests of sweetness, sacredness and practical consecration. Perhaps you are wearing a gilded cross upon your bosom, dear sister. Does the heart that throbs beneath it beat true to its holy meaning? Are the words that come from that throat, whose necklace is clasped by the symbol of His gentleness and suffering, in keeping with the cross you love to wear? Are the habiliments of your person and the habits of your life suggestive of Him whose only marks of honor were the thorn rents, the spear gash and the blood drops of agony on Calvary?

Let us contemplate the cross in its practical relation to our actual Christian life.

Refuge for the Sinner

When the sinner comes to the deep and awful sense of his guilt and peril, what refuge can he find apart from the cross of Calvary? "Thus far did I come, laden with my sin," wrote Bunyan, telling the story of the sinner's refuge. Then as the strings broke and the burdens rolled away, there came the joyful song of praise,

"Blest Cross! Blest Sepulcher! blest rather be
The Man that there was put to shame for me."

Refuge for the Tempted

When temptation comes and the newborn soul has found its first stumbling stone, what can bring deliverance and victory but the cross of Calvary? And oh, what new light comes as the soul begins to fully realize that Christ has purchased for it not merely a brief reprieve or a new probation, but a complete and everlasting vindication. Our sins have not only been forgiven, but obliterated; in fact, they have ceased to be our sins and have been assumed by the great Sin Bearer, and we are henceforth as free from liability for them as if we had never sinned! In the death of Calvary we have died, and we stand before the judgment and the high court of heaven in the position of those who have paid the full penalty for sin already and who, looking up in the face of heaven, can say, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God" (Romans 8:33,34).

Salvation from the Effects of Sin

Sometimes our past comes back again like great ocean billows threatening to overwhelm us. It is then that the cross rises as a mighty barrier and breakwater, even as rocks resist the billows around their shores, and we find that instead of reaping the harvest of our evil sowing, there is One that has reaped the wretched issue for us and we are free. We do not have to pass through the processes of natural law or pay the full penalty which sin exacts in the present life; but we may claim complete deliverance from the wreck of body and brain, and from temporal conditions which might justly have been our heritage, and go forth into a life as glorious and free as if we had just dropped from heaven, the new creation of infinite love.

Sanctification through the Cross

When we come to the great conflict with inbred sin we find once more that the cross has made provision not only for our justification but also for our sanctification. We do not have to fight alone the demon of depravity in our own hearts or slowly build up out of the wreckage of the past a holy character. But we find that the old man, as well as the old deeds, was crucified with Him, and that it is our privilege to lay off the nature of self and sin and put on the very nature and life of Christ Himself "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). And as the process of grace goes deeper and reveals to us yet undiscovered depths of corruption, we shall find that the cross is deeper still and that with every new revelation we may continue to put off "the old man with his deeds and ... put on the new man" in a loftier resurrection life, as step by step we come to "know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his suffering, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10).

Healing through the Cross

Still further we slowly learn that the shadow of that cross touches our mortal frame, that our very bodies have been redeemed, that our liability to sickness because of sin has been canceled by His death, that we may lay over our sicknesses and infirmities upon Him who bore them, and that we may take His resurrection life for every physical need of this mortal frame. "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" (Isa. 53:5).

Fellowship with His Cross

Much of our life contains suffering and trial and the shadow of the cross is also here. Looking upon our trials as unmeaning accidents, the blow of fate, the luck of evil fortune, or the cruel wrongs of men and women is so different from taking them from our Father's hand as the cup of His loving discipline and as the fellowship of our Savior's cross! How we have striven sometimes with some tremendous sorrow, and have refused to bow our head as it grew darker and more dreadful and as the iron of despair entered our nerveless soul. Then at last a sweet message from the heart of God the Comforter has breathed the prayer of faith and submission, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" How the clouds melted away, and like a benediction there have fallen upon our hearts the precious words, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). And again the echo has fallen upon our ears, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (2 Peter 4:12,13).

Ah, but you say, "People caused my sufferings." Well, did not people cause His? And that is the very thing which makes your fellowship with His cross complete. But again I hear you say, "Yes, but I am innocent of the things they say; I am misrepresented, lied about and persecuted." Was not that the very glory of His cross? Are you going to throw back on Him the burden which He has left for you to share? Yes, it is true that we may "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ... for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1:24). You can never share the wrath of God for sin; that He bore alone. But He has left for you to carry with Him, "the fellowship of his sufferings." An old legend tells us that when He met Simon Peter fleeing from Rome to escape the fiery wrath of Nero, He asked him, "Whither goest thou?" Peter frankly answered and told of his flight, and then asked in turn, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" The answer came, "I am going to Rome to be crucified a second time, because My disciple Peter has run away from his cross." It is no wonder that Peter turned back from his flight and hastened with downward head to follow his dying Lord. Let us also return and follow the Crucified.

Must Jesus bear the cross alone?

And all the world go free?

No, there's a cross for every one,

And there's a cross for me.

But it will cease to be a cross when we are sweetly conscious that He is bearing the other end, and that we are suffering with Him now and shall yet be glorified together.

Beloved, surely we may say, as we think of all these things, "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. 6:14).

The cross, it takes our guilt away,
It holds the fainting spirit up;
It cheers with hope the gloomy day
And sweetens every bitter cup.

The balm of life, the cure of woe,
The measure and the pledge of love,
The sinner's refuge here below,
The angels' theme in heaven above.

Our Attitude to Others through the Cross

The cross is also practical and powerful in its influence upon our ministry for others, our relation to the world and our work for God. How differently we would think, speak and judge concerning our fellow Christians if we lived more under the shadow of the cross. A Christian lady once asked, "How can I be delivered from the spirit of censorious judging and severe speaking of the faults of others?" In that moment came to me a revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ bearing the sins of others and taking them upon Himself. For us then to put our hands upon them is really to crucify Him afresh and demand that He should suffer again for the things that He has already borne. The revelation was so unspeakably vivid that it came almost like a shock and whatever effect this truth may have had upon the heart and life of the friend in question, the writer will never forget the awful light in which it seemed to place the sin of uncharitableness, censoriousness and evil speaking. Is not this covered by such texts as this, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?... Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." Beloved, let us think and speak and love henceforth under the shadow of the cross.

Our Attitude to the World through the Cross

The apostle declares that through the cross he has been crucified unto the world and the world unto him. Is this true of us? Do we look upon this world as the enemy that murdered our Lord? Can we join hands with it in its Christless pleasures and godless ambitions any more than a sister could dance with the ruffian that had murdered her brother? The world crucified our Christ and to us henceforth it must be recognized as our foe. Indeed, by the death of Christ we have died to the world and are counted as men that have passed out of it and then come back to it in a second life as God's sent ones, commissioned to represent the Master here. We cannot do this if we stoop to the world's level. It is from our heavenly place of identity with Him that we may expect to lift it to the higher level.

The cross in the market place! Oh, what a difference it would make if the cross of Calvary dominated all our business dealings, all our social amusements, all our pleasures and all our plans! Avarice would not dare claim its graft. Pleasure would blush in its mad revel before that vision of Him who came not to seek enjoyment or gain, but rather to lay down His rights and give up His very life, not only as an example of righteousness, but as a sacrifice of love.

The Cross -- the Inspiration of Zeal and Sacrifice

And oh, how poor our sacrifices and services for our Master and our fellow-men appear under the shadow of the cross! "He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:15). The cross is the only inspiration of true benevolence, sacrifice and zeal for the salvation of men and the salvation of the world. If its mark has been placed upon us, then we are not our own; we are bought with a price, and all we are and have belongs to Him, and the great sacrifice is little to give to Him.

A contemporary journal stated that during the last winter of the war in Manchuria the Japanese emperor, learning of the sufferings of his soldiers from the awful rigors of the Russian winter, was so distressed that he refused to allow the fires to be lighted in his palace and he spent that winter in fellowship with the sufferings of his heroic army. Such was the spirit of Jesus when our race was in peril. Heaven could be to Him no longer heaven, but down from the seats of glory He hastened to share our sin and save our world. Oh, surely, we might watch with Him one hour, and count it joy to share the fellowship of His love by sacrifice and service for the salvation of men! Are we doing this? Has the cross put its mark upon our ministry, upon our gifts, upon our personal labors for Him and for the perishing around us and the heathen in more distant lands? Well may we cry when we think of such love:

Oh, for a passionate passion for souls!
Oh, for the pity that yearns!
Oh, for the love that loves unto death!

(Cross of Christ) 2. UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS

Oh, for the fire that burns!
No Cross, No Crown

What significance will the cross have in connection with the crown? Beloved, if anything is true, this is true, that there will be nothing in heaven that does not have the mark of the cross upon it and has not passed through death and resurrection. Even the very earth and heavens must pass away, and a new heaven and a new earth emerge. There shall be no joy, there shall be no glory, there shall be no crown for us there that did not come from some surrender, some sacrifice, some renunciation, some crucifixion here. God help us, therefore, to stamp upon all our life below and our crown above the passion sign of the cross.