

A Procession of Cross-bearers

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true discipleship requires faithfully carrying one's personal cross, embracing suffering and sacrifice as essential to following Christ and ultimately receiving the crown of glory.

Scripture: Mark 10:21, Revelation 14:4, 2 Timothy 2:12, Psalm 91:11, Isaiah 40:31, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Hebrews 13:5, Psalm 18:34

Topics: "Discipleship", "Suffering", "Faithfulness"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon vividly portrays the Christian life as a procession of cross-bearers following Christ. He emphasizes that every believer is called to carry their unique cross, embracing trials and sacrifices as essential to true discipleship. Spurgeon encourages believers to bear their crosses patiently and faithfully, trusting in God's sustaining promises and the eternal crown that awaits. This sermon challenges Christians to surrender fully to Christ and find joy in faithful endurance.

Transcript

"Take up the cross, and follow Me." Mark 10:21.

YOUR mind's eye can see that procession yonder. Notice it carefully. At the head of it there walks One whom we rightly call Master and Lord. You may know Him by the prints of the nails in His hands and feet. I observe that He carries a Cross and that it is a very heavy one. Do you see the long line following Him? They are all those of whom the world was not worthy. That line has been continued even to this day and will be continued until the present dispensation shall close. As you watch these different followers of Christ in the procession, one thing will strike you—however much they differ in some respects, they are all alike in one thing—every one of them carries a cross. There is no exception to this rule! From the Master down to the last disciple, it is a procession of cross-bearers. The day will come when there will be a transformation scene and you will see all these cross-bearers transformed into crown-wearers! But, rest assured that the old motto, "No cross, no crown," is certainly true and those who refuse to carry the cross after Christ on earth shall never be permitted to wear the crown with Christ in the land that is beyond the stars.

The chief business of a Christian is to follow Christ. You may sum up all his life in that expression. He has Christ in him, Christ gives him new life from day to day and the very way in which that life expends its force is in the following of Christ. I would, dear Friends, that you and I would aim at so following Him as to gain a distinction for the closeness of our walk—for there are some in Heaven of whom it is written, "These are

they which follow the Lamb wherever He goes." There are some who seem to follow Him but partially. There are many wanderings and many inconsistencies in their life, but thrice blessed shall he be who, like Caleb, follows the Lord fully and with purpose of heart puts his foot down in the very footprints of his crucified Lord! If you are a disciple of Jesus, your chief business is to follow Jesus. But there are difficulties in the way and these difficulties are what is meant by "the cross." There are difficulties in the way of making a profession of faith in Jesus and of walking worthy of it. And these difficulties are a burden too heavy for flesh and blood to carry. Only Divine Grace can enable us to take it up—and when we do take it up, we are fulfilling the words of the text, "Take up the cross, and follow Me."

I am going to urge you to ask yourselves, each one, first, "What is my cross?" Secondly, "What shall I do with it?" And, thirdly, "What should encourage me to do so?"

I. First, then, WHAT IS MY CROSS?

I have said that the meaning of the cross is, principally, that which is involved by difficulties in following Christ. To some, the cross they will have to carry, if they become Christians, is that of reproach and rebuke for Christ's sake. Perhaps they have relatives who hate all true religion so that if they should profess to be converted, they would be sneered at, ridiculed and misrepresented. All their action would be twisted to mischievous ends and motives would be imputed to them which they, themselves, abhor. It is very hard for young people, especially in ungodly families, to dare to call themselves followers of the Crucified! Nor is it easy for a working man, in the workshop, to bear that perpetual "chaffing," as his companions call it, which they delight to inflict on those who are better than themselves. The same kind of thing takes place in other classes of society, though it is not generally done quite so overtly. There is the cold shoulder, there are suggestive hints and innuendoes and there are avoidances of the company of those who come out decidedly on the Lord's side. Some of you do not know much about this style of treatment. You were dandled on the lap of ease in this respect, for your parents rejoiced over you when you were converted and all your Christian acquaintances

kept high holiday, as it were, when they heard that you had decided to be a follower of Jesus! I wonder whether you would have been quite as firm as we might have wished if your first speech upon religious matters had been met with an oath, or if some brutal father had proceeded yet further and uttered horrible threats against you? There is many a child who has had to bear all that. Or if you had had a coarse, drunken husband who hated the very name of Jesus, I wonder whether you would have been able to bear it, as I have known some good women do from year to year, enduring a lifelong martyrdom for the sake of Jesus Christ? Now, dear Friend, whoever you may be, if anybody will sneer at you, or think the less of you, or say hard things about you because you become a Christian, that is your cross, and Christ says to you, in our text, "Take up the cross, and follow Me."

Sometimes the cross comes in another shape. A man is converted to God and he then discovers that his position in life is not one which a Christian ought to hold—certainly not one in which piety is likely to flourish. This case often comes under my notice. A man often comes to me and he says, "Sir, I trust I love the Lord. I am at the Tabernacle as often as possible, but I am sorry to say that I have half a dozen girls behind the bar serving drinks to people and I cannot bear the thought of it. It is a trade that I cannot now endure and I must get out of it." Often has this difficulty come before me and I have been gratified when I have seen men who have loved the Lord so much that they have said, "This business must no longer be carried on by me. I love my Lord too much for that. How can I bow my knee to Him and ask His blessing on such a business as this?" And they have escaped from it as fast as they possibly could! And there are

many positions into which a man may get in trade in which he becomes entangled in evil. If he were quite free, he could do the right and straightforward thing, but his partner, perhaps, will do the opposite and he knows that it will not do for him to be always throwing the blame of doing a wrong thing upon another man. And then pocketing his half of the profits, he says, "Come what may, I must get out of this business, for it would be better for me to enter into life as poor as the poorest beggar than, having a prosperous but sinful business, to be cast into Hell."

And many, too, suffer losses in business, because, as soon as they become Christians, they have to make a great many alterations. "Sunday is our best day for business," says somebody. Well, then, so much more opportunity is there for you to make a greater sacrifice to prove your love to Jesus! Up with the shutters and mind that you do it at once. If you have to lose anything, in any way for Christ's sake, in order to be His conscientious disciple, that is your cross—and He says to you, "Take up the cross, and follow Me."

Sometimes, however, the cross may be of a somewhat different kind. It may be the giving up of some pleasure, or habit which has been peculiarly gratifying to you. The Christian man discovers that although this habit may be allowable for others, it is not so for him—it would injure him. It would ruin him. He cannot pray, he cannot think of Divine things as long as he clings to this habit. It is his duty, if there is anything that hinders the growth of his soul, or his fellowship with Christ, to shake it off at once as Paul shook off the viper into the fire! But some have found it difficult to do this. Dear Friend, if that is your case, pluck out your right eye, cut off your right hand rather than keep them and perish in your sin! Better to lose everything else than lose your soul! Better to give up everything else than give up the hope of eternal life!

With some, however, the cross does not assume that shape. If we are to be Christ's disciples at all, He demands of us that we give up ourselves wholly and unreservedly to Him. Jesus Christ will not have half of a man! He will have the whole of him—body, soul and spirit! You cannot be Christ's disciple unless you are prepared to renounce everything you have at His bidding. For instance, if it should come to pass that to be a Christian required your imprisonment for Christ's sake, you must be willing to lie in prison and to die for Him. If it were required, as once it was, that you should be dragged into the amphitheatre to be slain by wild beasts, you must be willing to do as the Christians did then—to die such a death, if necessary, for Christ. My Lord and Master will not be content with the shell of a man—He must have his heart and soul, his entire being—and he who will not thus give himself up to Christ cannot be His disciple. This is a cross to many who want to make some little reserve, or some provision for the flesh. If this is your cross, I pray you to take it up and follow Christ.

We must not forget that the Cross, as far as Christ was concerned, was not merely a matter of shame and reproach. It was that towards men, but, before God, when Jesus carried His Cross, He was bearing a burden which it pleased the Father to lay upon Him. So, to some, the cross is poverty. They strive hard but they can never rise above grinding poverty. To others, it is a body which from their earliest childhood has been weak and feeble. To some, the cross is a

proneness to disease and pain. To others, a wearing sickness which scarcely permits them to leave their bed. To others, an affliction which, while it allows them a considerable measure of bodily vigor, yet, nevertheless, frequently gnaws at their very heart and they feel as if they could die from the weariness of a long life of pain. Oh, how many of God's children have to carry this cross! Or if it is not that, perhaps the cross takes the form of an ungodly husband or an ungrateful child. But I need not try to make a list of your crosses. We have a saying that there is a skeleton in every closet and, certainly, there is a cross in every

lot—

"Shall Simon bear his cross alone, And all the rest go free? No, there's a cross for everyone And there's a cross for me."

We all know what our own cross is. And if our Heavenly Father has appointed it for us, we must take it up and follow

Christ!

II. Now, secondly, WHAT AM I TO DO WITH THE CROSS?

Well, first, let me never try to make a cross of my own. I know some people who do that. They have pretty nearly everything that heart could wish for, yet they are dissatisfied. They are of a fretful, discontented disposition and they can always see something to trouble them even when nobody else can see it. I charge you, Friends, to watch against that state of heart which leads a man, when he looks up to the sun, to say, "Ah, it has spots on its surface." And when he observes the beauty of the moonlight, to draw only this reflection, "This light of the moon is very cold." If he were to look at the greenest landscape in the world, he would say that he believed there was an extinct volcano somewhere underneath it and, perhaps, it might not be quite extinct and might erupt again. Whenever he reads the Bible, he always likes to read about the pouring out of the vials and he is particularly fond of the star called Wormwood. And he almost hopes to see the day when there shall be wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes in divers places, and I know not what besides! Some people seem to have a little trouble factory at the back of their houses. They appear to be always engaged in making new crosses! I have often said that homemade troubles are like homemade clothes—they seldom fit, and they are likely to last a very long while! O child of God, do not make your life one continual groan! Far better to make it one happy song of praise, one joyful Psalm of thanksgiving to the Most High! Do not make a cross for yourself.

And, next, do not try to choose your cross. Of course you cannot do it, but there are many people who wish they had So-and-So's lot. Ah, you do not know how heavy his cross is! Have you never heard the fable that once upon a time all the cross-bearers were invited to come and bring their crosses and put them in one heap and each man might take up the cross that he liked best? So, of course, nobody took the one that he had brought, but each one went away with his neighbor's cross on his back. But, before many hours, they were all back again, asking to have their old crosses, for they found that the cross they had carried before had so worn their shoulders that they had become used to that particular burden, but the new cross was galling them in fresh places, so they were glad, each one, to put his neighbor's cross down and go away with his own. On the whole, my Brothers and Sisters, you have the best lot that you could have, for if you had a better one in some respects, it would be worse for you in other respects. Be satisfied as you are and do not wish to choose another man's cross. Christ says, "Take up the cross, and follow Me." He does not say, "Desire to have another man's cross."

Observe, too, that Christ does not say, "Murmur at your cross." That is the very reverse of taking it up! As long as a man is alive and out of Hell, he cannot have any cause to complain! Be he where he may—be he placed in the most abject position conceivable—the man is better off than he deserves to be. Let not a single murmur, then, ever escape our lips. Blessed is the Grace of patience, but it is difficult to be acquired. May the Lord, of His Infinite Mercy, teach us to bear all His holy will and bear it cheerfully—and so to take up our cross for Jesus sake!

Christ does not tell us to run away from our cross. There are some who try to do that. I have often observed that when people change their position in order to escape from trial, the old saying has been fulfilled to them, for they have leaped out of the frying pan into the fire. I have known some of them emigrate because of the difficulties of living in this country and, in about six months, they have thought that this old country is about the best under Heaven, as I reckon it is, after all! And glad would they have been if they could only have gone back to the place whence they came out. If you expect to go to a land where you will have no trials to bear, there is but one such place that I know of, except Heaven,

and that is the fool's paradise—and I would not advise you to attempt to enter that! Oh, no, we were born into this world that in the sweat of our brow we might eat bread—and the sweat must be on our brow in some form or other, and the burden must be on our back. If thorns and thistles grow in your garden, it is no use for you to move to the next street, for they will grow there, also. And it is no use moving to another country, for you will have thorns growing in France as well as in England—in Australia as well as in the British Islands—it is no use to try to run away from your cross and it is also cowardly. Do as Christ bids you, "Take up the cross, and follow Me."

And, dear Friends, there is another thing which we are rather apt to do and that is, to faint under our cross, or to feel that it is too heavy for us to carry. Do I address anyone in such a condition? Dear Brother, dear Sister, there are many promises suited to your case. "Underneath are the everlasting arms." "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint." "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it." "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." "Your shoes shall be iron and brass; and as your days, so shall your strength be." Let these texts be like a cordial to your spirit, and say, "I will not faint, after all. There is hope for me that I shall yet be revived." How can a man despair who can lift up his eyes to Heaven and call God his Father?

What, then, is meant by taking up the cross, but this? First, dear brethren, if following Christ will involve you in any scoffing and shame, bear it and be glad to bear it. If it will cause you any loss, say with Paul, "Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in Him." Does anyone drop your acquaintance because you belong to Christ? O my dear Friend, will you go to Hell for the sake of an earthly acquaintance? I hope not! Let the acquaintance be dropped, rather than drop your acquaintance with Christ! Will worldlings scowl at you? Let them scowl, as long as Jesus smiles. Will men put you out of their synagogue because you are a Christian? Let them put you out, for Christ will find you and if He shall welcome you, it will not matter who casts you away. Therefore, for Christ's sake, boldly bear whatever has to be borne and be faithful in your following of Him even unto death.

Taking up the cross means, next, be resigned to those afflictions which come to you from God your Father. It is easier to say this, my dear Friends, than to do it, as you will find. But, still, there is the cup which our Heavenly Father has filled for us, so shall we not drink it? He has made that cross for us to carry, so dare we say, "We will not carry it"? You will find that a disobedient spirit will be sure to bring upon you a dreadful chastisement. But the kindly yielding spirit of an obedient child will make the cross lighter than it would otherwise have been. May God grant us that yielding spirit! I love to see it and how often one does see it in God's poor, sick children! We pity them, for their pain is great and they can scarcely bear it—but when we speak to them about their Heavenly Father, they have not a word to say against Him—but

they have a thousand words to say for Him! They tell us how He sustains them—how, in the dreary night, their heart is gladdened by the Presence of Jesus—how, when it seems as if they could not suffer any longer the pain which has become so intense, the Presence of Jesus has flooded their souls with delight! It is a blessed thing to see Christians take up their cross resignedly, accepting the will of their Father in Heaven—and this is exactly what we are called upon to do! I trust that in both senses, namely, in a bold willingness to suffer for Christ's sake and for the Truth of God's sake—and in a patient willingness to accept the Divine will, whatever it may be—we may take up our cross and follow Christ.

But this is the great point, in carrying our cross—we are to follow Christ. We must keep on doing that. Through floods or flames we must follow Him. In life or in death we must follow Him and never, never step aside. And what an honor it is for us to be allowed to follow such a Lord! I was thinking, just now, that if the glorified spirits in Heaven, for whom Jesus shed His precious blood, had all gone there along a smooth pathway, without a tear or a sigh—if they had never suffered anything for His sake—I can almost picture them gathering round their Lord in Heaven and saying, "Dear Master, is it not possible for us to have the opportunity of suffering somewhat for You? We were allowed to do something for You on earth—we preached and we prayed—but we never suffered."

And the devil might whisper from his infernal den, "Had these men been tried—if God had put forth His hand and touched their bone and their flesh—they would have cursed Him to His face!" But, dear Friends, the devil can never say

that, for they have been touched in their bone and in their flesh. Take down Foxe's Book of Martyrs when you are at home—I hope you all have it, for that book ought to be kept in every Christian's house, to the everlasting shame of the Church of Rome—take it down and look at the long list of martyrs who counted not their lives dear unto them! It was one of the noblest sights upon which the eyes of Jesus ever rested when He could look upon them and see them gladly die for His dear sake! I think the angels must have crowded the battlements of Heaven and looked down and said, "See how they love their Lord! See how bravely they die for Him! See how the timid, trembling women come forward and are stretched upon the rack without a groan, and then are fastened to the stake and burnt there, smiling as they die, and saying, 'None but Jesus! None but Jesus!'" I do not think that all the cherubim and seraphim in Heaven ever praised God as they have done who have died in prison for Jesus' sake, or at the stake have poured forth their blood rather than deny Him. Be glad that you may prove your love by suffering for Christ! The ruby crown of martyrdom is not within your reach today, but be thankful if some jewels of suffering may be yours. And count it all joy when you can endure this cross for the name of Jesus Christ.

III. Now, for a few minutes I want to answer the last question. WHAT SHOULD ENCOURAGE US TO TAKE UP OUR CROSS AND FOLLOW CHRIST?

First, I cannot be Christ's disciple unless I do this and, oh, I must be His disciple! He is such a Master that I must follow Him! He is such a Lord that I cannot but serve Him! And if service should involve the carrying of the cross, I say, "Welcome cross! Lord, put it on my back!" I would gladly bear the burden which goes with His service.

Let each one of us encourage himself with the next reflection, "Better people than I am have carried a heavier cross than I have to carry." I know, dear Sister, that your cup is one of peculiar bitterness, but there are some who have drunk a far bitterer cup than yours, and they were better people than you are. Think of them—I have alluded to them already—the noble army of martyrs and sufferers for Christ's sake!

Will you refuse the cup which is not, after all, so filled with gall as theirs was? Think, too, how much more severe were the trials of your Lord and Master. What are all our griefs compared with His? If we were to heap up the whole mass of human woe, it would be a molehill compared with the great Alpine peaks of His griefs and woes—

"His way was much rougher and darker than mine; Did Christ my Lord, suffer, and shall I repine?"

They say that when the Greeks marched into Persia and the soldiers grew thirsty and weary with the long march, Alexander did not ride on horseback and he did not drink. Although there was always water for the great king, he refused to drink till his soldiers did. And when they saw him, hot and weary, marching side by side with them, every man said, "I must not complain, for the king is suffering as much as I am. I must bear it if he does." So, sufferers, behold your King! In all your afflictions He was afflicted. He was tempted in all points as you are, so be not ashamed of that cross which once your Savior's shoulders bore!

Furthermore, we may well take up the cross because Grace will be given to us to bear it. You say that you cannot bear the cross which is coming upon you, but you shall have more Grace when you get it on your back! God never gives His children any Grace to throw away. He gives them strengths according to their day and if their burden becomes heavier, their shoulders become stronger. In order to get more Grace, one might be quite willing to carry a heavier cross.

Remember, too, that the cross will be blest to you. A thousand good things come to us by the way of suffering and reproach. I think the sweetest letters which God ever sends to His children are done up in black-edged envelopes. You will find in many of those bright envelopes of His, some choice silver mercies, but if you want a great banknote of Grace, it must come to you in the mourning envelope. It is when the Lord covers the Heavens with clouds that He sends the showers of blessing upon the earth. Be glad of the clouds for the sake of the rain.

This thought, too, should help you to carry your cross—that Jesus will be honored by it. Yes, poor woman, I know that I am talking to you. Very seldom do you get a bright hour by yourself. Your lot is a very hard one, but if you bear it as a Christian should, Christ is honored through you. He looks down from Heaven and He says, "Look how she loves Me that, for My sake she is willing to bear all this." Yes, young man, I know you are harshly pressed but you have stood well and your Master has marked your brave conduct. He lets you go on being tried as our English king did with his son when he was fighting the French—he did not send relief to him because he did not wish to diminish the glory of his victory. So Christ often leaves His people, supported only by His Grace, to let the world see what a Christian really can do! That was

a notable duel between Job and the devil. Satan said, "Only give me the opportunity to take away his riches and to kill his children, and he will curse God to His face." But after Satan had done all that, Job still said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Then the devil was permitted by God to cover poor Job with boils from the crown of his head to the heels of his feet. He who has ever had one boil of that kind knows how painful it is, but to be covered from head to foot with such boils—to have to scrape yourself with a potsherd and to have a foolish wife urging you to curse God and die—and so-called "friends" standing around you and aggravating your woe, is a very terrible trial. Yet Job survived it and I do not think that the devil ever meddled with him again! He found that he could not manage him at all, so, at last, he went away! He was probably never so beaten by anyone until he met Job's Lord and Master in the wilderness and He beat him still more effectually!

I believe that the Lord takes delight in the prowess of His suffering saints. "There," He seems to say to the Prince of darkness, "I let you have your will with Job, but what have you made of him? Is he not still a perfect and upright man, and more than a match for you?" Well, if God might so be glorified by us, you and I might be willing to be tried as Job was! The time will come, dear Friends, when you will be pleased with the cross. If God will give you sufficient Grace, you will come to be satisfied and even pleased to suffer for Christ's sake. Rutherford used to say that the cross he carried for Christ had become so sweet to him that he was sometimes afraid that he might love the cross better than he loved Christ, Himself! That shows the heights to which a gracious soul may attain.

Lastly, in a very short time, the cross will be exchanged for the crown. It is said that when Princess Elizabeth carried the royal crown in some procession during the reign of her sister, she complained that it was very heavy and someone said that she would find it much lighter when she had it on her own head. So, some of us are carrying a great cross, here, and we find it very heavy—but we shall be well repaid when we receive our crown!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: MARK 10:17-45.

Verses 17, 18. And when He was going out on the road, there came one running and kneeled before Him, and asked Him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why call you Me good? There is none good but One, that is God. This was a hint that Christ was more than Man. If He was really worthy of the title that the enquirer gave Him, He was God as well as Man, for "there is none good but One, that is God."

19, 20. You know the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor your father and mother And he answered and said unto Him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth Possibly, in the ordinary sense of the words, he had observed these commandments, but Christ tested the reality of his declaration.

21, 22. Then Jesus looking at him, loved him, and said unto him, One thing you lack: go your way, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in Heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. Thus he proved that he had not kept either table of the Law perfectly, for he did not love the Lord with all his heart, nor did he love his neighbor as himself.

23-27. And Jesus looked around and said unto His disciples, How hard it is for those that have riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who, then, can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them said, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible. It is impossible for man, unaided by the Spirit of God, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but that which is impossible to man by Himself, is made possible by the Grace and power of God!

28. Then Peter began to say unto Him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed You. He spoke as if they had done what the rich man had failed to do, and evidently he thought they should be rewarded, for, according to Matthew, he added, "What shall we have, therefore?"

29-31. And Jesus answered and said, Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that has left house, or brothers, or sisters or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for My sake, and the Gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brothers, and sisters and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions, and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last first. In the final account, it shall be found that no man has been a loser through giving up anything for the Lord Jesus Christ though He has His own method of deciding who are to be first and who are to be last.

32. And they were on the road going up to Jerusalem. It was well known to them all that the crisis of our Savior's history was close at hand and a sort of indefinable dread was upon them all. The bravest spirit in the whole company was their blessed Lord and Master. He knew that He was going up to Jerusalem to die, so you may view Him as the Sacrifice going to the altar, or as the Hero going to the conflict in which He would die and yet conquer. They were on the road going up to Jerusalem—

32. And Jesus went before them. The disciples might well have been filled with holy courage as their Leader was in the van. This is true concerning the whole life of all the saints—"Jesus went before them." What if trials lie beyond and the dark river, itself, is in front of them, yet Jesus goes before them so they need not fear to follow!

32. And they were amazed. And as they followed, they were afraid. They did not know much about what was to happen, but a great depression was upon their spirits. They must have wondered at the cheerful bravery of their Master when all of them were ready to turn back from this mournful march.

32-34. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him, Saying, Behold we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him, and the third day He shall rise again. He thought it right that the twelve, who led the way, should be better acquainted than the rest with the sad history that was so soon to be enacted. So He tells them about it in private—and I want you to notice how He dwells in detail upon His sufferings. He does not describe them in general terms, but He brings out into strong relief each separate set of infamy—"they shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him and shall kill Him"—from which we learn that our Savior knew all that He had to endure, yet He went bravely forward to bear it for our sakes. For this reason we should admire His Divine courage and complete Self-sacrifice. Mere men may promise to do a certain thing without knowing what it will involve, but—

"This was compassion like a God, That when the Savior knew The price of pardon was His blood, His pity never withdrew."

I think, too, that as our Lord thus dwells upon each point, He means us also to dwell upon the details of His redeeming griefs. We should not be strangers at the foot of the Cross, nor in Gethsemane, but should hear each one of these notes ring out its sorrowful yet joyful music—"They shall mock Him, and shall scourge Him, and shall spit upon Him, and shall kill Him." But what a glad note that concluding one is—"and the third day He shall rise again." Death cannot hold Him in her bands, the sepulcher cannot continue to enclose Him in her gloomy prison! This is the glory and boast of our Christianity, our hope and our joy, for—

"As the Lord our Savior rose, So all His followers must."

35, 36. And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him saying, Master, we would that you should do for us whatever we shall desire. And He said unto them, What would you, that I should do for you? Our Savior's question suggests to us the prudent lesson to never promise in the dark. If anyone shall say to you, "Promise that you will do whatever I ask," follow the example of Christ and first ask, "What would you, that I should do for you?" Otherwise, you may entangle yourself with your own words. These young men evidently needed to have this question put to them, for they had not themselves thoroughly considered what they were asking their Lord to do for them.

37. They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one at Your right hand, and the other at Your left hand, in Your Glory. There was, undoubtedly, much that was wrong about this request and you have often heard that view of the matter dwelt upon, so I will call your attention to that which was right about it. These disciples showed their faith that

this same Jesus who was to be mocked, scourged, spit upon and killed, would yet reign! And I think it was wonderful faith that, after they had heard from His own lips, in sorrowful detail, the description of how He should die, yet nevertheless they so fully believed in His Kingdom that they asked to have a share in its honors. It is true that they were ambitious, but their ambition was to be near the Savior. It would be well if all those who ask for right hand and left hand places, wanted them at the right hand and the left hand of the Savior!

38. But Jesus said unto them, You know not what you ask. Has the Lord ever said to us, when we have been praying, "You know not what you ask"? I suppose that is usually true in a certain sense—we do not fully understand the compass of the most of our prayers and sometimes we ask so unadvisedly that we prove that we know not what we are asking.

38. Can you drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? "Can you share My drinking in Gethsemane and My sinking on Golgotha?"

39. And they said unto Him, We can. They knew not what they said, but they felt that such was the strength of their love that they could share anything that had to do with Christ! His Throne? Yes, they would like to sit at the right hand of it. His cup? Yes, they can drink of it. Immersion into His suffering? Yes, they can endure that baptism.

39. And Jesus said unto them, You shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized with shall you be baptized. And so they were, for James was soon put to death and John lived, the last and longest of the Apostles, a life-long martyrdom for the Master's sake.

40, 41. But to sit at My right hand and at My left hand is not Mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. Why were they displeased? Because they were of the same spirit as James and John! As they were displeased with James and John, it is evident that they wanted those places themselves—and many a man is thus displeased with his own faults. Did you ever see a dog bark at himself in a mirror? You and I have often done that—we have even grown very angry with what was, after all, only our own image!

42-46. But Jesus called them to Him, and said unto them, You know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: and whoever of you will be the chief, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but

to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. Christ instituted bishops, that is, overseers, but never prelates! He never had any idea of setting some men in His Church over the heads of others, but He put all His servants upon an equality. They are to exercise no lordship, the one over the other, nor to seek it, for the truest honor in the Church of God is found in service. He that serves most is the greatest! He that will occupy the lowest office, he that will bear patiently to be the most put upon, he that is readiest to be despised, and to be the servant of all, shall be the chief of all! The way to rise in the Kingdom of Heaven is to descend, for even so was it with our Lord, Himself! God give to all of us the humble and lowly spirit that will make us willing to be the least

of all!

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