

(The Supreme Priorities) 4. One Thing Thou Lackest

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of taking up the cross and following Jesus, which involves a separation from the world and its desires, and a death to the old life and the old self.

Scripture: Mark 10:17

Topics: "Surrendering to God", "Discipleship"

Description

Zac Poonen emphasizes the critical importance of prioritizing spiritual over material wealth, as illustrated by the story of the rich young ruler who, despite his moral integrity, lacked the willingness to surrender his possessions to follow Jesus. Poonen highlights that true discipleship requires a willingness to take up one's cross, which involves a separation from worldly attachments and a commitment to God's will. He warns that many young people today, like the rich young man, miss out on fulfilling their divine purpose due to their attachment to material things. The sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the cross, which signifies death to self and the world, leading to true victory and fruitfulness in Christ. Ultimately, Poonen encourages believers to embrace the cross as the only path to spiritual freedom and fulfillment.

Transcript

"And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. And he answered and said unto him, All these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow me. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions." (Mark 10:17-22).

Here we read of a wealthy young man who came to the Lord with much eagerness but went away disappointed. He was an exceptional young man, for he came running to the Lord, thus showing his eagerness to know the truth, and he kneeled, so displaying his humility. Moreover his question revealed an interest in the things of eternity that is rare among young people, and perhaps rarest of all among the youthful rich. Further, when Jesus spoke to him of the commandments, he could reply without hesitation

that he had kept them all. He had never committed adultery, never killed, never stolen, never borne false witness, never defrauded anyone and never dishonoured his father or mother. Since Jesus did not challenge his statement, we must agree that he was a remarkable young man, honest, upright, moral, sincere and keen. But Jesus then put His finger on the one thing still lacking in his life, a thing so important that without it all his other qualifications were of no avail. He was unwilling, because of attachment to material possessions, to take up the cross and to follow the Lord.

We are told in verse 21 that Jesus beholding him, loved him. Jesus looked at this man and saw the tremendous potential in his young life waiting to be used for the glory of God - or misused for self and the Devil. And He loved him. Today as the Lord looks at young people, He looks at them in just the same way. He sees the possibilities latent in every young life and he also knows how most of these lives are being wasted on things which will not last eternally. Very many young people today are dazzled by such things. Like this young man they go away sorrowful. They are unwilling to pay the price involved in following Jesus, and thus like him they miss the great privilege of fulfilling through their lives the purpose for which they were created and redeemed. The sorrow they choose is theirs for ever.

Many who are familiar with the invitation given by the Lord to heavy-laden sinners in Matthew 11:28, are ignorant of the very next words of Jesus on that occasion. To those who heard His call "Come unto Me," He went on to say, "Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me" (verses 29). This is really equivalent to Jesus' words elsewhere: "Let him take up his cross daily and follow Me." But the two statements of Jesus in Matthew 11:28 & 29 were never meant by Him to be separated. He intended all who came to Him to take up their cross and follow Him, and He expected none to come to Him who was unwilling to follow. The Lord Jesus never presented men with two alternative levels of consecration, one for those who only wanted salvation and an entry to heaven, and another for those who were prepared to take up the cross and follow Him fully. He presented only one standard before men. All who came to Him for forgiveness of sins were to pursue His purpose to its fulfilment. Many Christian preachers present two separate standards, one involving the accepting of Christ as Saviour and the second the accepting of Him as Lord. But this is, in Paul's words, "another gospel," and not the gospel of Christ that the apostles preached (Galatians 1:6-9). Men have separated what God has joined together and this divorce of the two essential ingredients of the Christian message is the cause of so much lack of vitality in the Christian church today.

Perhaps few of us have clearly understood the real implications of bearing the cross. Many of us speak of the incidental burdens of life as our crosses. Others of us see crosses in our physical infirmities. Still others use the metaphor to describe our unruly wives or unloving husbands or disobedient children. I tell you, these are no more our crosses than are the gold crosses people have around their necks or the stone crosses on church steeples. None of these is the cross that Jesus referred to in the words "Let him take up his cross." The Christian church today has so beautified the cross of Christ as a religious symbol that most people have a wrong impression of what Jesus really meant.

In the times when Jesus walked on earth, the cross was an instrument of death. It was a thing of shame. If you had been living in Jerusalem in those days, and one day you saw a man carrying a cross down the street, surrounded by Roman soldiers, you would have had no doubt at all in your mind as to where that man was going. He was going to the place of execution. He would have said goodbye to his relatives and friends and was now going along a pathway by which he would never return. He had said goodbye to the world and was now leaving that world for ever. Nothing that he possessed in it would he ever see again. And furthermore he was leaving the world by a most shameful and humiliating exit. The death of the cross was a death of ignominy. All this was involved in what Jesus meant when He called men such as this rich

young ruler to take up the cross and follow Him. For to follow means to walk the same road and Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem to be crucified. Unless we get this picture of the cross in our minds, we shall never fully understand what Jesus meant when He spoke of the cross in the believer's life.

But there is one other thing that we must note here before we proceed further, and that is that Jesus never compels anyone to carry the cross. We saw in the last chapter that God always respects man's free will. Jesus said, "IF any man will come after me, let him take up his cross" (Luke 9:23). There is no compulsion here at all. He desires our voluntary dedication to the whole purpose of God.

On another occasion the Lord Jesus spoke of a corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying and thus producing much fruit (John 12:24). There again He was alluding to His forthcoming death on the cross, but the principle of that verse applies to all who seek to live a spiritually fruitful life. A grain of wheat will remain a single grain as long as it stays with the other grains in the granary. If it is to bear fruit it must be separated from all the other grains, and fall into the ground alone, and there die. Then only will it spring forth in a triumphant fruitfulness. So our subject in this chapter is our death with Christ, and once again we shall consider it under three headings. First we shall see that the cross involves a separation; secondly, that the cross means death; and thirdly that the cross brings victory and fruitfulness.

The Cross Involves a Separation

On the hill of Calvary, in the hour when Jesus was crucified, two thieves, condemned with Him, hung on either side with Jesus in the middle. For the hour of their suffering they were thus separated, if only physically, by the cross of Jesus. In the outcome they were eternally separated, one to perdition and the other to be with Him for ever.

This is a picture of what the cross of Jesus always does. It separates men who choose the light from men who choose the darkness. Yes, it separates.

There are many sincere Christians today who feel that any attempt to separate mankind always has its source in the Devil, and that every movement towards unity always originates from God. This, however, is only because they are not familiar with the Bible. The Bible talks about separation in its very first paragraph. In Genesis 1:3 we read about the creation of light, and in verse 4 we read that God saw that this light was good. Thereupon He separated the light from the darkness. Had He allowed the two to mingle they might have produced some form of twilight; but this could scarcely have served the life-giving purpose for which God had created light. Thus we see that God was the first person to make a separation. He is a God of distinctiveness, and right through the Bible we find this principle clearly laid down. Moreover from a "separation of principle" it soon comes to involve a separation of people. God forbade Israel to mix in intermarriages with the other nations because they were themselves to be a light to the nations who sat in darkness. In the New Testament for the same reason the church is clearly told to be separate from the world (2 Corinthians 6:14). In fact, the very Greek word "ekklesia", which is translated "church" in the English versions, itself means a "called-out company."

The church and the world thus have something in common with the two thieves who hung there at Calvary on either side of Jesus. Both men were originally wicked, but one was forgiven and justified because he repented. The other continued in his sin and died unforgiven. So their eternal destinies were different, just as are those of the church and the world. For the spirit of the world is wholly contrary to the Spirit of God, loving the darkness and turning away from the light. It chooses its own destiny - and finds it.

Alas, this separation to God can at times mean a separation from the religious world also. When what passes as the Christian church lives according to the spirit of this world and not according to the Spirit of God, and is guided by the tradition of men instead of by the Word of God, a choice may be forced upon us. At the very hour when the Lord Jesus was being crucified outside the city of Jerusalem, the priests and religious leaders were worshipping God in the temple, inside the city. They had crucified the Son of God, but in their blindness were carrying on with their empty religious rituals, in the belief that God was pleased with them! Both in His life and in His death the Lord Jesus Himself was outside all religious formalism, and so will His true disciples be (John 16:2). There are many professing Christian churches today that, like the church in Laodicea, have placed themselves in the same position as those Jews. They are carrying on their activities, thinking that all is well with them, while in truth all the while the Lord Himself is outside their church door (Revelation 3:14, 20).

There is a story of an African-American in the early twentieth century, who had recently accepted the Lord, and who went to attend a church service in a certain city in the Southern United States. Not realizing that colour discrimination extended to the Christian church as well, and that this particular church was exclusively for whites, he was surprised when the ushers refused to let him enter the building. He went away disappointed and told the Lord about the matter in prayer. The Lord replied (so the story goes): "Don't worry, My son, I Myself have been trying to get inside that church ever since it came into existence, and have not yet succeeded; so don't be surprised when you too are turned away." When it is religious formalism or church tradition that rules rather than the Word of God social prejudice such as this easily gets a grip upon men's hearts. The Christian who takes up his cross and follows Jesus will find himself separate in spirit from a Christianity that displays such worldly features. But to be thus separate is never an easy task.

Today all the talk is of ecumenical unity among Christian churches. Consequently many are afraid to preach separation, fearing lest their congregations regard them as uncharitable and un-Christlike. It is therefore good for us to bear in mind the words of Jesus in Luke 12:51, 52, lest we get an unbalanced picture of what true Christ-likeness is. Jesus emphatically stated there that He had come to bring division. Of course there is a unity which is wholly in accordance with Scripture. It is the unity which Jesus spoke of in John 17, which takes its character from the unity of the Godhead ("in us," verse 21), and it is significant that in this same chapter Jesus spoke very strongly about separation also (verse 16). And equally it is the unity referred to in Ephesians 4:3, the unity brought about by the Holy Spirit. This is one thing. A man-made unity is quite another. The latter can have no better future than the unity manifested at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Separation from the world is in fact a leading theme of the New Testament. Before He went to the cross Jesus told His disciples that they did not belong to the world. Jesus was Himself one apart - "not of this world." And He affirmed that His disciples were just as truly other-worldly. And because they did not belong to it, He told them, that they would find this world a difficult place to live in (John 15:19; 17:16). It is the disciple's responsibility to keep himself unspotted from the world (James 1:27). For the church is Christ's bride, loved, won and sanctified, by Him (Ephesians 5:25-27). This explains Paul's "godly jealousy" over the Corinthian believers. He desired, he said, to present them as a pure virgin to Christ, and he feared lest the Devil corrupt them (2 Corinthians 11:2, 3). This explains too the extremely strong words, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses," addressed by James to believers who showed themselves friendly with the spirit of the world (4:4). Yes, the Bible has much to say on separation.

But let us be clear in our minds that what the Bible speaks of is not a separation in terms of distance. It is not an outward, physical separation from the people of the world at all, but one of the heart. Many have thought that by dwelling as hermits in some lonely place where they have no contact with the people of the world, they could draw near to God. The monk who sequesters himself in a monastery, or the nun who retires within the walls of a convent, has not understood the meaning of separation as the Bible teaches it. Neither does this separation mean the wearing of white or saffron-coloured clothes, or any other uniform. Jesus Himself never preached or practised any such means of outward distinction. What He taught and practised was a freedom from the spirit of this world, even while living in the midst of it.

We are beings in an alien element. A ship in mid-ocean is surrounded by water, and yet no sea-water penetrates inside the ship. When a believer lives like that, he is bound to face ridicule and opposition from the world sooner or later. The world will quickly become an uncomfortable place for him to live. Jesus warned His disciples in advance that this hostility would ensue as an inevitable consequence of following Him (John 16:33). If a Christian belongs to heaven, then earth is obviously not his natural sphere. He is a fish out of water, and need not be surprised if he finds it difficult to carry on his existence here. It would need a miracle to keep a fish alive on land, and it needs no less a miracle for the true church of Christ to exist on earth. But that is just what God intends the Christian life to be - a life of daily dependence on His miracle-working power.

God expects to see, between His people and the spirit of this world, a great gulf fixed, a gulf as deep and as wide as that which separates Paradise from Hell (Luke 16:26), a gulf never to be bridged or crossed. Freedom from the spirit of the world has always been God's desire for His own. Many a believer, unfortunately, has yet to learn this lesson, and until he does so remains powerless and frustrated.

It was such a freedom of spirit that, once learned, brought Abraham to the place of power and fruitfulness. This is clearly pictured for us in Genesis 22. There the Lord told Abraham to offer up his only son. This was not because He wanted Isaac slain, (as is evident from verse 12) but to free Abraham from any inordinate love for the boy. Abraham's usefulness as a servant of God was here in view. God wanted him to be free of any selfish possessiveness in his attitude towards Isaac. He wanted him continually to hold Isaac as a Divine gift.

When the Lord either withholds or removes from us material possessions and other things that we hold dear, He is dealing with us as He dealt with Abraham. This was why He asked the rich young man to sell all that he had. He was too attached to his money. Material things are not sinful in themselves. It is when they become a hindrance to our following the Lord that they become sinful. This too is why the Lord allows trials to come within our family circle - in order to detach us from inordinate affection for our loved ones (cf. Luke 14:26, 27). True separation involves our holding everything that we have in trust, as belonging not to ourselves but to the Lord, and as given to us to use for His glory.

We may count ourselves to be the children of God, but unless we have accepted this aspect of the cross of Christ in all its costliness, we shall not enjoy the privileges of sonship that God intends for all His sons and daughters (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Brothers and sisters, there is wealth undreamed of, that God intends us to have. We have not yet received it, and He is still unable to give it to us, because our hearts are distracted and our hands full with this world and its things.

The Cross Means Death

If we really accept the cross that Jesus spoke of to His followers, it must mean death for us. When the corn of wheat falls into the ground, is trampled under foot and finally has its shining outer shell cracked open, it is no longer beautiful. In exactly the same way, a believer who takes up his cross and follows Jesus ceases to be attractive to this world. The world despises him. There may have been many things that it admired in him formerly, but not now. Like his Lord, he is now despised and rejected by men.

Just as in Old Testament times the fire consumed the sacrifice that was placed upon the altar and reduced it to ashes, so the cross of Christ puts a man to death. Real consecration to the Lord always means that. The fire of God will so consume every life that is yielded to Him that that soul can no longer live for himself or for the world, but only for God. He will be dead to this world and this world will be dead to him (Galatians 6:14). There is a lot of superficial consecration among Christians today that fails to take this fact into account. But "let him take up his cross" is what the Saviour said, and this is the only consecration that is acceptable to God. No Old Testament sacrifice was accepted by God which was not consumed by fire upon the altar. We may have often given ourselves to God to receive His blessing, but have we ever yielded ourselves to Him to be put to death in this way? Have we allowed God to take away from us whatever He pleases and to shatter all the ambitions and plans we have made for ourselves, reducing them to ashes? That is what the cross means.

It is indeed surprising to see Christians professing to follow the Lord Jesus, yet seeking at the same time to be accepted and popular in a world which crucified and rejected Him. Theirs can scarcely be other than a counterfeit Christianity. Acceptance and popularity in the world, or even in Christian circles, for that matter, are no indications of God's blessing. On the contrary they are something of which Jesus Himself warned us constantly to beware (Luke 6:26). To Him it did not matter in the least whether the world accepted Him or rejected Him, for in His spirit He had died to this world long before He went to the cross. He did not go out of His way to make Himself unpopular with the world, but on the other hand it did not disturb Him if doing the will of His Father had this effect.

That is to be the spirit of the disciple as well. That is why Paul called himself "a fool for Christ's sake" (1 Corinthians 4:10) - F.F.C.S. - a degree we may well feel is far more to be coveted than an F.R.C.S. or any other worldly qualification! Everywhere Paul went there were those who despised him as a fool. But none of these things moved him. Like his Master he had died to this world.

In a certain town there was a man who used to witness for his Lord by walking through the streets wearing placards on his body with Bible verses written on them. (In the West they call them "sandwich boards.") As a result he was the butt of ridicule on the part of many in the town. One day when he went out, on the front placard he had substituted these words: "I am a fool for Christ's sake," and on the back: "Whose fool are you?"

Do we understand this, brothers and sisters, that if we are not willing to be fools for Christ's sake, we shall be fools of the Devil, whether we realize it or not? Accepting the cross means accepting the position of death to this world, so that it no longer matters whether the world praises or criticises. This is often the "one thing lacking" in many young people, which considerably restricts and often totally hinders their effective service for the Lord. We may have many educational qualifications, and possess many gifts and talents, but all these will be of no avail in the Lord's service, if we lack this one thing.

The cross not only means death to this world. It also means death to our own wills. This is more difficult than what we have been considering so far, for it means that we no longer have our own way, but choose

the Lord's way. It also means that we no longer stand up for our own rights. We no longer retaliate when other people hurt us. This is the standard of life that Jesus held up to His disciples in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5, 6 & 7). How different this is from the type of life that we see around us every day - and not only in the unbeliever, but alas, in many believers too! Many have looked at the standard set by Jesus in those chapters and said that it is too difficult to live by. It is not too difficult; it is impossible! Unless we are willing to accept the cross in our daily life, such a life is an impossibility. But when our lives are yielded to the lordship of Christ, we can joyfully refuse to fight back and meekly submit to all that men may do to us, because we know that God has permitted them to treat us thus.

This was Jesus' attitude during His trial. He could have called 72,000 angels to His help with a word, yet He refused to do so. Meekly He submitted to being falsely accused, insulted, beaten and crucified, believing that His Father had allowed it all. At His trial Jesus was treated like a worm (Psalm 22:6), spurned and trodden under foot. The difference between a snake and a worm is that if you tread upon the former it will strike back, whereas with the latter, even if you trample it or crush it, it will never retaliate. In the one you have the spirit of the Devil, in the other of God's Son. When people harm us, or insult us or trample upon our rights, what we manifest in return will always be one of these spirits. Which has it been so far?

Have you been grossly and humiliatingly insulted? If you accept the cross, it means that you are willing to let the Holy Spirit tie your tongue so that you do not speak back in the same tone to your accuser, and chain your hand so that you do not write back a stinging reply, and melt your heart so that you return love for hatred, blessing for cursing and kindness for harshness. Your friends and your own injured self may tell you, in such a situation, not to accept the humiliation lying down, and not to let the other person get away with his insults. But the Holy Spirit will point you to the pathway of the cross and say, "No, do nothing, say nothing. Instead let Me love that person through you."

Which voice are you going to listen to? You are going to face situations like this every day, and often many times a day, as long as you live in this sinful world - and sometimes the provocation may come even from believers! Remember on every such occasion you have only two courses open to you. You will either accept willingly death to yourself, or else you will crucify your Lord afresh. The world cannot crucify Christ again, but there is a sense in which believers can (Hebrews 6:6). We do so every time we refuse to accept the cross in our own lives. It is our refusal of the way of the cross in such situations that paralyses our spiritual life. Accept the cross there, and we shall not only fill our heart with joy; we shall also pave the way for great fruitfulness.

Let me repeat here what I said earlier, that to accept the cross in this way means that we no longer want our own way in anything, but only the Lord's way. This was implied in the prayer of Jesus Himself in Gethsemane: "Not my will but Thine be done." It is implied too in the use Paul makes of the marriage relationship to illustrate our union with Christ: "As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:24). What does that submission mean? Surely it can only mean the crucifixion of our own wills, that henceforth we may do His will alone. This was the spirit of Christ when He went to the cross, and it was because of this spirit in Him that He could rout the forces of darkness there.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, have you so yielded yourselves to Him that you desire nothing but His will, even though it may mean saying No! to your own will again and again? There is always a cross in the pathway of those who seek to do the will of God.

Further, just as death transports a man from this world to another, even so the acceptance of the cross transports the believer to the plane of the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). At once he begins to look at this world from a different standpoint and with an altogether new sense of values. Money, worldly goods, people, all are now looked at in the light of the cross, in the light of eternity, in the light of Christ's kingdom. People are no longer seen by him as rich and poor, or great and small, or on their different social levels. They are all seen as souls for whom Christ died (2 Corinthians 5:16).

To such a man, money and material things no longer have their old attractiveness. The things of eternity shine with greater lustre. He sees this whole world and everything in it as already condemned by God, and therefore assuredly going to pass away one day. Henceforth he lives only to do the will of God and to lay up treasure in heaven (1 John 2:17; 1 Peter 4:1-3). It is a grief to see children of God looking at people and material things in the same way as an unbeliever looks at them - through worldly eyes. Such a soul has never known the true meaning of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Would you care to test yourself? Are you concerned to know how far you come short? You only have to read through Matthew chapters 5, 6 & 7, and honestly ask yourself how many of those commands of Jesus you have never even thought it necessary to obey.

The Cross Brings Victory

Does all we have been saying seem rather gloomy? The message of the cross has a brighter side - a positive one. It is this, that the cross is not an end in itself. It is a pathway to the resurrection life. There is a joy set before all who are willing to accept the working of the cross (Hebrews 12:2). The corn of wheat that falls into the ground and dies does not remain there forever; it springs forth into a triumphant fruitfulness. The believer who accepts the pathway of the cross, no matter how much he may be misunderstood by others, will ultimately be vindicated by God. Fruitfulness comes through death to Self. Some of this fruit we may see even while on earth, but all of it will be seen only at the judgment seat of Christ, when the Lord will reward His faithful ones.

The life of Joseph affords a wonderful example of this. It was a painful experience for him to be sold by his own brethren whom he loved, and to end up as a slave in a strange country. Nevertheless he made no complaints while in Potiphar's house, but faithfully carried out the work assigned to him; and when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him, he remained faithful to God. Flung in jail, he still did not complain, but accepted everything as permitted by God, and harboured no bitterness against anyone. Forgotten there by Pharaoh's ungrateful butler, Joseph still bore no grudge against God or man. The outcome of all this was that he finally became Prime Minister of Egypt. God honours those who honour Him (1 Samuel 2:30). He did so then, and He does so even today. It may not always be public honour in the world's eyes as in Joseph's case, but Divine honour nevertheless. How much we miss when we avoid the pathway of the cross!

But the story is not finished. Even after Joseph rose to supreme rank and had all power in Egypt, he sought no revenge on Potiphar's wife nor on his brethren, but forgave them freely. Many a believer has initially walked as Joseph walked, submitting to the suffering of the cross at every step. But then success has come and he has been honoured and exalted by God. And tragically, with it has come pride and selfishness and the lust for revenge.

Joseph was not like that. He remained the same humble man, whether he was in the jail or on the throne. What a remarkable man he was! This attitude is what God appreciates and ever delights to honour. It is

the spirit of His Son. When it is missing in us, He has to say that one essential thing is lacking in our lives. It was not through His miracles, nor yet through the messages that He preached that the Lord Jesus brought Satan to nought. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that it was through His death that He rendered the Devil powerless. If the Lord Himself defeated Satan only through death, then surely His disciples cannot defeat him in any other way. Many have the idea that if only they could do a few miracles in the Name of Jesus, the Devil would be defeated. But the Devil has yielded to no other weapon than the Cross of Christ. When a believer refuses steadfastly to accept any other way than the way of the cross in his life, he will find that the Devil is powerless against him. It is only the man who submits joyfully and completely to all of God's dealings with him, whom the Bible commands to resist the Devil and who will find the Devil fleeing from him (James 4:7). It is folly to resist the Devil if we have not first submitted ourselves to God.

The way of the cross is the only way of victory. That is why Satan tried his best to prevent Jesus from going that way. That is also why Satan is constantly trying to prevent men and women from accepting that way for their lives. Peter sought, in well-meant love, to prevent Jesus from going through the suffering of the cross, but Jesus instantly recognized the voice of Satan there (Matthew 16:21-23). Our friends and relatives may give us similar advice too, when our pathway is hard. But remember that the voices we hear, whether inside our hearts or from others, that would divert us from the way of the cross are always the whisperings of the Devil. Do we always recognize them as such?

In the book of Revelation we see the Lord Jesus as the slain Lamb. There we have heaven's view of Calvary. In the eyes of man, Calvary was a defeat. We have no account of any unbeliever seeing Jesus after His resurrection, and Calvary is therefore still viewed as a defeat by man. But in heaven's eyes, Calvary was the greatest victory ever won on earth. On earth they crucified the Lamb of God, but in heaven they worship Him. When, in following Jesus, you surrender your rights, men on earth may say that you have no backbone, but in heaven there will be rejoicing over a child of God who has taken a position of victory. "They overcame him (Satan)they loved not their lives unto the death (of the cross)Therefore rejoice ye heavens" (Revelation 12:11, 12).

In Psalm 124:7, we have the Christian life pictured in the symbol of a bird that has escaped from a snare. A bird soaring in the sky is a perfect picture of the glorious liberty that God wants all His children to experience. Mountains and rivers can hinder the onward course of earthbound creatures, but not of a bird. It soars high over them all. God created man in order that he might be like that bird, perfectly free, having dominion over everything and subduing everything under him (Genesis 1:28). But man's disobedience has made him like a bird trapped in a snare, unable to fly.

Only the cross can break that snare and set us free. There is no other way. Accept death to this world and to your own self, and you will therein die to the Devil's power as well. His hold upon you will be broken, and nothing can then prevent you from soaring upwards like that bird. That is true liberty - and that is what the Holy Spirit seeks to bring in our lives (2 Corinthians 3:17). But the way of the cross is the only pathway to that liberty.

As in the earlier chapters, this message too has a special application to the last days in which we are living. In 2 Timothy 3:1-8 these days are described. Men, we are told there, will primarily be lovers of themselves. Consequently they will manifest in their character all that is most contrary to the spirit of the cross. It is not surprising therefore that when persecution increases against Christians, many will be offended (Matthew 24:9, 10). Many Christians who have all their lives been satisfied with superficial Christian activity will turn away from the Lord at that time, because their Christianity had all along been

regulated by their convenience and not by the demands of the cross of Christ. In Mark 4:17 Jesus speaks of such Christians as those who do not have any root. Their Christianity was superficial. Whenever God sought to strengthen its roots by giving them opportunities to accept the cross in their lives, they always avoided it.

There is only one pathway that can lead a man into the fullness of life that there is in Christ. We can walk along other paths if we like, but we shall never fulfil God's purpose along any other road. All our gifts and talents will only be wasted if we avoid the pathway of the cross in our lives. We can accept it or reject it - the choice is entirely ours.

Sadhu Sundar Singh used to say that, when we reach heaven, there will be no second chance to bear the cross for Jesus's sake. We may reject it now, but we shall have no opportunity in eternity to follow in the blood-stained path that Jesus walked in. When we meet our blessed Lord, He will yet have nail prints in His hands and feet. What will it be then to look back over our own earthly lives and find that we carefully avoided the cross at every step? God grant, rather, that at every step we may yield to it, and thus have no regrets in that day.

"Always delivered unto deathalways led in triumph." (2 Corinthians 4:11; 2:14)

"Jesus, I my cross have taken,

All to leave and follow Thee;

Destitute, despised, forsaken,

Thou from hence my all shalt be;

Perish every fond ambition

All I've sought and hoped and known;

Yet how rich is my condition,

God and heaven are still my own."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-supreme-priorities-4-one-thing-thou-lackest/>

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