

Fellowship in the Cross and Crown

by John Follette

John Follette's sermon emphasizes the importance of taking up one's cross and embracing suffering as essential steps in the Christian journey towards glorification and fellowship with Christ.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Romans 6:6, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 1:5, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 1:29, Philippians 3:10, Colossians 1:24, 2 Timothy 2:12, 1 Peter 4:13

Topics: "The Cross", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Follette preaches about the progression in the Christian journey beyond just serving the Lord, emphasizing the importance of taking up our cross after being yoked with Jesus. He explains that the cross symbolizes suffering, necessary for spiritual growth and fellowship with Christ. Follette highlights the significance of denying ourselves, not just material things, but the ruinous self-will within us, in order to fully surrender to God. He stresses that suffering is a part of every Christian's journey and leads to a deeper union with Christ, ultimately preparing us for glorification and reigning with Him.

Transcript

After our Lord Jesus Christ gets the young Christians yoked up and they are rendering beautiful service with the blessing of God upon them, when He has them so close to Him that they can look right into His eyes and they are pulling along together, He begins to deal with them on other lines than merely serving Him; for that is not the end of the program, though some may think it is. Some people have the idea that if they just serve Him till the trumpet blows they will be ready to enter in, but let me tell you that is only the beginning. Most of this service has its counterpart, symbolized by the next thing He tells them to take. They have taken the yoke and now we find, about four chapters further on, that there is still something more for them. For we find Him saying to His disciples, "If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me."

But we might question, "A cross, right when we are moving along down the road of wonderful victory and power? A cross?" Yes, that is the next thing He has for us. Never try to load a poor sinner up with a cross. He has nothing to do with it. Get him to take the yoke if possible but not the cross at first. And remember that we are not now speaking of the Cross of Calvary--that belonged to Jesus. He tells us to take our own cross. It is as if He said, "Now I have you exercised sufficiently and have you in good running order, and it is time for you to take up your cross and follow Me." Why does He say that? Because the cross is a symbolic term. The yoke is the symbol of service, the cross is the symbol of suffering; the crown is the sign

of authority, and the palm is the symbol of victory. All of these are symbols or pictures.

The Lord is speaking of the invisible crosses which face every heart that is actually serving the Christ in this yoke life. Every bit of spiritual service issues in suffering and it is necessary that we suffer it is a part of this cycle of which we have been speaking.

You thought the yoke was given so you could serve the Lord ? It was not that only. It was that He might, through the medium of service, captivate you so you would then take up the cross. He could thus move you into still another phase of this fellowship. So He draws a halt to all this activity.

You thought you were pulling along beautifully, but that was only to get you started. Did you not know that what you are is of far more value than anything you do! The worker is always of more consequence to God than anything he can ever do and yet it is the work which seems to captivate thousands and thousands of Christian workers. To all such whose vision is filled with the work they do for the Lord let me say, "You have your focus wrong; the vision is all right but the focus is wrong; never focus it upon anything you do. It is you He wants and not so much the things you will accomplish.

He says, "If you will do that which I am asking of you, then I can not only get something done for my kingdom but I will also accomplish something in you and through this I will be able to stamp upon you a little more of the divine image until you come to the full stature of Christ." So He draws a halt to this lovely picture of service and says, "Now take up this cross. It is not Mine, but is for you alone." This does not mean that we cease to serve Him. We are now conscious of a cross and its place in our life.

But you say, "If Jesus died on the cross, why should I have a cross ?" That you might do the very same thing that He did. The cross is a symbol of suffering, of crucifixion, and He wants your heart and life brought through the death process.

Being saved, sanctified, baptized and used in His service--all this is but preliminary to getting you ready to be placed upon that cross. The Paschal lamb was standing in all its perfection without spot or blemish, sanctified to the Lord, but Jehovah didn't say, "Tie that perfect lamb to the door and when the death angel passes over he will see this beautiful lamb and pass over." We are not saved by life but by death. Do you want to live ? Then take your cross. What is your cross? You will have to learn to interpret your own cross, for yours is not like anyone's else. It will be a cross fitting your whole concept and disposition, and more than that, your will. Whatever you are in your WILL determines your cross. What may be a cross to you may seem like a joy-ride to another. It is that which will crucify the I in you that will determine your cross; whatever sort of a cross will do away with that "straight-up-and-dicular" pronoun, will be the one He means you to take.

He has shaped it and brought it to you but He leaves the taking of it to your own volition. He doesn't lay it upon you. That would spoil it. It is the surrender of your being to the cross that He wants. Take it in faith, always remembering that on the other side of that cross there is a further step to this cycle to which He is calling us. We have that to encourage us.

Let me admonish you--never make your own cross. How easy it is to make crosses for ourselves! I remember years ago when I first came into this teaching and the Lord, leading me out on this line of thought, began to search my heart and to crucify me. I thought sometimes I would almost perish. Sometimes the reaction of it would nearly overwhelm me and yet I told the Lord I wanted more of it; I told Him I wanted to know the philosophy of it, the meaning, even though it took my life. He created that

hunger in me; it was a God-made hunger. And He began to feed me with some of these luscious things of the Spirit which come only by this process. I saw that I should be crucified and I endeavored in my own strength to let this crucifixion work in my heart and life. I found I was not progressing, so one day while on my knees, the Lord, as it were, leaned over me and whispered, "Now just wait a bit. I know how to make crosses. I worked in a carpenter shop and I know just how to shape them." I knew well what He meant--I was not to do any more of this self-crucifying business. You know why ? Because everytime we make a cross for ourselves we always pad it somewhere with a cushion. But when you allow Him to form the cross He has a unique way of managing it all. Take up the cross He has made for you, but don't shy off. Hundreds of people have side-stepped their crosses. Oh, they will not miss heaven because of it but I know some things they will miss over there!

He says to us, "Deny yourself." Now don't start denying yourself of things. He doesn't ask you to do that. It is this miserable, evasive, hateful, ruinous thing in us which we are to deny. Don't you hate it? You may deny yourself of things till you are skin and bones and still retain that hideous thing that wants to rise up and be "It" and say and do and have, when instead, it should always be "Christ in you the hope of glory." I can of myself do nothing, but I live; as Paul says, yet not I -- not this terrible ego--but Christ liveth in me.

When He says, "Deny yourself" He is striking at the fundamental element again. The I in us is the only thing that wants to live in us. God knows that and is saying, "If you continue to allow that I to move under the power and realm of the creation in which it is born you will die a wreck." If you are unsundered and unsaved all you need to do to get to hell is to keep on having your own will. Don't think for a moment that you have to go out and commit adultery or lie and steal to be lost; if you keep on allowing that ruinous self-will to exert itself and remain unsundered to God you will land in hell.

That is why God always asks for our surrendered will. With my will I have power to attain, by the power of choice, the highest place in God or to wreck my life. God never coerces anyone. He asks us to take up our cross, to deny ourselves----deny that which wants to rule us. Every time you feel it rising up, deny it. You know when it comes. Did you ever have a secret meeting in your own heart? Do you know these movements in your heart of hearts? God knows them and He would like to have us honest enough to sit down with Him, as little broken-hearted children, and face our failures, call them by their proper names. Would it not be profitable to admit that we are miserable failures ? But instead of that we begin to make excuses and say, "Well, if so-and-so had not done that it wouldn't have happened." Have any of you here ever discovered that you were not absolutely perfect after you were baptized ? If you think you are a finished product you are deceived and I would far rather deal with an honest sinner than with you in that state. God wants reality. He knows that this I will go forty miles out of its way to make itself prominent or to spare itself. It is all a part of the colossal ruin of Adam. I have often thought that if our hearts were all hung on a washline from here to Jerusalem we wouldn't be able to pick out our own. In the natural we are all of the same clay.

Now Jesus says, "Being identified with Me take up your cross and follow Me." Where will you follow ? He walked from Bethlehem's manger to the city of Jerusalem and lived a most wonderful life. Is that the only place where He walked ? And did He go right from there to heaven ? True, there is that lovely picture of the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus stood in the perfection of manhood. But He was more than that. He is the Lamb that must be slain. He went down from the Mount to the demoniac of humanity at its base, and later on climbed up Calvary's hill and made His exit from Calvary.

Are you to follow this Jesus just where His miracles are being performed ? That would be interesting, but you will have to be careful. He will lead you right through Gethsemane to Calvary. There is something wonderful about it all, for as you find your Gethsemane and your Calvary you will also have the fellowship of this Jesus whom you so love. You will share in the fellowship of His suffering. Remember that every bit of spiritual service issues in suffering. His service never rides in a band wagon. He has other means of locomotion. You will not amount to much on the band wagon; it may roll on for a time but by and by you will hear the wheels creaking so you had better get off and get down on the ground. The bride of Christ doesn't get to heaven on a band wagon. He has other means of locomotion. You will find it in Genesis. Remember the camel.

As we follow the Christ in His walk we find that He grew in wisdom and knowledge and in favor with God and man. From the human aspect He has the favor of men and they like Him; He was a fine young Jew. Then something happens. God leads Him to be baptized in the Spirit and through a terrific pressure He becomes partaker of that inward revelation of God the Father. God is truth and therefore this Jesus must be a revelation to the world of what truth is. He becomes the embodiment and personification of truth, insomuch that He can stand up and say, "I am the truth." No one else could have done that.

And the moment He declares Himself to be truth, the attitude of the people changes. In the synagogue where He has always been welcome and in perfect harmony with all the people, when He takes His place in the Messiah's chair and dares to say to them, "This day is this prophecy fulfilled in your ears," what is the reaction? They hate Him and would have killed Him. What has happened? His personality has not changed, but He has taken it upon Himself to be identified with God in truth, and truth is the thing they hate. Always distinguish between the two--personality is a evasive thing, but Truth is dynamic. Oh, yes, the philosophers wanted to know what truth was, but when they had the very Embodiment of truth in their midst they rejected it. They would rather get it second- third- or fourth-hand; they are afraid to get too near the fire and they fear that direct truth might inconvenience them. So they seek to get rid of Truth by throwing Him over the precipice, but you cannot get rid of truth that way.

He had not really served in anointed ministry up till that time; He was simply that beautiful thirty-year-old young man. But just as soon as He begins to serve in the capacity of truth He ceases to be in favor. Listen, the ministry which does not demand a price of us is not worth anything. And it is a strange thing, but the more you embrace that truth the greater become the desire and hunger in your heart for more of it. A spiritual ministry dealing with truth is the most costly service.

Now why do we suffer in our service ? It is in our catalogue. Any Christian who thinks suffering is not on his program has a mistaken idea. On Calvary Jesus met every other condition; He met the entire sin problem and made provision for it but He never put suffering out of the program. He uses suffering to serve us. But don't let yourself get crushed beneath it. Suffering, if borne in the Spirit and to the glory of God, will issue again into a new fellowship with Him; but it cannot be entered into unless you come the way He has designed.

Now let me read from Romans 8, ",And if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we SUFFER with Him that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." We are candidates for heir-ship. That is, it belongs to us if so be that we suffer with Him. Where is He bringing us ? To a place of glorification with Him. That is our final destiny. It comes by way of the yoke--but don't stop with the yoke; by way of the cross but don't stop at the cross; by way of suffering but don't stop at

suffering. Move on. He wants us finally to be glorified with Him. I love Him because that is His divine arrangement and program.

We are all heirs, but there is a great difference between being an heir and actually getting your possessions. Did you think just because you were an heir you would get it all the next afternoon at two o'clock? There is "many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," you know. He says we are candidates for heirship, and we may become joint heirs --yoked, or joint heirs with Him, ii. Oh, that little conditional IF. Is it on condition that you receive the Baptism? No. On condition that you are a Christian? No, you have all that to start with but that is merely to get you inside the schoolroom door, and puts you in the first seat where you are looking at the letter a. Now you have all the remainder of the time to study out these intricate things of God.

Children in the primary department are heirs to all the education of High School and University but we don't go to them and say, "I love you so that I will just put you in High School today." Yet people think God will do that very thing. It is ridiculous. No, He says we shall be joint-heirs in that glorification, in that unveiling, in that mystical union that He had with the Father, if we suffer with Him. Have you learned to suffer ? That strange crucifixion is to qualify you with capabilities that will make it possible for you to reign with Him.

Yes, our reigning with Him requires qualifications. I was once a teacher in public school and learned some lessons there. I have taught in all departments for we were required to take the children on up through the grades to High School. While I always had a certain amount of fellowship and understanding with every grade because I adapted myself to my pupils and loved the children, yet I learned that, with all my devotion to them and all my interest in their welfare there was one thing I could not do---I could not impart to them in one day, qualifications or ability to land them in the high school classes or send them to college. All I could do was to keep eternally setting before them their lessons, teaching them, coaching them so that one day they would be able to adapt themselves to their new realm. How ridiculous it would have been for me to take a child in the early grades and transplant him right into a high school class! He wouldn't know how to adapt himself.

And do you think that some day the Lord will come and take us up and then come around with a bunch of crowns and say, "Now here is your crown"? and "Here is yours"? or "Here is a pair of wings for you and a golden house"? Is that what fellowship with the Son consists of? Is that the deep spiritual understanding that you learned when you were in the yoke with Him? when your face was so close to His ? when you were so close that you understood the intimations of His heart, and felt the warmth of His nature? Ah, no! It was then that you received something that transformed you until finally you found you were not the same creature that first went into the yoke with Him; you found yourself in perfect union and in love with this mystical Christ until you were partaking of His glory.

Do you want this fellowship with Christ? If so, it will cost you everything you possess, but it is worth it all. Let all else go; become detached and liberated from everything earthbound and move along with Him in this blessed fellowship, first in the yoke, then in the cross and its suffering and eventually you will enjoy that supreme fellowship of reigning with Him.

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