

The Cross and Attainment

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon calls Christians to embrace the Cross as essential for spiritual growth and true discipleship, emphasizing self-crucifixion and the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23, John 12:24, Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:10, 2 Timothy 3:12, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 2:21

Topics: "Discipleship", "Suffering For Christ"

Description

L.E. Maxwell emphasizes the profound significance of the Cross in the life of a believer, illustrating through the stories of martyrs and biblical figures that true discipleship involves embracing suffering and self-crucifixion. He argues that while many Christians may feel they have attained a level of spiritual maturity, the journey of knowing Christ requires a continual identification with His sufferings and a willingness to bear one's own cross. Maxwell challenges the notion that the Cross is merely a past event, urging believers to recognize that their daily lives must reflect the sacrificial nature of Christ's death. He highlights that true victory and resurrection power come only through a deep, ongoing relationship with the Crucified. Ultimately, he calls for a radical commitment to live in a way that mirrors Christ's humility and obedience, even in the face of persecution and societal rejection.

Transcript

A BOY WAS ONCE SEEN walking home after the martyr fires had been burning brightly at Smithfield. Someone said to him: "My boy, why were you there?" Like a true follower of the Lamb he replied, "I want to learn the way." When "Bloody Mary," as she has been called, had forbidden the proclamation of the simple gospel, Lawrence Sanders was constrained to obey God rather than man. When sentenced to death before the Lord Chancellor, Sanders answered: "Welcome be it, whatever the will of God shall be, either life or death; I tell you truly I have learned to die." Taking the stake to which he was to be chained and burned, he kissed it saying, "Welcome the Cross of Christ, welcome everlasting life." Do such martyr stories seem to belong to another world, "to another order of life?" Shame on us that we think SO. If, however, it is our eternal passion to press on to know Christ, we shall soon discover that the crucified Lord must have crucified followers; that as we glory in the Cross for our salvation, so we must embrace the Cross for self-crucifixion. We cannot sever the outward from the inward cross. Shame on me if I think there is a Cross for Jesus, but none for me. Let me embrace the way of the Cross and learn to die.

When we first came to Christ the Cross was our only attraction. By His blood alone could we have been reconciled to God. Later perhaps, we came to see the deeper meaning in His death, that when He died for us we also died with Him. We learned that we "have been crucified together with Him," identified with Him in death and resurrection as God's way of victory over sin. Paul says that, having obeyed from the heart that pattern or "mold of doctrine" to which we were delivered (through our vital union with Christ in death and resurrection), we were freed from the old mastery of sin. Emancipation came through our having been handed over, or delivered up to, the Cross-mold of doctrine. That truth has gripped us as in a vise--we do belong to our new Master, the Crucified. But it is just here that many honest believers may begin to fail. Having reckoned themselves "dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," they almost unconsciously begin to feel that they have attained. They almost feel that for them the Cross is past and done with. They forget that their life-long fellowship is to be with the Crucified, and that if the Crucified is to abide in them, they must know Him in the fellowship of His sufferings as the daily experience of life. How can we abide daily in the Crucified unless our lives be poured again and again into the mold of the Cross? The offense of the Cross has not ceased except in the case of those who have refused to live crucified lives. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution:" The moment we begin to live Christ-like lives we hear the apostle say, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." And what was that mind? When He was in the form of God He emptied Himself; He came in the likeness of men; He took the form of a servant; He humbled Himself; He became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Am I a follower of the Lamb? His was a path of self-emptying and learning of obedience by the things which He suffered. The law of the Master must be the law for the disciple.

And did my Lord on earth endure
Sorrow, and hardship, and distress
That I might sit me down secure
And rest in self-indulgent ease?
His delicate disciple, I
Like Him might neither live nor die?
,Master, I have not learnt Thee so;
Thy yoke and burden I receive,
Resolve in all Thy steps to go,
And bless the Cross by which I live,
And curse the wisdom from beneath,
That strives to rob me of Thy death.
--Rev. Charles Wesley

Charles Simeon, the great Cambridge preacher, was poured again and again into the mold of the Cross. Hear his own sorrowful story as he had wrung out to him the bitter dregs of persecution:

I strolled forth one day, buffeted and afflicted, with my little Testament in my hand. I prayed earnestly that, on opening the Book, I might find some text which should sustain me. The first text which caught my eye was this, "They found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name; him they compelled to bear his cross." You know Simon is the same name as Simeon. What a word of instruction was here--what a blessed hint for my encouragement! To have the cross laid upon me, that I might bear it after Jesus--what a privilege! It was enough. Now I could leap and sing for joy, as one whom Jesus was honoring with a participation in His sufferings. And when I read that I said, "Lord lay it on me, lay it on me; I will gladly bear the cross for Thy sake." And I henceforth bound persecution as a wreath of glory round my brow I (Quoted by A. J. Gordon in Two-Fold Life.)

Such is the pathway and victory, yea, the glory of the Cross. Again, and yet again, we must be brought to the end of ourselves. That is the work of the Cross. At Calvary, Christ laid down His life. We, too, must learn to lose our lives, learn to lay them down gladly for Christ's sake. Let us learn to bind upon our brow, as a wreath of victory, every circumstance of life which brings us to new heart searchings, and humblings, and self-surrender, and the courageous sacrifice of every idol. Let us be bold, and deathless, and uncompromising, and uncomplaining, as we embrace our cross daily; and then, let us look unfalteringly unto Jesus crucified to carry us up with Himself into new resurrection power and liberty. In spite of all that the great apostle of suffering went through from the moment that he met the Crucified on the way to Damascus, Paul cried out at the last of his life, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed unto his death" (Phil. 3:10, A.S.V.). Gordon Watt says, "We do need to be careful not to emphasize a truth out of right proportion; not to preach what I have been calling the death side of the Cross so as to forget the life side of the Cross. That is what many, I fear, are doing today--forgetting that the constant reassertion of the self-life can be dealt with only by the Cross, and that only in the measure in which we enter into the death-union with Christ can we know the resurrection life of Christ."

Most Christians fail to follow Paul into the deepest meaning of the Cross. Paul had long known Christ and "the power of his resurrection." But when we find Paul longing for fuller maturity in the spiritual life--"not as though I had already attained"--we find him longing for a still deeper fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. Paul has as his goal, "becoming conformed unto his death." As C. A. Fox has expressed it, "The climax of the risen life gravitates, strange to say, back to the Cross." We fear that many Christians are attempting, through determination and imagination, to seat themselves in the heavenlies without being incorporated more deeply into their death-union with Christ. "Conformity to His death" will come to be experienced in very practical and commonplace ways. For instance:

Christ was "crucified through weakness." Am I "weak with Him?" Or, do I unconsciously try to skirt the Cross and continue asking for baptisms of power? It is only as "the Crucified" that He pours upon us of His Spirit.

Christ emptied Himself, becoming the poorest of the poor. Should I utterly avoid this likeness to Christ? Am I soft in spending upon myself?

Jesus was made in all things like unto His brethren. Have I ever been poured into the mold of my brother's misery? Such may be my cross.

My Lord was set at nought. Has anybody yet set me at zero and found me uncomplaining?

Christ was willingly classed with criminals. Do I seek the better society? "Men of high degree are a lie."

Christ made Himself of no reputation. Am I seeking in any way to make one?

Christ and all the apostles were "made a spectacle (or theater) unto the world and to angels and to men." Do I shun the path of becoming a laughing-stock? Do I honestly esteem "His reproach greater riches" than the smile of the world, even the religious world? Am I outside the camp, or am I still reckoned among the respectably proper?

Jesus went a little farther and fell on His face. Have I certain limits where I say, "Thus far and no farther will

I follow the Crucified?"

Jesus felt the pang and agony and pain of the Cross all His life. Do we glory in the Cross or do we just talk about it and preach about it? That foul-mouthed communist found some ground for his vitriolic jibe when he said to a minister: "Christ died on His Cross, but you ministers live on it."

God forgive us for living so unidentified with the Cross that the world can see nothing of Him. For it is only as we embrace our cross that the world can behold the Crucified. Amy Carmichael asks, "Who would go so far as even to wish to be

Dead to the world and its applause,

To all the customs, fashions, laws,

Of those who hate the humbling Cross?"

But how absolutely necessary it is that I be just that --yes, all that--if I would be conformed to His image.

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