

The Cross and the Crown

by L.E. Maxwell

The sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing suffering and persecution as a necessary step towards glory and exaltation with Christ.

Topics: "Spiritual Rest", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

The preacher delves into the concept of 'Rest' (katapausis) in the Bible, exploring its literal and metaphorical meanings. Rest is seen as a spiritual fulfillment provided by God, symbolized by the Promised Land, God's completion of creation, and the peace of God. The sermon emphasizes the importance of entering God's rest through faith and obedience, drawing from Old Testament references and New Testament passages in Hebrews. The preacher highlights the significance of ceasing from self-effort, finding peace and confidence in God, and ultimately experiencing eternal rest in Christ.

Transcript

CONCERNING JAPAN'S early persecution of the Koreans, an old missionary said: "Japan could not have planned better for the Korean Christians if she had tried." The worst which befalls us often proves to be the best. It will finally prove to be true, that the sufferings of the saints in the furnace heated seven times hotter, in the dungeon and concentration camp, in the Coliseum at the mercy of wild beasts, before the shooting squad, at the stake, and under the thumb-screw, were actual steps to the throne.

It is said that a Bohemian nobleman was brought to execution for his Protestant faith. Ere he suffered under the executioner's axe, the Jesuits made a last plea. "No," he said, as he pushed them aside: "I have finished my course; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." The Jesuits rebuffed him: "Those words were true for the apostle, not for 11 "Nay," rejoined the faithful soul; "you forget the rest--'and not only to me, but also to all them that have, loved his appearing!"

As sinners, our call is to salvation. As saints, our call is to suffering. There is the Cross for Christ. And there is also the cross for the believer. In His work of atonement, Christ stands absolutely alone with none to compare. But in a life laid down, Christ is the first, the supreme, the model, in a long train of martyrs who have "loved not their lives unto the death." Every follower of His has been "born crucified." He is there-fore a potential martyr. Christ always associated together His sufferings and His glorification. There is no crown without the Cross. Golgotha and glory are forever wedded in the mind of the Saviour, so that those who sink into Calvary's depths are assured of the heights of glory. The rewards are sure. Crucifixion with Christ predestines the glory. For, there is life, and there is the crown of life; there is righteousness,

and the crown of righteousness. It is the difference between being the child of the kingdom and being crowned with reward in the kingdom. Crowns are for those who have borne their cross. This law is so in-flexible that the call to the Cross is truly a call to the crown.

According to the old Latin Vulgate, Psalm 96:10 should read: "Tell it out among the heathen, that the Lord reigneth from the Tree." Justin Martyr accuses the Jews of having deliberately erased the words "a ligno," lest they establish the rule of the Crucified "from the tree." But to us who are saved, it is from that place of shame, and suffering, and death, Christ holds sway. To us, the Cross is "the power of God and the wisdom of God." There, the King, the King of the curse--"he that is hanged is accursed of God"--has captured us and fastened us to His chariot wheels. In His utmost weakness and loss, Christ there slaughtered our pride, unseated vain self, and reigns a King. From that throne high and lifted up He holds sway. The "Lion of the tribe of Judah" is "the Lamb slain in the midst of the throne." His reign is from the Tree.

The truth that David learned to sing,

Its deep fulfillment here attains;

"Tell all the earth the Lord is King!"

Lo, from the Cross, a King He reigns!

The Jews were nonplussed over the apparent contradiction in Old Testament Scripture. They saw there a suffering, dying Messiah. They saw also a ruling, reigning Messiah. Must there be two? They wondered. Of course the death and resurrection of Christ solve the mystery. Omnipotence has been crowned-"from the Tree."

But we repeat, the Cross is not only atoning; it is also exemplary. What is more logical than a crucified Christ so that He may have crucified followers? Head and members must be one. Let us not divorce the doctrine of His Cross from the endurance of our cross. God forbid that we should be "saved by crucifixion and yet saved from crucifixion." The disciple is not above his Lord. Let him then "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ."

Bishop Pearson once proved the divine origin of Christianity by showing that its doctrines were such that they could not naturally command success.

1. Christianity condemned all other religions.
2. It lays upon men commands contrary to the flesh, viz., the love of enemies and the bearing of the Cross.
3. It makes promises which are seemingly incredible, which cannot be realized or obtained till after this life and founded on the miracle of resurrection.
4. To seal "the faith" against success, it promised persecutions.

A good argument indeed. However, we are convinced that the Christian faith succeeded, not in spite of these things, but because of them. In the Cross of Christ is displayed the very "wisdom of God" as well "the power of God." In the Cross is exhibited the whole principle of the Christian faith and life. In Christ's Cross (and in ours as we follow Him), all the seeming beauty of "life under the sun" is stripped away, and we are left with--only God. The world's joys and pleasures are "for a season." The Christian forfeits the

present, and chooses to suffer "for a season."

A heathen of 100 A.D., Lucian of Samosata says: "The Christians still worship that great man who was crucified . . . these wretched people have persuaded themselves that they are absolutely deathless, and will live forever, for which reason they think slightly of death, and many willingly surrender themselves." Little wonder that the Cross created such consternation with its inroads into heathenism. The Cross captured men and carried them carefree and happily, yea, even recklessly, through the midst of the most excruciating agonies and tortures and deaths. These saints became such free citizens of heaven that they could not be subdued to the customs of that sunken society. This contemptible "third race" perplexed the sane (?) among all men. They wore the livery of humiliation and heaven, treated the trifles of time with contempt, and lived the life eternal. To the heathen the doctrine of the Cross seemed, in all its invisible mysterious power, a veritable plague, an infection, a strong invincible--once it seized the simpletons! And so it was. In those days the Crucified was known by His followers. They embraced the Cross so fully because they were so sure of the crown. They took the way of death because it was and is the gateway to life. "Why are you Christians so bent upon death? You are so bent upon death that you make nothing of it." To which the disciple nobly replied: "We are bent, sir, not upon death, but upon life."

We are commanded, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," who humbled himself (Phil. 2:5, A.S.V.). Thus Christ embodied all He taught. He himself summarized the principles of all recompense, when He said: "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." This principle Christ exemplified. From the heights of glory Christ descended, from the Godhead to manhood. As a man, He descended to a servant. From life, He descended to death. From a common death, He descended to that of a criminal. And having plumbed the depths, He is highly exalted or "exalted with all exaltation." His exaltation is measured by His humiliation. His ascent is but His "descent re-versed." And ours will be the same. These fearful facts must so seize upon us that we will begin here and now to shape our lives by this unbreakable law of recompense. Shall we reap what we have never sown? Do we prize seats on the right hand and on the left in the kingdom? God have mercy on any lazy, ambitionless reader who does not care. The Saviour rebuked no one for aspiring to the highest. "Covet earnestly the best gifts." We have no option but to choose the very highest. Someone says:

God has His best gifts for the few

Who dare to stand the test.

His second choice He has for those

Who will not have His best.

With the first two lines we agree; with the last two we cannot. He who "picks and chooses," refuses. As we face the Cross we have no option, no alternative. We must descend to the dust in utmost humiliation. But that must is never by coercion. We must choose; we must choose the highest; and the choice must be purely voluntary. We have been destined for a crown only if we choose the Cross. It is for this reason that someone so well says, "If I covet any place on the earth but the dust at the foot of the Cross, then I know nothing of Calvary love."

Is it but a Christmastide sentiment that the Christ of glory was born of a lowly maiden, entered our world in a

humble stable, and lived in despised Nazareth? How the devil does becloud these mysteries! Think a moment. Christ was the only one who, before conception, ever chose His mother, chose His place of birth, chose His residence. He left God's glory for one purpose, that He might lay "God's axe at the roots of man's pride." In His very birth He would incarnate all that He would later teach. At every step of His de-scent, He "made Himself void by His own act" (Moule). Job was stripped involuntarily. Christ stripped Himself. He chose to lay down His life "of Himself." Would He bring many sons unto glory? God's selfless "Corn of Wheat" fell into the ground and died. Now note how God begins to reverse His descent. From those unplumbed depths of death He "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him"--to the very heights of name, and fame, and rank, and rule. And not because of His eternal glories but solely because He humbled Himself as a man. In His in-carnation, Christ added "a life that stooped to the lower part of the earth to that which filled the highest heavens. He has thus lifted up our degraded nature, and in Himself crowned it with many crowns. . . . Hence it is, that forevermore Christ's glory must be measured by the depth as well as by the height; for the depth has increased the height" (Gracey). In speaking of the glories of the God-man, the same writer says, "Our humanity rises, rises to the right hand of the eternal throne; but ever amid the burning splendours of that throne is still true humanity."

The throne on which He now appears

Was His from everlasting years!

But a new glory crowns His brow,

And every knee to Him shall bow!

--F. M. Pitt.

And he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit. Listen, fellow believer. You and I (let us say it reverently) are blood brothers with the King. He is near of kin. We are "joint-heirs with Christ." He says to you and to me, "My Father and your Father; My God and your God."

Child of the Eternal Father,

Bride of the Eternal Son,

Dwelling-place of God the Spirit,

Thus with Christ made ever one;

Dowered with joy beyond the Angels

Nearest to His throne,

They, the ministers attending

His beloved one:

Granted all my heart's desire,

All things made my own;

Feared by all the powers of evil,

Fearing God alone;
Walking with the Lord in glory
Through the courts divine,
Queen within the royal palace,
Christ forever mine;
Say, poor worldling, can it be,
That my heart should envy thee?

--Ter Steegen.

Little wonder that when the suffering Simeon of Cambridge read the words, "They found a man of Cyrene ... him they compelled to bear his cross," he said, "Lord lay it on me." Henceforth he bound persecution about his brow as a wreath of victory.

The Saviour promised: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit down with me in my throne, even as I also

overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." Joseph was such an overcomer. God's way up for Joseph was down, as it must be for every disciple. His descent was climaxed with false accusation and imprisonment. At every point he suffered for no fault of his own, but solely "for righteousness sake." He had thirteen long years of insult and injury, suspicion and slander, testing and trial and treachery; but all these actually created the king. He said: "God hath caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction." And when we see him seated with Pharaoh on his' throne, fully forgiving and feeding and caring for his brethren who had sold him, we behold that "bound-less unselfishness upon which God confers boundless power." Crowns of righteousness will be conferred upon those who have learned to "have the mind which is also in Christ Jesus."

The Saviour said: "The meek . . . shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Shortly before the American civil war closed, General Howard had succeeded another officer as head of a special division. General Sherman had been the commanding officer, and when he was arranging for a grand review of the army at Washington, he sent for General Howard. He told the General that the friends of the other officer insisted upon his riding at the head of the corps. "But it is my command," said Howard, "I am entitled to ride there." "Of course you are," replied Sherman, "you led the men through Georgia and the Carolinas; but, Howard, you are a Christian and can stand the disappointment." "If you put it on that ground," said Howard, "there is but one answer. Let him ride at the head of the " "Yes, let him have the honour," said Sherman; "but you will report to me at nine o'clock and will ride by my side at the head of the army." So it is with the saints who have humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God. The promise is that He will exalt you in due time. Every downward step, every dying to self, every embracing of the Cross--whether in the form of denial or degradation, of suffering or separation, of sorrow or vexation, of false accusation or humiliation--all these and a hundred other things we might mention, are not a descent but actually an ascent to the throne. Our call to embrace the Cross is a call to reign with Christ.

Beloved, Christ is coming. He says, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12). Crowns of righteousness await all those who love His appearing. Can we respond out of a full heart, Amen, Even so, come Lord Jesus. "Thy kingdom come." And in our prayers let us ask as never before-for "just enough wood to make a cross." "Oh Christ, descend! Scarred temple, wear the crown! Bruised hand, take the sceptre! Wounded foot, step the throne! Thine is the kingdom!" Oh, searching hour when He looks us over, the born crucified, not for medals but for our birthmarks, the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Hast thou no scar?

No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand?

I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,

Hast thou no scar?

Hast thou no wound?

Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,

Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent

By ravening beasts that compassed me, I swooned:

Hast thou no wound?

No wound? No scar?

Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,

And pierced are the feet that follow Me;

But thine are whole; can he have followed far

Who has no wound nor scar?

--Amy Carmichael

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