

FOLLOWERS OF JESUS: CROSS-BEARERS.

"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." – Matt. 16:24.

OUR Lord's invitation to forsake all and follow him is presented in very different language from the usual invitations given in his name today; – the thought, the sentiment, is wholly different. The general thought today, in connection with an invitation to "Come to Jesus," might be expressed thus: – "We invite, we urge upon you to escape an eternity of torture, of misery, by accepting Jesus as your Savior. It is a question of eternal happiness or eternal misery, and, therefore, you have practically no alternative, but must accept him." How different from this is our Lord's presentation of the matter in this text. He says nothing whatever about there being no choice, nor about an eternity of misery for those who do not elect to become his followers. His words imply that it is a matter of choice with the individual, and not a matter of compulsion in any sense of the word.

Our text contains no urging, no insistence that there is no alternative. On the contrary it presents to the mind obstacles which must be encountered by those who become the Lord's followers – the crosses they must expect; and thus it invites them to consider well what they are doing, before taking the step. The invitation contains neither rant nor cant, but is, in every sense of the word, logical and reasonable, and so stated as to avoid any misunderstanding. In this respect it corresponds with our Lord's other utterances on the subject; as, for instance, when he gave the parable of the man who proposed to build a house and laid the foundation, but afterwards was not able to complete the structure. On this parable the Lord builds the teaching that his followers should count the cost of discipleship, in the same cool, methodical, calculating manner in which they would count the cost of the erection of a building; and that they should make sure that they sufficiently desire the result to carry forward the conditions

necessary to attain them. His words are, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me, cannot be my disciple." He explains, further, that this implies that he will love the Lord more than father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters – yea, more than his own life. – Luke 14:26-30.

Furthermore, it is proper that we notice the class of people to whom the Lord addresses these searching requirements of discipleship. He addressed not vile sinners, not aliens, strangers, foreigners from God's covenants and blessings; but those who were already the recipients of these – Israelites. Our text shows that his invitation was addressed to those who were already, in some sense of the word at least, our Lord's "disciples" – believers in him and, to some extent, already cooperating with him. And so, still, we understand **[R3236 : page 342]** these words to be applicable, not to sinners but to those who have accepted of God's grace in Christ to the forgiveness of their sins. The Lord is seeking a very special class of followers, separate not only from the world in general, but separate and distinct from the ordinary class of followers or disciples. Without prejudice to the general interests of the world, the blessing of which will come in due time; – without prejudice to the general disciple or believer, who will experience some blessing, some favors more than the world; – our text is pointing out the conditions of that highest degree of discipleship, the reward of which will be to be with the Master, see him as he is and share his glory as joint-heir with him in the Kingdom which the Father has promised him – through the instrumentality of which Kingdom all the ordinary disciples and the world in general shall be eventually blessed.

Our Lord wished, evidently, to draw a sharp line of distinction between all other classes and those followers who would walk in his steps, bearing their crosses after him. It is of this class that he declares, "No man having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62.) This special class must be

thoroughly imbued with a zeal for God and for righteousness; must gain some reasonable conceptions of the good things which God has in reservation for them; must have some appreciation of the Kingdom privileges, else they will not be persevering enough, nor zealous enough, to "fight the [R3236 : page 343] good fight of faith" and overcome the spirit of the world, with the Lord's assisting grace. It will require these qualities of heart, in addition to the grace, mercy and strength which the Lord has promised, to enable them to take up their cross and follow the Lord in the narrow way of self-sacrifice. And it was not only a kindness on the Lord's part to make clear and definite the terms of the sacrifice, but it was reasonable also that he should not inveigle any into taking such a course contrary to the true zeal of their hearts. It was eminently proper that he should put the matter just as he did put it and that we, as his followers and mouthpieces, should present the matter to each other and to all who purpose to become his disciples in the same straightforward manner.

Some might be inclined to think that urging to accept the Lord and to seek to be his follower, with the thought that any other course would mean eternal torture, might be considered a deception which would work out benefit to the deceived ones – a deception which would do good rather than harm. We dispute this. We hold, on the contrary, that the erroneous teaching has done great injury in various ways.

(1) Its misrepresentation of the divine methods and arrangements has caused many to doubt not only the love but the justice of God.

(2) While people have theoretically claimed that only those who follow closely in the footsteps of Jesus and take up their crosses, following him in self-sacrifice, will be saved, and all the remainder of mankind be damned to eternal torture, nevertheless few believe it, few act upon such a belief, few are making an effort to be followers of the Lord as if they believed it; and extremely few of the many who are not trying to take up their crosses and follow the Lord give

evidence of any fear of an eternity of torment because of neglecting his words.

(3) As a consequence there is a nominal church of professed followers of Christ, extremely few of whom are followers in the sense comprehended by the Lord in the text.

(4) As a result of this, nominal Christianity and nominal discipleship having crowded out the true condition of discipleship which our Lord specified as necessary to joint-heirship in the Kingdom, we find that nearly all the preaching and other religious efforts and services of today are going in another direction entirely – to produce merely justified believers, and not to produce the sanctified followers described.

(5) As a consequence, present conditions, teachings, etc., are extremely unfavorable to the development of the very class which this Gospel age was intended to select and perfect as joint-heirs with their Lord in the Kingdom.

It is because, under the Lord's providences, the mists of the dark ages are scattering and the light of the Millennial morning creeping in, that we are privileged to see the inconsistencies and falsities of the traditions of men which have beclouded the inspired records; and, therefore, we are led to inquire for the "old paths," and to listen, not for the confused babel of error, but for the clear words of the great Shepherd of the flock and his inspired representatives, the apostles. Listening to these – listening to the voice of God through these – the inspired plan of God is becoming clear and luminous to us, and its every feature reasonable, harmonious and beautiful.

It is from this standpoint that we are enabled to view our text with pleasure; and seeing the grand designs of our Almighty Father, are enabled to rejoice that we are accounted worthy, through our Redeemer's merit, to be invited to walk in his footsteps and to take up our crosses and to follow him through evil and through good report.

And we are assured of his sustaining grace by the way, and of final victory and joint-heirship with him in the Kingdom, if we thus continue steadfast to the end.

"If any man will come after me," signifies, If any man desires to be a follower of mine, to walk in my steps of obedience to the Father's will, and to share with me in the Father's reward. Such are to know that the cost of such discipleship will be cross-bearing. Cross-bearing signifies endurance of trials, difficulties, disappointments – the crossing of the human will and preferences by circumstances and conditions permitted of the Father. Our Lord's will was fully submitted to God, so that it was his delight to do the Father's will, and this must be our attitude to commence with; but after this consecration has taken place comes the trial and testing. If we were in heaven, where all is in full accord with the divine will, we could have no crosses from the time we fully consecrated to the Lord; because our wills being in accord with the Father's will and with all righteousness, and there being nothing in heaven contrary to that which is right, we would be in accord with everything, and everything would be in accord with our newly consecrated minds. Our crosses come because we are living in "this present evil world," because the spirit of the world is contrary to the Lord and his Spirit of righteousness and equity, and because our Adversary, Satan, seeketh continually to stumble and ensnare us; because, also, our new wills are circumscribed and hindered and opposed by the desires of our natural bodies, which are more or less in accord with the things of this present time, its conditions, its aims, its sentiments; and because the new will strives to use the body in a manner and in a service which, under **[R3236 : page 344]** present evil conditions, continually causes it annoyance and suffering. These things are to be taken into consideration as the cost of discipleship – the cost of a share in the Kingdom and its glory, honor and immortality, promised to the "called, chosen and faithful."

"GOD KINDLY VEILS OUR EYES."

It is fortunate for us that in the outstart we do not, can not, estimate or appreciate the full meaning of the words, sacrifice, cross-bearing, etc. If we could look into the future and see from the start the various trials and difficulties to be encountered in the "narrow way," doubtless few of us would have the courage to make the consecration and the start – if we could not see or appreciate, beforehand, the rewards and blessings which under divine providence come to us in connection with every trial – more than compensating us for every earthly self-denial and endurance. Nor can we in advance appreciate how the Lord wishes to test our zeal and our faith, by letting us come to the crosses of life one at a time, and letting us see their ruggedness, – hiding from us the assisting hand by which, as soon as we take hold of the cross and put forth our efforts, our Lord lifts the real weight of it, so that we have no more at any time than we are able to bear. So careful is he of all those who thus become his footstep followers and cross-bearers, and prospectively his joint-heirs in the Kingdom, that he will not "suffer them to be tempted above that they are able, but with the temptation will provide also a way of escape." – 1 Cor. 10:13.

SACRIFICING PRECEDES CROSS-BEARING.

The first step in following the Lord is properly designated in the Scriptures a sacrifice; but it is not a taking up of the cross. When we sacrifice our wills, when we submit ourselves fully to the Lord, it is the sum of all sacrifice – in the sense that the giving up of the will means the surrender of our all to the Lord, that his will may be done in respect to all our affairs. The will is the individual, the ego, and holds the command, the rulership of our time, influence, abilities, and every talent; hence the surrender of the will to God means a surrender of all these things to him. All subsequent sacrifices which we may make in the Lord's service are included in and represented by this sacrifice of the will. If the will changes, draws back, ceases to be obedient to God, ceases to be submissive to his arrangements, the

whole condition changes and the relationship to God as a member of the body of Christ terminates. But if the will continues faithful to God and desirous of serving him and his cause, though the service and cross-bearing be not done faithfully, the Lord will carry such through, and by chastisements and corrections in righteousness they shall **[R3237 : page 344]** ultimately be "saved so as by fire" – by tribulation. This is the essence of the doctrine of "the final perseverance of the saints." So long as they continue to be consecrated – to have their wills sanctified to the Lord – they continue to be his, even should they, from lack of zeal, fail to win the prize offered to the zealous, the "overcomers."

But if the will remain loyal to the Lord, and the crosses are approached and lifted and borne in faith and trust, not only will the Lord's grace suffice, but his comfort and assistance will be given in the narrow way; – so that its trials and difficulties may be esteemed as "light afflictions, but for a moment." Eventually this class shall be the victors, joint-heirs with the Master in his Kingdom, because by his assisting grace they shall have walked in his footsteps faithfully, even unto death – and that with greater ease and peace and joy and satisfaction than others who with less zeal seek to avoid the crosses of their consecration.

The statement that the consecration of the will – its surrender, its sacrifice, that the Lord's will may be received instead – is not one of the crosses we are called on to bear, may need further explanation. In order for the sacrifice of our wills to be acceptable to the Lord at all, it must be no cross to us; the desire to give up our own will and to accept God's will must be a joy, a pleasure. Our wills must be sacrificed willingly, else the sacrifice will not be accepted of the Lord, and we shall have neither part nor lot with him. Unless the will be joyfully resigned to the Lord's will, all subsequent sacrificing or cross-bearing will count nothing whatever to our advantage. Our Master's expression respecting the surrender, the sacrifice, of his will to do the Father's will, illustrates this matter clearly; and it will be

noticed from the language that there was no cross connected therewith.

Our Lord's sentiments were, "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart." (Psa. 40:8.) And so all who would be his disciples must not only count the cost of cross-bearing because of the opposition of the world, the flesh and the devil, but they must have a somewhat similar spirit to that of our Lord in connection with the sacrificing of their wills; they, too, must delight to have God's will done in them – delight to surrender or sacrifice their own wills. Let us see this clearly, and if there is anything lacking in respect to the sacrifice of our wills let us give it our first attention. He who has completely sacrificed his will to the Lord's will has gained the victory at the start which will make all the remainder of the "narrow way" comparatively easy. He who has merely hacked and mutilated his will [R3237 : page 345] instead of killing it outright, will find extra difficulty at every step of his journey, and can never gain the victory until he has finished the sacrifice which he imperfectly began.

IN WHAT DOES CROSS-BEARING CONSIST?

The Master's cross-bearing did not consist in fighting the weaknesses of the flesh, for he had none; nor are these weaknesses of the flesh our crosses. Because all our weaknesses of the flesh are fully covered by the merit of our Lord's sacrifice; our standing before God is as New Creatures and not as imperfect fleshly creatures – the imperfections of the flesh, which are contrary to our wills and opposed by them, being fully pardoned by the Lord. The Lord's cross-bearing consisted in the *doing of the Father's will under unfavorable conditions*. This course brought upon him the envy, hatred, malice, strife, persecution, etc., of those who thought themselves to be God's people, but whom our Lord, who read their hearts, declared to be of their father, the devil. We are not able to read the hearts of those about us who profess to be the Lord's people, yet we may be sure that there are plenty still who profess the name of God and of Christ and who

have none of his Spirit and are not his children, but are the children of the Adversary, – begotten of an evil spirit.

Since we are walking in the same "narrow way" that our Master walked, we may reasonably expect that our crosses will be of similar kind to his – oppositions to our doing the will of our Father in heaven – oppositions to our serving his cause and letting the light shine out as our Master and Leader directed. It is a pleasure for us to do the Father's will – no cross about that. We delight not only to consecrate our wills, but the Lord's law of righteousness is in our hearts to such an extent that we delight to serve the right, the Truth. Our cross-bearing comes when we find that the Truth, so beautiful to us, so charming, is hated by others and draws upon us their anger, malice, hatred, as the same truths drew the same opposition upon our Master. Our faithfulness in cross-bearing consists in our willingness to stand up for the Truth and for every principle of righteousness; – meekly, humbly, yet firmly, speaking the truth in love, no matter what the cost of friendships broken or enmities enkindled, or evil words spoken against us falsely for the Truth's sake.

Our Master forewarned us of just such experiences when he spoke of our crosses in following him. He was explaining the matter more fully when he said, "Marvel not if the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." "If ye were of the world the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." If they have called the Master of the house Beelzebub, – prince of devils, – think it not strange if they will call his followers by evil names also. Yea, he forewarned us, "They shall say all manner of evil against you, falsely, for my sake." He even implied that some who are not children of the devil would be found amongst the persecutors of the cross-bearers, and assured us that some of these would verily think that they were doing God service. And are they not doing God and us also a service in the sense that Satan is serving God's purposes in the present time, in the persecution of the Church; – in making her path a

"narrow" one, and filling it with difficulties; that thus the Lord's faithful cross-bearers might be tested and proven, and that he might thus select and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works and zealous of the Truth?

CROSS-BEARERS MUST BATTLE WITH THE FLESH, ALSO.

While we pointed out, foregoing, that cross-bearing is quite separate from battling with the weaknesses of the flesh, nevertheless whoever has the mind of Christ, whoever is seeking to be a cross-bearer and to stand up as a representative of the Lord and the Truth in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, as an ambassador of God, will surely realize that he could not be an acceptable ambassador and could not claim that his will is sacrificed to the Lord's will, if he did not strive against the weaknesses and imperfections in himself as well as stand for the general principles of righteousness and truth everywhere. The Apostle included this thought and much more in this expression, – "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (1 John 2:6.) He is to walk as our Lord walked, in his general deportment and relationship to everything that is good; and correspondingly to avoid everything that is evil. He is to walk as nearly as possible in the footsteps of Jesus.

This, however, does not mean that he either should or could, in an imperfect body, walk up to all the perfection of his Lord, who even in the flesh was perfect. It means just what it says, that we should walk as he walked – in the same way, in the same direction, toward the same mark and standard that he recognized and established. The Apostle Paul gives us a suggestion along this line, very helpful when rightly understood. His words are, "The righteousness of the law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:4.) To walk after the flesh is to walk after sin – to knowingly, willingly, intentionally, do those things which we [R3237 : page 346] recognize to be contrary to the divine will, even though we

should not go to the extreme of wickedness. So, likewise, to walk after the Spirit does not mean to walk *up to the standard* of the Spirit, which would be impossible for us who were born in sin, shapen in iniquity, and thus blemished by sin according to the flesh. As "New Creatures" we are living in the earthly tabernacle, which is imperfect; and so long as we are thus limited, we cannot do all that we would. As "New Creatures," begotten of the holy Spirit, we desire to do perfectly. We desire that every thought, word and act should be perfect in the sight of our heavenly Father, – as perfect as were those of our dear Redeemer; but this we know from the Scriptures and from experience is impossible. We are glad, therefore, that the Lord shows us, as in this statement of the Apostle, that what he requires is that we should walk after the Spirit; – that he does not require of us that we should walk up to it, which would be an impossibility.

It is because we could not walk up to the Spirit, up to the perfect standard of the divine requirement, that God has mercifully provided an arrangement of *grace* on our behalf. By this grace, those who start as members of the body of Christ, to walk in the footsteps of Jesus – to walk henceforth not *after the flesh*, but on the contrary to walk *after the Spirit*, and as nearly as possible up to the Spirit's requirements – have their deficiencies made up for them by their Redeemer's meritorious sacrifice. The divine arrangement for this is a unique one, which adapts itself to the various conditions and circumstances of each and all called to walk in this narrow way. If one by reason of being well born and having a good environment has for this reason a better balanced and equipped mortal body in which the new mind can exercise itself with the greater freedom; – and if such a one by reason of these advantages be able to walk nearer to the Spirit's standard than a less favored brother, whose will, however, is equally loyal to the **[R3238 : page 346]** Lord, the divine arrangement is that each shall have imputed to him *grace sufficient*, – so that both may be counted perfect – counted as having walked up to the Spirit's requirements.

This matter may be more clearly before our minds if we imagine a scale marked off from naught (0) to one hundred (100) – a scale on which we will suppose moral stamina to be measurable, one hundred representing the full, complete character which God requires. On this scale imagine five brethren with different degrees of physical imperfections, yet all fully consecrated to the Lord, all seeking to the best of their ability to "walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit" – as nearly up to the full (one hundred) standard as possible. One has ten points of character, another twenty, another thirty, another forty, another fifty. From the Lord's standpoint, because they are all trusting in Christ and walking in his way, and seeking to do his will, they are all counted as up to the full standard, one hundred – all acceptable with the Lord – the weakest as well as the strongest of them. This wonderful divine arrangement for man's necessities tells of the wisdom of God as well as of his mercy and love. Who else could have devised such an equitable plan, by which whosoever cometh unto the Father through the Redeemer, with full consecration of heart, of will, and full intention of life, might be acceptable – nothing short of perfection being acceptable.

It is for this reason that we are told that we are reckonedly justified – "justified by faith." Mark now the words of the Apostle, "Where sin abounded, there did grace so much more abound." He here expresses a general principle of the divine arrangement. Those hearing the invitation in this present time, and desiring to accept God's grace and call, are all thus put on an equality: he who has little character with many weaknesses and imperfections, has accredited to him of the Lord's grace and merit proportionately; he who has more of character naturally and who needs, therefore, less of grace, gets also according to his needs. But let it be clearly noted that there is "none righteous, no, not one" – none who can come up to the divine standard. All need to have the Lord's merit imputed to them, and hence the Lord makes this arrangement for all who would approach him and accept his favor, his call to joint-heirship with his Son. They can have neither part nor lot in the matter until they have

acknowledged their own imperfections and have accepted the imputed merits of our Redeemer, "In whom we have redemption through his blood."

All of the Lord's people – not all of the nominal church, not merely nominal disciples, but the true followers mentioned in the text – are not only walking in the same pathway, but similarly all find it narrow and difficult. Similarly all in this pathway have the same spirit, mind or disposition – to do the Father's will and to serve his cause. This is the Spirit of Christ, and by it all men may take knowledge of his disciples; they, like him, will be loyal to the principles of righteousness and truth. They will be willing to suffer opposition and persecution for the Truth's sake, for righteousness' sake, and thus with him to be cross-bearers.

The Apostle Paul brings out this thought when, writing to the Corinthians respecting Titus, he asks, "Walked we not in the same spirit? Walked we not in the same steps?" (2 Cor. 12:18.) Assuredly Paul [R3238 : page 347] and Titus must have been walking in the same spirit and the same steps if they were both walking in the Spirit and steps of the Master, – taking up life's crosses and following him. And this, dear brethren and sisters, will be true of each and all of us. While we each have our individual peculiarities and differences of temperament, conditions, surroundings, opportunities, etc., the same spirit and the same steps can be noted in all who are followers of the Lamb. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." If any man walk not in the footsteps of Jesus he is not one of his followers, in this special sense pointed out by our text, and consequently would not be one of the joint-heirs in the Kingdom. But let us keep in memory the Lord's assurance that his grace is sufficient for us, and that his strength is made perfect in our weakness, and that this is the victory that overcometh the world – even our faith.

