

CROSS-BEARING A PRIVILEGE

**"And as they led Him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, ...and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus."
– Luke 23:26.**

THIS TEXT brings before our minds the whole scene of our Master's shame, ignominy – His condemnation by the Roman Governor at the solicitation of the chief priests and scribes and Pharisees – men of His own nation. Those who led Him away were the centurion and soldiers appointed by Pilate – not willingly, but by reason of the stress laid on him by the Jewish nation. The chief priests had threatened to report him as unfaithful to the interests of the Roman Empire, if he did not condemn Jesus. And then how would the Emperor treat him who allowed this humble Nazarene to make the claim of being king in territory under Roman jurisdiction?

We remember that the Jewish Sanhedrin tried the Lord under a different charge altogether. Their charge against Him was *blasphemy*, the penalty of which, under the Law, would have been stoning to death. Possibly they were not allowed to do stoning at that time; or possibly they feared the people.

It was not Divinely intended that our Lord should be stoned, but that He should be treated as a cursed one – hanged upon a tree. (Deuteronomy 21:22,23.) "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up." (John 3:14,15.) So through fear of the multitude or from lack of authority from the Roman Governor, the Jews failed to stone Jesus.

Since they could not bring the charge of blasphemy before a Roman Court, they were obliged to bring a different charge – that, while *they* were *loyal* to the Roman Emperor, *Jesus* was *disloyal* to the Roman interests. Pilate washed his hands of the affair. He wished to be free from any guilt. But under stress of the Jews, and willing

to keep peace, he caused the charge to be made that our Lord was crucified because of claiming to be King of the Jews.

The narrative seems to imply that Jesus bore His own cross on the way to Calvary, and that He fell beneath its weight. There might have been various reasons for this. He was weak from undergoing very rigorous physical and mental strain. He had suffered from the bloody sweat in the Garden of Gethsemane, and had endured different trials – before the Sanhedrin, before Pilate, and before Herod. After this He was flogged! We can imagine that a person who had undergone so much would be scarcely able to walk, let alone carry a burden.

THE PROBABLE WEIGHT OF THE CROSS

When we think of our Lord as a perfect man, we would not think of Him as being the strongest of men. The imperfections of our race have manifested themselves in various ways. We have no reason to suppose that the first specimen of our race, Adam, was of surpassing strength, which might denote coarseness. We see this principle illustrated in fruits and vegetables. When we find an overgrown apple, we learn that it is not so tender as one of average size. So with a man of great physical stature – a giant. He might be coarse. We are to think of our Lord, not as extremely rugged, nor as weak, but as of great delicacy, and of reasonable strength and fiber.

When we think of the cross, too, we believe that it was of no light weight. We know of no light woods in the vicinity of Jerusalem. The most common tree there is the olive, which is an extremely heavy wood and of remarkable density. If we should suppose the cross to have been three feet in the ground and of reasonable height, it must have been at least twelve to fourteen feet long, and the cross-beam must have been at least five feet. Allowing a reasonable thickness for strength and for keeping it from bending under its load, we would think that the cross must have weighed

from one hundred and fifty to two hundred pounds. This gives us the thought that it was no light weight. [R5222 : page 120]

LESSONS FROM THE INCIDENT

We have every reason to sympathize greatly with the tradition that the Lord *fell* under the weight of the cross. It was at this juncture that Simon, evidently a strong and rugged countryman who was passing by, was stopped by the centurion and his band, and compelled to assist Jesus in carrying the cross. Apparently, even then, its weight was on Jesus.

There are lessons for us in this incident. One is that the disciples of Jesus, the faithful eleven, missed an opportunity of cross-bearing. At first we might be inclined to censure them severely. We must reflect, however, that they feared for their lives. We may sympathize with them, and at the same time learn a lesson of greater courage in everything connected with the Master.

It is true that the multitude might have been as anxious to cry for the death of the disciples as for the Lord's. But one of them had said that he was ready to die for the Lord, and so said they all. How strange that in the moment of testing they did not display the courage! It is much easier to *attest* great loyalty, great faithfulness, than it is to manifest these traits when the test comes. With the opportune moment, come the difficulties, and the fearful sights and sounds, carrying terror with them.

We, of course, have no opportunity of doing anything of this kind for the Master Himself. But we realize that He is still with us in the brethren. What a precious privilege this affords us of still helping to bear the Master's cross! How advantageous to know that He still recognizes that whatsoever is done unto the least of these His brethren is done unto Him!

CROSS-BEARING PRECEDES CROWNING

Another thought that we have in this connection is that Simon, under the necessity of cross-bearing, would receive the burden either willingly or unwillingly. We have no record of what his experiences were. There is a tradition which declares that he afterwards became one of the Master's disciples. So in the Lord's providence, sometimes there is responsibility laid upon us. And if the Lord lays a cross upon us, will it be borne with *gladness* or with *murmuring*? If the former, we shall have a blessing, even though we had not sought the cross, even if it had been forced upon us.

When trials and difficulties come, and crosses are forced upon us, happy are we if we appreciate the opportunity of cross-bearing, recognizing that this is closely connected with the crowning. Simon represented in this case all of the Lord's faithful ones who help to bear the cross, following His example, walking in His steps. The cross will not be too heavy for us. The Lord will bear the heavy end of it; and our experiences will be only such as will be for our good and will work out for our blessing.

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"I know not the way that's before me,
The joys or the griefs it may bring;
What clouds are o'erhanging the future,
What flowers by the wayside may spring.
But there's One who will journey beside me,
Nor in weal nor in woe will forsake;
And this is my solace and comfort,
'He knoweth the way that I take.'"

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