

THE SUFFERING SAVIOUR

Meditations on the Last Days of Christ

By

F. W. Krummacher

Copyright © 1947

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

SIMON OF CYRENE

PILATE, driven from the field by the determined opposition of the enemies of Jesus, has delivered the Holy One of Israel into the hands of His murderers, who hasten to carry the execution into effect as quickly as possible. No appeal was permitted to a rebel after being sentenced; on the contrary, a Roman law commanded that such should be led away to execution immediately after sentence had been pronounced. This was believed applicable to Him, whom the people thought they could not remove soon enough from human society, as being a rebel against God, against Moses, and against the emperor.

We left the Saviour at the close of our last meditation on the road to the fatal hill.

The procession moves slowly forward enveloped in clouds of dust. What a running together from every side! What a tumultuous noise and horrible din! Spears, helmets, and drawn swords glitter in the sunshine. Soldiers on foot and horseback, priests and scribes, high and low, shrieking women and crying children, Jews and heathen, all mingled together in the crowd. At the head of the procession surrounded by guards, the three delinquents, panting slowly forward under the weight of their instruments of death. Two of them robbers and murderers, and between them, He to whom, on closer observation, the whole of this hideous exhibition has reference. Behold that bleeding Man, who according to appearance, is the most guilty of the three! But we know Him.

He also bears His cross, and thus claims our sympathy in the highest degree. Crosses were often seen, under the dominion of the Romans.

A rebellious slave was very frequently condemned to this most shameful and painful of all punishments. But there is something very particular and peculiar about the cross which we see the Holy One of Israel bearing to Calvary.

If we refer to the roll of the divine Law, **“If a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day (for he that is hanged is accursed of God), that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance”** (Deuteronomy 21:22).

This remarkable ordinance of God was punctually observed in Israel. As often as a criminal was nailed to the tree of shame, he was regarded, according to the words of the law, as an object of profound abhorrence to the Almighty, and the people were conscious that God could look upon the land only with anger and disgust so long as the dead body of the criminal was not removed out of His sight.

But such of them as were enlightened well knew that all this included in it a typical meaning, and had a prophetic reference to One who should hang upon a tree, on whom heaven's wrath would be poured out, but in whose atoning sufferings the curse and condemnation of a sinful world would reach its termination. But who would dare to say that in Christ the ordinance in the wilderness had found its fulfillment, if the Word of God itself had not justified such a conclusion?

Turn to Galatians 3:13, 14, where the apostle states frankly and without circumlocution, "**Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us, as it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.**"

In the type of the brazen serpent, as well as in the divine ordinances respecting one that was hanged on a tree, the clearest light is thrown on the cross which the Son of God is carrying to Calvary.

It is the scaffold where, according to Romans 3:25, God resolved to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

It is the Moriah where for the benefit of a sinful world the curse pronounced in paradise is endured in the sacred humanity of the great Surety.

It is the altar of burnt-offering on which the Lamb of God submitted to the sum total of that punishment which ought in justice to have fallen upon me; and the dying bed, where death is permitted to seize upon and slay another, in order that he might forever lose his claim upon me.

Such is the mysterious cross which you see borne toward Calvary. It is the sepulcher of a world; for the innumerable host of those that are saved died, in the eye of God, with Christ upon it. It is the tree of life, "**the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations.**"

Jesus carries His cross. When did He ever show so plainly in His outward circumstances that He bore the curse, as now? If the voice of God had sounded directly down from heaven, and said, "This Just One is now enduring the sentence pronounced upon you," it could not have afforded us more certainty than by this living figure of bearing the cross.

Its language is powerful, and points out even to a child wherein we ought to seek the final cause of Christ's passion.

We find the Holy Sufferer, as you know, outside the gates of Jerusalem. The Scriptures attach great importance to the fact that he was led away out of the holy city.

Thus we read in Hebrews 13:11, 12, **“The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore, Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.”**

Here Christ is represented as the true antitype of the Old Testament sin offerings.

But since we know the nature of these, and how, by this devotional act, the sins of the transgressors were imputed to the animals to be sacrificed; and that the sinner after such sacrificial act, was absolved and declared blameless; so it clearly appears that Christ, on His being led out of the gates, was in fact burdened with our sins, and bore our curse.

Thus it is we that tread the path to the place of execution; for He does so in our stead.

That such is really the case, and that He does not proceed upon that road as the holy Jesus, but as the Representative of our sinful race, becomes more apparent at every step. Hence it is comprehensible how the Eternal Father could give Him up to such nameless ignominy and torment. It is on this account that no angel from above hastens to His aid; no fire falls from heaven to consume His murderers. All the circumstances in which we see the Saviour are truly dreadful and appalling; but all exclaim, with the most powerful emphasis, “Behold the Lord Jesus, laden with the sinner’s curse!”

We have been contemplating Jesus with the sinner’s cross.

The scene now changes, and a new figure presents itself to our view - the sinner with the cross of Jesus.

The Holy One had proceeded forward some distance with His heavy burden, when His blood-thirsty attendants begin to fear lest He should break down under His load, and entirely succumb from exhaustion before the execution.

To prevent this, they look about for someone on whom they may lay the cross of Jesus for the remainder of the way; and their eyes soon light upon a stranger, just coming from the field, whom they the sooner select for this purpose from thinking they see in his looks a secret sympathy with the Nazarene. This was Simon, born at Cyrene in Africa. He was stopped and compelled to bear the Lord’s cross.

With reference to this circumstance, the words of Jesus are wont to be applied - **“Whoso will be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me;”** and occasion is then taken from the history of this part of the passion to treat of the reproach we have to bear for Christ’s sake.

But this seems to me not entirely correct, since Simon does not bear his own cross, but that on which Jesus died. Something very different is, therefore, reflected in the symbolical form of the cross-bearer. It presents to our view the inward position of faith with respect to the cross of Christ, that is, to the sacrifice and act of redemption accomplished upon it. We ought to be cross-bearers in the same sense in which Simon was, only spiritually so.

We are such, when the cross of Christ becomes ours in the way of self-accusation, believing appropriation, and continual dying with Christ. We are compelled to pronounce sentence upon ourselves.

But what threatens transgressors, such as we? **“Tribulation and anguish upon every soul that doeth evil.”** **“The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness.”**

We read and tremble, “Woe is me,” we exclaim, “Miserable man that I am! I am already condemned, and accursed, and lost!” A thousand reminiscences of past transgressions crowd around us like avenging spirits exclaiming, **“Thou shalt surely die!”** and the dreadful words haunt us even in our dreams. We imagine we read them in the stars, and that they are written on each of our days. Thus we are at length compelled to acknowledge that the sentence is just. Christ’s cross is laid upon us, that is, we find ourselves guilty of the cross, since we feel that we are ourselves exposed to the curse which Christ endured upon it. When, in this sense, we have taken the cross of Christ upon us, God who has humbled us, is wont, in due time, to comfort us.

We again arise from the darkness and horrors of self-condemnation into the crimson-colored sunshine of the atonement. In the cross of Christ, we recognize the mysterious tree on which the sentence which menaced us with eternal destruction has long ago been endured.

We apprehend the mystery of the cross in its consolatory depth, and enter into a new relation with it, embrace it as our only refuge, and believingly appropriate the merits of Him who suffered upon it. We now take it in a different manner upon us than before; certainly more from necessity at first than desire. Proud human nature resists the idea of being saved by grace.

Finally, however, we become reconciled to the wondrous burden, and finally bear it with delight.

In a spiritual sense, we become like Simon of Cyrene. We enter into the most vital, fervent, and blissful fellowship with the cross of Christ. We are everywhere and continually occupied with this cross, and it becomes the sign by which we are known.

If listened to in our chamber, we are heard praying beneath the cross.

- If we say, **“Abba, father,”** it is the cross which encourages us to do so.
- If we hope for a favorable answer to our requests, the cross emboldens us to expect it.
- If our conversation is in heaven, the cross is the heavenly ladder on the steps of which we rise above the world, death, and hell. The cross forms the focus of all our heartfelt melody.
- If a gleam of joy rests upon our foreheads, the cross is the sun from whence it proceeds.
- If we are courageous, it is in the shadow of the cross.
- If we overcome the temptations of the wicked one, the cross of Christ is the banner under which we conquer.

We do not indeed always embrace the cross with equal warmth and fervor.

Occasionally, we bear it with indifference, unwillingly, and even as a burden. This is the case either when the root of our life again sinks imperceptibly deeper into the soil of this world; or when the Lord causes our mountain to stand strong, and we take fresh occasion to please ourselves with our own doings. But God, who is as faithful in humbling as in comforting us, knows how to render the cross sweet to us by giving up our old man to a renewed crucifixion, and by reviving and refreshing in us the consciousness of our wretchedness in the midst of distress, disgrace, and pressure.

Generally speaking, the experience of all who in faith take upon them the cross of Christ, agrees in this, that they are ever longer drawn into the death of Him who hung upon the tree. They decrease. They consciously become personally poorer, more worthless and helpless - nay, in time, nothing remains in them of which they might boast as a ground of justification.

The more completely they suffer shipwreck as to everything of their own, the more valuable does the cross of Calvary become to them, as the only plank of rescue from the surge. How fervently is it then again embraced, how highly and loudly praised, and how bedewed with warm tears of grateful thanksgiving, until at length the whole inward life moves round the cross, in ever closer drawn circles, like the revolving planets round their several suns.

May the Lord be pleased to impress the form of Simon the cross bearer ever more clearly upon our inner man; and in order that this figure may be the more fully produced in us, may He the more and more comprehensively unveil to us the corruption which adheres to us by nature! It is only thus that we learn to bear the cross of Christ with a holy joy. Only thus does it become to us a tree of life, from which we may pluck heavenly fruit. Only thus does it serve as a wondrous weapon by means of which we overcome the world, death, and Satan.

~ end of chapter 39 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
