

THE GREAT CROSS-BEARER AND HIS FOLLOWERS

NO. 1683

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

“And when they had mocked Him, they took off the purple from Him, and put His own clothes on Him, and led Him out to crucify Him.”
Mark 15:20.

“And He, bearing His Cross, went forth.”
John 19:17.

“And they compelled one Simon, a Cyrenian who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear the Cross.”
Mark 15:21.

WHEN our Lord had been condemned to die, the execution of His sentence was hurried. The Jews were in great haste to shed His blood. So intense was the enmity of the chief priests and Pharisees, that every moment of delay was wearisome to them. Besides, it was the day of the Passover and they wished to have this matter finished before they went, with hypocritical piety, to celebrate the festival of Israel's deliverance! We do not wonder at their eagerness, for they could not bear themselves while He lived, since His very Presence reproved them for their falsehood and hypocrisy.

But at Pilate, we do wonder, and herein he is much to be blamed. In all civilized countries there is usually an interval between the sentencing of the prisoner and the time of his being put to death. As the capital sentence is irreversible, it is well to have a little space in which possible evidence may be forthcoming which may prevent the fatal stroke. In some countries we have thought that there has been a cruelly long delay between the sentence and the execution, but with the Romans it was usual to allow the reasonable respite of 10 days.

Now, I do not say that it was incumbent upon Pilate, according to Roman Law, to have allowed 10 days to a Jew, who had not the rights of Roman citizenship, but I do say that he might have pleaded the custom of his country and so have secured a delay—and afterwards he might have released his prisoner. It was within his reach to have done so and he was blameworthy, as he was all along, in thus yielding to the clamor for an immediate execution for no other reason than that he was “willing to content the people.”

When once we begin to make the wishes of other men our law, we know not to what extremity of criminality we may be led. And so the Savior's hasty execution is due to Pilate's vacillating spirit and to the insatiable blood-thirstiness of the scribes and Pharisees. Being given over to death, our Savior was led away and, I suppose, the painters are right when they put a rope about His neck or His loins, for the idea of being led in an open street would seem to imply some sort of bond—“He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.” Alas, that the Emancipator of our race should be led forth as a captive to die!

The direction in which He is led is outside the city. He must not die in Jerusalem, though multitudes of Prophets had perished there. Though the Temple was the central place of sacrifice, yet the Son of God must not be offered there, for He was an offering of another kind and must not lie upon their altars. He must be led outside the city because, by the Jews, He was treated as a flagrant offender who must be executed at the Tyburn of the city, in the appointed place of doom known as Calvary or Golgotha. When Naboth was unjustly condemned for blasphemy, they carried him forth out of the city and stoned him with stones that he died. And afterwards Stephen—when they cried out against him as a blasphemer, they cast him out of the city and there they stoned him.

Our Savior, therefore, must die in the ordinary place of execution, that in all respects He might be numbered with the transgressors. The rulers of the city so loathed and detested their great Reprover that they rejected Him and would not suffer Him to die within their city walls! Alas, poor Jerusalem, in casting out the Son of David, you did cast out your

last hope—now are you bound over to desolation! He was led outside of the city because, from that time on, no acceptable sacrifice could be offered there. They might go on with their offering of daily lambs and they might sacrifice their bullocks and burn the fat of fed beasts—but from that day the substance of the sacrifice had gone away from them and Israel’s offerings were vain oblations.

Because the true Sacrifice is rejected of them, the Lord leaves them nothing but a vain show. Still more forcible is the fact that our Lord must die outside the city because He was to be consumed as a sin-offering. It is written in the Law, “And the skin of the bullock, and all his flesh, with his head, and with his legs, and his inwards, and his dung, even the whole bullock shall he carry forth outside the camp unto a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn him on the wood with fire.” There were several sorts of offerings under the Law—the sweet-savor offerings were presented upon the altar and were accepted of God, but sin-offerings were burnt outside the camp, or gate, because God can have no fellowship with sin.

Once let sin be imputed to the sacrifice and it becomes abhorrent to God and must not be presented in the tabernacle or the Temple, but burned outside the circle wherein His people have their habitations. And here let our hearts gratefully contemplate how truly our Lord Jesus became a Sin-Offering for us and how, in every point, He followed out the type. With His face turned away from His Father’s House, He must go to die—with His face turned away from what were once His Father’s people, He must be led forth to be crucified. Like a thing accursed, He is to be hung up where felons suffer deserved punishment. Because we were sinners and because sin had turned our backs to God—and because sin had broken our communion with God’s accepted ones—therefore must He endure this banishment.

In that sorrowful march of the Cross-bearing Savior, my soul, with sorrow, sees herself represented as deserving thus to be made to depart unto death. And yet joy mingles with this emotion, for the glorious Sin-Bearer has thus taken away our sin and we return from our exile! His Substitution is infinitely effectual! Well may those live for whom Jesus died! Well may those retain in whose place the Son of God was banished! There is entrance into the Holy City, now! There is entrance into the Temple, now! Now there is access unto God, Himself, because the Lord has put away our sin through Him who was led to be crucified outside the city gate!

Nor do I think that even this exhausts the teaching. Jesus dies outside Jerusalem because He died, not for Jerusalem, alone, nor for Israel, alone. The effect of His Atonement is not circumscribed by the walls of a city nor by the boundaries of a race. In Him shall all the nations of the earth be blessed! Out in the open He must die to show that He reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God! “For He is the propitiation for our sins,” says Paul, who was, himself, a Jew, “and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Had He been the Savior of Jews, only, seclusion in the place of His offering would have been appropriate, but as He dies for all nations, He is hung up outside the city.

And yet, once more, He suffered outside the gate that we might go forth unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. “Come you out from among them; be you separate, touch not the unclean thing,” from now on becomes the command of God to all His sons and daughters! Behold the Son of sons, His Only-Begotten, leads the way in nonconformity to this present evil world, being, Himself, officially severed from the old Jewish church, whose elders seek His life! He dies in sacred separation from the false and corrupt corporation which vaunted itself to be the chosen of God! He protested against all evil and for this He died, so far as His murderers were concerned.

Even so must His followers take up their cross and follow Him wherever He goes, even though they are to be despised and rejected of men. See what instruction is found in the choice of the place wherein our great Redeemer offers Himself unto God!

I. Let us draw near to our Lord for a while and carefully observe each instructive detail. Our imagination pictures the Blessed One standing outside the gate of Herod’s palace in the custody of a hand of soldiers with a centurion at their head. And we begin, at once, to observe HIS DRESS. That may seem a small matter, but it is not without instruction. How is He dressed? Our text tells us that when they had mocked Him, they took off the purple from Him and put His own clothes on Him. But we are not told that they took off the crown of thorns and, therefore, it has been currently believed that He continued to wear it to the Cross and on the Cross.

Is not this highly probable? Surely if the thorny crown had been withdrawn, this would have been the place to have said, “They took off the purple from Him and removed the crown of thorns.” But it is not so written and, therefore, we may believe that the sorrowful coronet remained upon Him. Pilate wrote upon his accusation, “the King of the Jews,”

and it was not unfitting that He should continue to wear a crown. Jesus died a crowned monarch, King of the curse! The Lord God in justice said to rebel man, “Cursed is the ground for your sake: thorns, also, and thistles shall it bring forth to you.” And lo, the Man by whom we are redeemed is crowned with that product of the earth which came of the curse—

*“O sacred head surrounded
By crown of piercing thorn!
O bleeding head, so wounded,
Reviled and put to scorn.”*

Probably also, as I have said, He was bound, for they led Him as a sheep to the slaughter. But this binding was probably more abundant than that which we have hinted at, if it is, indeed, true that by Roman custom criminals were bound with cords to the cross which they were doomed to carry. If this was the case, you may picture our Lord with His Cross hound to Himself and hear Him say, “Bind the Sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar.” But the chief point to be noted is that Jesus wore His own clothes, the usual garments which He was accustomed to wear and this, no doubt, for identification, that all who looked on might know that it was the same Person who had preached in their streets and had healed their sick. They were under no misapprehension—they knew that it was Jesus of Nazareth—the keen hate of the scribes and Pharisees would not have permitted any substitution of another. It was none other than He and His garments were the ensigns of that truth.

He wore His own clothes, also, for another reason, namely, that there might be a fulfillment of prophecy. It may not strike you, at first, but you will soon see it. Our Lord must not go to die in the purple—He must march to the Cross in that vestment which was without seam and woven from the top throughout, or else the Word of God could not have been fulfilled, “They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots.” Other raiment could readily have been torn and divided, but this garment, which was peculiar to the Savior, could not have been so torn without destroying it and, therefore, the soldiers cast lots for it! Little did they who put it on Him dream that they were thus accessory to the fulfillment of a prophecy!

Does it not strike you as strange that the Pharisees, who were so full of hatred to Christ, did not carefully draw back from the fulfillment of so many types and prophecies? Their rabbis and teachers knew the prophecy of Zechariah, that the Messiah should be sold for 30 pieces of silver—why did it not occur to them to make their bribe to Judas 29 or 31 silver pieces? Why, again, did they cast the price unto the potter by buying from him the field of blood? Could they not, so to speak, thereby have balked the prophecy? Here were voluntarily fulfilled, by themselves, prophecies which condemned them! I shall have to show you the same thing further on, but, meanwhile, observe that if it had been their objective to fulfill type and prophecy, they could not have acted more carefully than they did. So they put His own garments on Him and unwittingly furnished the possibility for the fulfillment of the Prophet’s words—“They parted My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture.”

To me there occurs one other thought touching His wearing His own garments. I do not know if I can express it, but it seems to me to indicate that our Lord’s passion was a true and natural part of His life. He died as He lived. His death was not a new departure, but the completion of a life of self-sacrifice, and so He had no need to put on a fresh garb. Look! He goes to die in His ordinary, everyday garments! Does not it almost seem as if people put on their Sunday clothes because they regard religion as something quite distinct from their common life? Do you not wish to see godliness in work-day clothes? Religion in its shirt-sleeves? Grace in a smock-frock? Do you not almost cry concerning some loud talkers—“Put his own clothes on him and then lead him out and let us see him”?

It should be an integral part of our life to live and to die for our God. Must we become other men if we are to be God’s men? Can we not wear our own clothes, habits, characteristics and peculiarities and serve the Lord? Is there not some suspicion of unnaturalness in services which require men to put on a strange, outlandish dress? Surely they find their worship to be on another level than their life—they must step out of their way and dress up to attend to it! It is evil for a man, when he cannot lead his fellows in prayer till he has gone to the wardrobe! Time was when vestments meant something, but ever since our great High Priest went up to His one Sacrifice wearing His common clothes, all types are fulfilled and laid aside.

Now, we pray not officially, or we should need the robe—but we pray personally and our own clothes suit us well. Jesus continued the unity of His life as He approached its close and did not, even in appearance, change His way. He lived to die a Sacrifice—this was the climax of His life, the apex of the towering pyramid of His perfect obedience! No mark is

set, no line is drawn between His passion and all the rest of His life, nor should there be a screen between our life and death. Somehow, I dread a death which is meant to be pictorial and exhibitional. I am not an admirer of Addison's death, as some are, who praise him because he sent for a young lord and cried, "Come, see how a Christian can die!"

I like better, Bengel's wish, when he desired to die just as a person would slip out from company because someone beckoned him outside. Such a person modestly thinking his presence or absence to be of small account in a great world, quietly withdraws and only friends observe that he is gone. Death should be part of the usual curriculum, the close of the day's work, the entrance into harbor which ends the voyage. It is well to feel that you can die easily because you have done it so many times before! He who dies daily will not fear to die! Bathe in the Jordan often and you will not dread the fording of it when your hour has come.

Our blessed Lord lived such a dying life that He made no show of death. He did not change His tone and spirit any more than His garments, but died as He lived. They put His own clothes on Him—He had not, Himself taken them off—it was no wish of His to wear the purple even, for an hour, either in reality or in mockery. He was evermore the same and His own vesture best beseemed Him. Truly, blessed Master, we may well say, "All Your garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia"—even though they take You not out of "the ivory palaces wherein they have made You glad"—but out of the common guardroom, where they had made You to be despised and mocked and spit upon. Come from where You may, Your vesture has a fragrant smell about it, and all Your Brothers and Sisters rejoice therein.

II. Brethren, I beg you, for a few minutes, to look at HIS COMPANY. Who were they that were with our Lord when He came to die? First and nearest to Him were the rough Roman soldiers—strong, muscular, unfeeling men—ready to shed blood at any moment. In them, human affection was kept down by stern discipline. They were the iron instruments of an empire of iron. They would do what they were bid and feeling and sympathy were not allowed to interfere. I do but bid you look at these guards to remind you that from beneath their eagle, our Savior won a trophy, for their centurion at our Lord's death uttered the confession, "Certainly this was the Son of God." This was a blessed confession of faith and I delight to think of our Lord as thus becoming the Conqueror of His conquerors by taking one out of them to be His disciple and witness, as we would gladly believe he was. Surely after openly making the clear confession which the Evangelist has recorded, we may number him with Believers!

Next to these guards were two malefactors, led out with Him to execution. That was intended to increase His scorn. He must not be separated from the basest of men, but He must be led forth between two thieves, having previously had a murderer preferred to Him. They seem to have been very hardened scoundrels, for they reviled Him. I mention them because our Lord won a trophy by the conversion of one of them, who, when dying, said, "We suffer justly, but this Man has done nothing amiss," and then prayed, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom." This dying thief has brought more Glory to Christ than hundreds of us, for in every place wherever this Gospel has been preached, this has been told as a memorial of him and as a comfort to the guiltiest to look to Jesus! In the act of death, he believed in Christ and believed when the Lord, Himself, was in the act of death—and that day he was with Him in Paradise!

How have You conquered, O You despised of men! How have You won, by Your gentleness, both Roman legionnaires and Jewish thieves! Beyond the prisoners were the scribes, Pharisees and High Priests. I could not picture their faces, but surely they must have been about the worst lot of humans that were ever seen, as with a fiendish delight they stared at Jesus! He had called them, "hypocrites." He had spoken of them as "making clean the outside of the cup and platter," while their inner part was wickedness—and now they are showing their venom and silencing His reproofs. But their hate was so insatiable that it was accompanied with fear and that night it was seen that Christ had conquered *them*, for they crouched before Pilate and begged a guard to prevent their Victim from leaving the tomb.

In their heart of hearts they feared that, after all, He might really be the Son of God! Thus were they, also, vanquished—though to them the Lord Jesus was a savor of death unto death—yet they could not but be affected by Him and vanquished by His death. Their hate brought with it alarm, fear and agitation—they trembled before the Nazarene. Look at the scene! Though the despised and sorrowful One is bowed down beneath His Cross, you can see at a glance the majesty which dwells in Him! But as you look at them—the mean, wretched seed of the serpent—they seem to go upon their bellies and dust is their meat! Jesus is all truth and openness and they are all cunning and craft. You can see, at a glance, that as an angel is to the fiends of Hell, so is the Christ to His persecutors! That face stained with spit and

blackened with blows, and punctured with thorns, wears a more than imperial Glory, while their faces are as the countenances of slaves and criminals!

Around these there is a great rabble and if you look into the mob, you see with surprise that they are the same crowd who, a week ago, shouted “Hosanna! Hosanna!” They have changed their note and cry, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” For a few pence they were bribed to do so—they were an ignorant, fickle mob. When such do hiss at you for doing right, forgive them. When they point the finger of scorn at you for being a Christian, regard them not. It little matters what they may say or do. They yelled at Him who was their host Benefactor and ours. The Lord Christ endured the popular scorn as He had once *received* the popular acclamation! He lived above it all, for He knew that men of low degree are vanity. Vanity of vanities! All that comes of vain man is vanity!

Yes, but there was a little change for the better in the company—there was just a streak of light in that cloud—for kindly *women* were in the throng. These were not all His disciples, perhaps few of them were such, for otherwise He would not have bid them weep over a woe which His disciples escaped—but they were tender-hearted women who could not look upon Him without tears. It is said by Luke that they bewailed and lamented Him. They knew how innocent He was and how kind He had been. Perhaps some of them had received favors at His hands and, therefore, they wept sorely that He should die. It was well done of them. In all the Evangelists there is no instance of a woman that had any hand in the death of Christ. As far as they are connected with the matter, they are guiltless—they rather oppose His death than promote it.

Woman was last at the Cross and first at the sepulcher and, therefore, we can never say a word about her being the first in the transgression. Oh, kind eyes that gave the Lord of Love the tribute of their pity! Blessed are you of compassionate Heaven! But the Savior desired not, at that time, that human sympathy should be spent upon Him, for His great heart was big with sorrows not His own. He knew that when the children of those women had grown up and while yet some of the younger women would still be alive, their awful woe would make them exclaim, “Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bear, and the paps that never gave suck.” When they saw the slain of the Romans and the slain of their own contending factions, then would they mourn! The Master, therefore said—

*“Weep not for Me! Oh! Weep not, Salem’s daughters,
Faint though you see Me, stay the bursting tear!
Turn the sad tide—the tide of bitter waters—
Back on yourselves for desolation near.”*

It was well on the woman’s part; it was better, still, on His, that He gently set the draught of sympathy to one side because their coming sorrow oppressed Him more deeply than His own.

We must now leave the company, but not till we have asked, Where are His disciples? Where is Peter? Did he not say, “I will go with You to prison and to death”? Where is John? Where are they all? They have fled and have not yet returned to speak a word to Him or for Him. Holy women are gathering, but where are the *men*? Though the women are brave and act like men, the men are fearful and act as women! We are poor helpers to our Master. Had we been there, we should have done the same as they did, if not worse, for they were the flower of our Israel. Ah, me, how little are we worth for whom the Ever-Blessed paid so much! Let us give clearer proof of loyalty and follow our Prince more closely.

III. But now, come closer to the Savior—break through the company and hear my third talk with you while you look a little on HIS BURDEN. May the good Spirit teach me how to depict my Lord. We are told by John that our Savior, “went forth bearing His Cross.” We might have supposed, so far as the other three Evangelists are concerned, that Simon the Cyrenian had carried the Cross all the way, but John fills up the blank space in their accounts. Our Lord carried His own Cross at the commencement of the sorrowful pilgrimage to Calvary. This was done, first, by way of increasing His shame. It was a custom of the Romans to make felons bear their own gallows and there is a word in the Latin, *furcifer*, which signifies, “gallows bearer,” which was hissed at men in contempt, just as nowadays a despised individual might be called a “gallows-bird.” Nothing was more disgraceful and, therefore, that must be added to the Redeemer’s load of shame. He made Himself of no reputation for our sakes.

Note, next, its weight. Usually only one beam of the cross was carried—it may have been so here. It does not look so, however, for the expression, “bearing His Cross,” would naturally mean the whole of it. It is highly probable that, although that load could easily be borne by the rough, coarse criminals who ordinarily suffered, yet not so readily by the tender and more exquisite frame of our Divine Lord. It is difficult to find any other reason why they should have laid the

Cross on Simon, unless it is true, as tradition says, that Jesus fainted beneath the burden. I care nothing for tradition, nor even for conjecture, but still, there must have been a reason and as we cannot believe that these people had any real mercy for Christ, we think they must have acted upon the cruel wish that He might not die on the road, but might at least live to be nailed to the tree. “The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.” This I leave.

And now I call your attention to the fact that there was a typical evidence about this. If Simon had carried Christ’s Cross all the way, we should have missed the type of Isaac, for Isaac, when he went to Mount Moriah to be offered up by his father, carried the wood for his own sacrifice. I think if I had been a Jew, full of hate to Jesus Christ, I would have said, “Do not let Him carry His Cross—that will be too much like Isaac carrying the wood.” No, but knowing the type, they wantonly fulfill it! It is their own will that does it and yet, the predestination of the Eternal is fulfilled in every jot and tittle—and our great Isaac carries the wood with which He is to be offered up by His Father! How marvelous it is that there should be a fixed decree and yet an altogether unlimited free agency!

The spiritual meaning of it, of course, was that Christ, in perfect obedience, was then carrying the load of our disobedience. The Cross, which was the curse, for, “Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree,” is borne on those blessed shoulders which were submissive to the will of God in all things. Our Lord’s Cross-bearing is the representation of His bearing all our sin and, therefore, in it we rejoice. It also has a prophetic meaning—that Cross which He carried through Jerusalem shall go through Jerusalem again. It is His great weapon with which He conquers and wins the world—it is His scepter with which He shall rule—governing the hearts of His people by no more forceful means than by the love manifested on His Cross!

“The government shall be upon His shoulder.” That which He bore on His shoulder shall win obedience and they who take His yoke upon them shall find rest unto their souls.

IV. I wish I had an hour during which I might speak upon the last head which bristles with points of interest, but I must give its lessons to you rather in rough remarks than in studied observations. The last thing to consider is HIS CROSS-BEARER. We are not told why the Roman soldiers laid the Cross on Simon. We have made a conjecture; but we leave it as a conjecture, although a highly probable one. If it is true, it lets us see how truly human our Master was. He had been all night in the garden, sweating, as it were, great drops of blood in His anguish. He had been before the Sanhedrin. He had been before Pilate, then before Herod, then before Pilate, again! He had endured scourging; He had been mocked by the soldiers and it would have been a great wonder if His human frame had not shown some sign of exhaustion.

Holy Scripture, by its example, teaches us great reticence about the sufferings of Jesus. Some of the medieval writers and certain good people who write devotional books are too apt to dilate upon every supposed grief of our Master, so as to harrow up your feelings, but it is the part of wisdom to imitate the ancient painter who, when he depicted Agamemnon as sacrificing his daughter, veiled the father’s face. It is indelicate and almost indecent to write as some have done who would seem to be better acquainted with anatomy than awed by Divinity. Much that Jesus endured must forever remain veiled to us—whether He fainted once or twice or three times—or did not faint at all, we are not informed. And, therefore, we leave the idea in the obscurity of probability and reverently worship Him who was tender in body and soul and suffered even as we do. Oh, love surpassing knowledge which could make Him suffer so!

There was a great singularity in the Providence which brought Simon upon the scene just when he appeared. The right man came forward at the right moment. That Simon did not come, at first, and that they did not place the Cross on him from the beginning was for the fulfillment of the type of Isaac to which allusion has been made. Thus Providence arranges all things wisely. Observe that Simon was pressed into this duty. The word used signifies that the person is impressed into the royal service. Simon was a pressed man and probably not a disciple of Christ at the time when he was loaded with the Cross. How often has a burden of sorrow been the means of bringing men to the faith of Jesus! He was coming in from the country about some business or other and they compelled him to bear His cross, impressing him into the service which otherwise he would have shunned, for, “he passed by,” and would have gone on if he could.

Roman soldiers were not accustomed to make many bones about what they chose to do. It was sufficient for them that he came under their notice—and carry the Cross, he must. His name was Simon—but where was that other Simon? What a silent, but strong rebuke this would be to him! Simon Peter, Simon son of Jonas, where were you? Another Simon has taken your place! Sometimes the Lord’s servants are backward where they are expected to be forward and He

finds other servitors for the time! If this has ever happened to us, it ought gently to rebuke us as long as we live. Brothers and Sisters, keep your places and let not another Simon occupy it! It is of Judas that it is said, “His bishopric shall another take,” but a true disciple will retain his office.

Remember that Word of our Lord, “Hold that fast which you have, that no man take your crown.” Simon Peter lost a crown here and another head wore it! Simon was a Cyrenian—an African—I wonder if he was a black man? In the Acts of the Apostles, at the 13th chapter, we find mention of a Simeon that was called Niger, or black. We do not know whether he was the same man or not, but he was an African, for Cyrene lies just to the west of Egypt, on the southern coast of the Mediterranean. Surely the African has had his full share of cross-bearing for many an age! Oh that the pangs of his sorrow may bring forth a birth of joy! Blessed be he, whether African or Englishman, or who he may, that has the honor of bearing the Cross after Christ!

He was coming in from the country. How often the Lord takes into His service the unsophisticated country people who, as yet, are untainted by the cunning and the vice of the city! Some young man is just come up from the country this very week and is commencing his apprenticeship in London. How I wish my Master would impress him at the city gates and do it in that Divine way of His to which the will of the impressed person yields a sweet consent! Would God you would come at once and take up the Cross of Jesus just at the city gate, before you learn the city’s sin and plunge into its dangers! Happy is the Simon coming in from the country who shall, this day, be led to bear Christ’s Cross! Good Master, fulfill our heart’s desire and lay Your Cross on some unaccustomed shoulder even now!

We are told he was the father of Alexander and Rufus. Which, my Brethren, is the greater honor to a man—to have a good father—or to be the father of good sons? Under the Old Testament rule, we usually read of a man, that he is the son of such an one, but here we come to another style and find it to a man’s honor that he is the *father* of certain well-known Brothers—“the father of Alexander and Rufus.” Surely, Mark knew these two sons, or he would not have cared to mention them. They must have been familiar to the Church, or he would not have thus described their father. It was their father who carried the Cross. It is exceedingly likely that this Rufus was he of whom Paul speaks in the last chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, for Mark was with Paul and by this means knew Simon and Rufus.

Paul writes, “Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.” His mother was such a motherly person that she had been a mother to Paul as well as to Rufus. Surely, if she was a mother to Paul, she was another disciple of Jesus, and it would look as if this man, his wife and his two sons all became converts to our Lord after he had carried His Cross! It is certainly not the most unlikely circumstance that has been accepted by us on the ground of probability. Oh, what a blessing to a man to be known by his sons! Pray, dear Christian Friends, you that have an Alexander and a Rufus, that it may be an honor to you to be known as their father! “Him they compelled to bear His Cross”—perhaps the heavier end of it, if it was really bound to Christ, as they say, or, as I judge, the whole of it.

It matters little how it was, but Simon is the representative of the Church which follows Christ bearing His Cross. Here we may recall the language of Paul—“I fill up that which is behind.” May I paraphrase it?—I take the hind end—“of the sufferings of Christ for His body’s sake, that is the Church.” Everyone that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. Jesus said, “Whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.” Here is a representative, then, of all the godly—this Simon bearing Christ’s Cross! Mark, it was not a cross of his own making, like those of monks and nuns who put themselves to pains of their own inventing! It was Christ’s Cross and he carried it not *before* Christ, as some do who talk of their poverty as though it would get them to Heaven, instead of resting on Christ’s Cross. He carried it *after* Christ in its right place.

This is the order—Christ in front bearing all our sin and we, behind, enduring shame and reproach for Him and counting it greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt! There is Simon and we will view him as a lesson to ourselves. First, let Simon be an example to us all and let us readily take up the cross after Christ. Whatever is involved in being a Christian, rejoice in it! If there is any shame; if there is any contumely; if there is loss; if there is any suffering—even if it were martyrdom—yet gladly take up the cross! Behold, the Father lays it upon you for Christ’s sake!

The next is advice to any of you that have been compelled to suffer as Christians though you are not Christians. I wonder whether there is anybody here who is only a press-man and yet has to bear the cross? A working man became a teetotaler—he did not mean to be a Christian, but when he went to work, his mates tempted him to drink and, as he would not join them, they attacked him as a Christian and said, “You are one of those canting hypocrites, those Wesley-

ans, those Presbyterians, or those Spurgeonites!” This is not true of you, but thus, you see, the cross is forced on you! Had you not better take it up and bear it joyfully? They have *pressed* you into this service—take it as an index of the will of Providence, and say, “I will not be a press-man only—I will be a volunteer and I will cheerfully carry Christ’s Cross.”

I know a man who merely comes to this place of worship because he is somewhat interested with the preaching, though he has no idea of being a converted man. Yet in the street where he lives nobody ever goes to a place of worship and, therefore, they set him down as a pious man and some have even ridiculed him for it. Friend, you are in for it because you attend here and you put me in for it, too, for if you do anything wrong, they are sure to lay all the blame on me! They say—“That is one of Spurgeon’s people.” You are not—I do not acknowledge you as yet—but the outsiders have pushed you into the responsibilities of a religious profession and you had better go in for its privileges! They have laid the Cross of Christ upon you! Do not throw it off! Come on and bring that dear motherly wife with you, and Alexander and Rufus, too. The Church will be glad to take you all in and, then, as a volunteer, you shall bear Christ’s Cross! It is, however, a remarkable thing that some should first of all be forced into it and then become willing followers.

Last of all, if you and I are cross-bearers, here is a sweet thought. Are we carrying a cross which presses us heavily just now? You know you are to be like your Master and if so, there will be someone found to help you bear your cross. They found Simon to bear the Cross of Jesus and there is a Simon somewhere to help you. Only cry to the Lord about it and He will find you a friend. If Simon is not forthcoming, I will tell you what to do. Imitate Simon. If Simon was what I think he was, he became a converted man and, before long, found himself in trouble through it. And so he at once went to the Lord in prayer, and said, “Lord Jesus I am resting in You, alone. You did give me the honor to carry Your Cross once, now, I beseech You, carry mine!”

This is what I want you to do with your crosses at this time. You that have to endure hardness for Christ and are glad to do it, ask Him to bear your burden for you! He has borne your sins and, if you will but commit your troubles to Him, joy and peace through believing shall stream into your souls by His Holy Spirit. God bless you, for Christ’s sake.

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