**Joy Beyond the Cross**

**by Walter Chantry**

*"And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting."* (Luke 18:29, 30)

Confronted with the unrelenting demands of the cross, some begin to think of Christianity as a grim and undesirable existence. When a truth lies ignored and forgotten, great emphasis must be given to it. But emphasis on "daily" self-inflicted pain sounds austere if not gruesome. Gospel calls to take up one's cross may seem to be an invitation to take pleasure in self-abuse. It must then be made manifest that our wise Lord's demands cast no bitter pall over the Christian life.

Mention of self-denial is essential if we are to be faithful to any who are attracted to the benefits associated with trusting the Lord Jesus. Danger lurks for those who do not carefully count the costs of forsaking this present world to follow him. Enchanted with the bright prospects of the kingdom of God, some receive its announcement with JOY. But "when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, by and by they are offended' (Matthew 13:21). To avoid misrepresentation and to turn men from apostasy our Lord must clarify the reality of losing one's life to enter his kingdom.

Still, in our Lord's view, his own cross was not all bleak. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that he "*for the joy* that was set before him endured the cross." Even when his soul was troubled from taking full measure of the terrors of Golgotha, the only Saviour of sinners never lost sight of the joy beyond. Travail of soul would bring satisfaction. He would gather great spoil by his cross (Isaiah 53:11-12). "Wherefore (because he became obedient unto the death of the cross) God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow (Philippians 2:9, 10). just so, the only lasting and fully satisfying joys for any man lie on the other side of a cross.

Luke 18:18-30 preserves an outline of our compassionate Lord's interview with the rich young Ruler, and of a subsequent discussion occasioned by it. "Come, take up the cross and follow me" were Jesus' final words to the seeker (Mark 10:21). Abhorring the cross of denying self its beloved riches, the young man sadly abandoned the great Prophet. This inquirer would not inflict pain on himself in order to find eternal life. He desired heaven and all the pleasures of earth too. Then, it seems, the disciples sensed Christ's disappointment with the departure of the sinner.

As if to encourage our Lord, who himself was feeling the painful cross of spurned love, Peter spoke. "We have left all, and followed thee." Some men do not snub the cross, but will deny themselves, esteeming companionship with Christ a great boon at any price. Peter meant to console our noble Lord. But a selfless Jesus turned the occasion into an opportunity to comfort his disciples. Attention was given to the blessedness of those who suffer for the kingdom of God's sake.

Not one man has ever sacrificed for his Lord without being richly repaid. If the cross is only contrasted with earthly pleasures lost, it may seem hard and threatening. But when the cross is weighed in the balances with the glorious treasures to be had through it, even the cross seems sweet. As Samuel Rutherford wrote, "Christ's cross is the sweetest burden that ever I bore; it is such a burden as wings are to a bird, or sails to a ship, to carry me forward to my harbour." Or as the self-denying apostle wrote, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Perhaps the most astonishing part of our Lord's teaching to the disciples on this occasion was his reference to "this present time". Blessings for the cross-bearing servants of Christ are not all reserved for another world. Though their great inheritance is "reserved in heaven" for them (1 Peter 1:4), God has granted his people a foretaste of heaven "in this present time".

A clear comparison is drawn, "manifold more in this present time", "more" than was left behind of houses, lands, parents, brothers, wife or children! The man who has denied self for Christ can never say he is a loser by it, even if the comparison is merely between benefits in this world as compared with losses. Careful auditing of each Christian's ledger arrives at confirmation of this balance: "manifold more in this present time". Though the pains of self-denial are nonetheless real, the fraternity of the cross is a bright and cheery society even now in life on earth.

Often our Lord grants manifold more in kind. More is given of the very object sacrificed. Peter had left all to follow Jesus. He had left a quiet fishing village for a tumultuous life of constant pressure by the crowds. He never again returned to the tranquil life of a fisherman. Yet he received a peace which the world cannot give (John 14:27). Peace with a reconciled God, peace concerning the future, and peace flowing from the assured presence of the Son of God, filled his soul.

Peter was severed from a beloved father and other relatives. Many Christians have lost the affection of parents in confessing Christ. Some have been cut off from brothers, sisters and friends. Yet who are more deeply loved in the church than those who have paid the dearest price to declare their faith boldly. Saintly old men become fathers and older women mothers to the cross-bearer. What a vast number of brothers and sisters await him at the Lord's house! How many have found fellowship in the assembly of the redeemed more intimate and gratifying than a home lost for Christ's sake. We are replete with "manifold more" in this present time.

Some Christians have found that a financial cross awaits them. It was this expectation which the "Good Master" had set before the rich young ruler. His actual loss of gold would have been felt. But had he taken up the cross, thereby losing houses or lands, he would have received 'manifold more'. This is not a crass materialistic promise that our Lord will eventually multiply the bank account of any who follow him. But "the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof" (Psalm 24:1). And the God of all the earth has promised to add food, clothing and all other needs to those who seek first his kingdom (Matthew 6:33). Rich men have seen their riches take wings and fly away. Some who once were wealthy are at this very moment destitute. But David could say, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psalm 37:25).

Whatever your losses '"for the kingdom of God's sake" it will not take much imagination to discover "manifold more" in kind given to you. With that in the background our Lord adds even greater bliss, "and in the world to come life everlasting." Ah! the world to come!

Ugly as the cross appeared in Gethsemane, do you think our Lord Jesus regrets his cross? While he sits upon the throne of God, around which many angels, the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders and thousands of spirits of men render perfect worship to him and sing "Worthy is the Lamb", can there be any fretting over the cross?

Do you imagine that those who live in his glorious presence complain of crosses? When Stephen walks in his resurrected body in the heavenly Jerusalem where God himself shall dwell with him, how light an affliction will his stoning seem to be! If in this life Paul could say, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18), then a thunderous "Amen" will brush aside crosses as nothing in glory.

Count it as a profound truth which Christ taught: '"Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you" (Matthew 5:11,12). Some become hypnotized by crosses. Their eyes are riveted on the cost of self-denial. Or they grumble that others have not such heavy crosses as they. Then comes the temptation to abandon the cross as the rich young Ruler did. Our Lord counsels, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad"— think of your reward in heaven! You have joined the noble ranks of the prophets. joy in his kingdom comes with a cross. Most of those who fail to experience the joy of the Lord have refused to take up a cross!

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