

The King's Highway

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IT COSTS TO REDEEM

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"I . . . fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:23-24).

Two incidents—one plain, the other dramatic—are in my mind as I start thinking with you about this strong, startling statement of St. Paul's.

The first one concerns the late Gipsy Smith, greatly-famed and greatly-loved evangelist. In the midst of a campaign he was conducting, a man invited him to preach. Knowing how full the Gipsy's schedule was and seeking to make this extra assignment appear as light as possible, the man said, "This will not be a large meeting, and you can give us something that won't take anything out of you." It was the wrong thing to say, as the man quickly realized when Gipsy replied, "Then, my brother, it's no use for me to come. A message that will not take anything out of me is not worth giving!"

How right! There is no completely painless way to present the redeeming Saviour who once hung on that pain-drenched Cross.

"Those Hands"

The other incident rises from the gallant life of Adoniram Judson, whose flaming spirit brought the light of Christ to darkened men in Burma, when the gospel was virtually unknown there. Because of his preaching he was imprisoned. It was a filthy den in which he lay, and he suffered terribly. After his release he appealed to the king of Burma for permission to go and preach in a certain city. The king refused, but in his refusal lay a shrewdness that no one should miss. He said, "I am willing for a dozen preachers to go to that city, but not you. Not with those hands! My people are not such fools as to take notice of your preaching, but they will take notice of those scarred hands."

To understand those two stories, it seems to me, is to have the key to what Paul means in our text when he declares: "I . . . fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." "Not that Gethsemane and Calvary have failed!" cries Jowett, in one of his most moving sermons. "Not that the debt of guilt is only partially paid, and there is now a threatening remnant which demands the sacrifice of human blood!" But rather this: that "The gospel of a broken heart demands the ministry of bleeding hearts . . . The work of Calvary must proclaim itself in the sacrificial saints."

In verse 20 Paul declares that our Lord Jesus Christ "has made peace through the blood of his cross." In the mystery and victory of His dying for us Christ has perfectly and eternally opened up that "new and living way" by which unrighteous men may, in penitence and faith, come to, and abide in, the forgiving, cleansing mercy of the infinitely holy God." To that finished and final work of atonement neither man nor angel can add jot or tittle.

"A Ceaseless Longing"

But, mind you, the same apostle who here speaks of

the atonement for man's sin at Calvary as an accomplished, perfected fact testifies in Philippians 3:10 that he carries in his heart a ceaseless longing to know "the fellowship of his sufferings." Let us put it this way: what Christ did in His redeeming death for us was finally and forever sufficient, but the spirit in which He did it is something that must be constantly communicated to those who would bear its message to others. "All ministry for the Master," to quote Jowett again, "must be possessed by the sanctified spirit of the Master."

Let us trace this out a bit.

For one thing, the sufferings of Christ are seen in the realm of His sympathy. The writer to the Hebrews, you will remember, tells us that since "he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted," or, as Phillips puts it, in words closer to the speech in our day, "By virtue of His own suffering under temptation He is able to help those who are exposed to temptation" (Heb. 2:18).

Let us not put too narrow limits on this word "sympathy." Let us not think of it only as a sentiment we try to express when it is funeral time. It is much too big and beautiful a word to be left on the counter where cards of condolence can be bought for a dime. Literally, the word means "to feel with." It carries the same meaning as "compassion." It stands for that wonderful gift which makes any personality the richer—the ability to put yourself in the place of someone else.

"Hollow as a Drum"

Matthew tells us that when Jesus "saw the multitude"—saw them "as sheep having no shepherd," driven and scattered—He was "moved with compassion on them" (Matt. 9:36). He was not content to give them a friendly "Cheerio." That can be as hollow as a drum. He entered into their distress. He identified Himself with them. He suffered in a sympathetic oneness with them.

Now, leave the Master and turn to the pupil. Leave the Saviour and turn to one of His saved ones. Here is Paul, saying to the Corinthians: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?" (2 Cor. 11:29). Moffatt's rendering brings out the apostle's meaning vividly: "Who is weak, and I do not feel his weakness? Whose faith is hurt, and I am not aglow with indignation?"

That kind of sympathy wrings the blood from the heart. It suffers. The redemptive ministry to which it prompts is costly. It is filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ.

Every informed person knows something about Albert Schweitzer, the famous medical missionary of French Equatorial Africa. His theology is not mine; I could not agree with it. But somewhere he has drunk deeply at the fountain of Calvary. Besides being one of the world's

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