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— "Made Conformable Unto His Death" —

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The Lord Jesus likened the Kingdom of heaven to a merchant-man who possessed many goodly pearls, but who later sold all that he had in order to possess that which he called the greatest. The good was thereby sacrificed for the best.

The same principle is illustrated in the life of the Apostle Paul. He had much indeed to gain by remaining a rabbi. And apparently he had everything to lose by becoming a Christian disciple. But amid all this his testimony was: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him...that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:7-10). He sacrificed the good and obtained the best. It was the sacrifice of the legitimate; but it was done for the kingdom's sake. That he should obey Christ implicitly was the only thing that really mattered with the beloved apostle. It was his great desire to know—really know—the risen Lord!

There are two approaches to the cross: the first is, from Gethsemane; and the other is, from Easter morning. The disciples were amazed when the Lord told them of his coming death; and their Messianic hopes were dashed to the ground when he hung upon the cross. "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel," some of them said only a few days later.

Why this misunderstanding? Because they viewed the cross from the wrong aspect. They beheld it from the tears and darkness of Gethsemane rather than the sunshine and glories of the Easter morning. The assurance that he who died was now alive revolutionized their whole outlook. The cross then took on a new meaning so far as they were concerned. They realized that the cross was a necessity, and as the Saviour had expressed it earlier, the Son of man must (had to) be lifted up (John 3:14). The sacrifice of the cross they saw at Easter was God's way of redeeming a sinful world back to himself.

The resurrection made all the difference. There could have been no Easter Day without the initial Good Friday, and if Christ had not risen, then Christianity would have been proved a farce. Witness therefore the need for the resurrection.

The crossing of the Red Sea was the great proof of God's ability according to the Old Testament. When we come to the New Testament, that miracle fades, and the resurrection of the crucified Lord of glory is the New Testament's standard of the power of God. To know this power was Paul's one great desire.

I want to be a partaker of his sufferings.

This does not refer to the Saviour's physical suf-

ferings, for they were his alone. They are to be an example for the believer. Paul's expression here refers to our fellowship with the risen Lord of life, and implies a partnership in his high priestly ministry and the sufferings or afflictions connected therewith. In another epistle they are called the "unfinished sufferings" of Christ.

I want to be conformed to his death.

His death is to be the pattern for our lives! The Saviour's death was, of course, the divine atonement for our sin. "He died for all," the apostle says, "that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again...For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Cor. 5:15, 21).

In the cross, unbelief sees a vile murder. Faith sees into the realm of the invisible, and the cross becomes not a murder at all, but the willing (voluntary) sacrifice of God himself. It is not a one-sided affair so far as the Godhead is concerned. The Bible teaches that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." The cross was not an afterthought in the mind of God. It was not a means by which he hoodwinked Satan after man's shameful fall. The Bible teaches us that it all happened by "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). It was, we repeat again, the willing sacrifice of God himself, and that same principle must find an echo in the life of the sanctified believer. Self-sacrifice on the believer's part must issue out of a willing heart. Only so can we know in our lives what it really means to be conformed to his death.

The cross an eternal principle. It did not end on Golgatha's brow. Neither did it begin there. There was a cross in the heart of the Eternal long ages before it was erected outside a city's wall. The Bible teaches us that Christ is "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). The Bible also states that Christ is a Lamb newly slain. Those two truths are not contradictions.

While he is both the Lamb slain from before time, and the Lamb newly slain, his sacrifice is complete. "It is finished," he cried, as he hung upon the tree. He died once, but he never will die again. He arose from the tomb of Joseph. Vain for them to try to imprison even his body. He arose, and now lives. "He ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). And for that very purpose he is today seated at his Father's right hand in the glory-land.

His physical sufferings are over, yet Charles Wesley is surely correct in using the present continuous tense in his hymn:

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