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Sermon preached by Mr. J. Delves at Ebenezer Chapel, Richmond, Surrey  
on Friday 27th March 1959

Hymns: 95, 803, 771    Reading: Matthew 16.    Text: Matthew 16 vv. 24, 25

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me, for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it".

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We cannot read the Scriptures with an enlightened understanding without perceiving three distinct things. The first is, that there is a way to heaven, a mercy indeed is this that we shall never fully realise here, but it is felt to be a mercy to the redeemed family of God that there is a way of escape from the wrath to come and that there is a way to heaven! That way is the Lord Himself!

"A bleeding Jesus is the way,  
And blood tracks all the path"

Can you believe that? What will make you believe it? Some manifestation of the Lord Jesus to your soul, that will make Him everything - Alpha and Omega, first and last in the salvation of your never-dying soul.

Another point is that the way to heaven is attended with great difficulties, much conflict, many fears, sore temptations, much opposition within, and often without, a sharp trial of faith and many other things which in themselves make it very hard travelling. Can you believe that? Do you feel it could ever be, in the light of all that the Saviour suffered when He was here upon earth of the contradiction of sinners against Himself, and all the trials and temptations that attended Him, that His people should have a flowery path, an easy path, no obstruction, no difficulties, no temptations, no oppositions, no fears? What conformity could they have with a suffering Christ thus? Not that trouble brings conformity automatically, but it does bring conformity when it is sanctified and brings the subject to the feet of Jesus.

But there is something else, and that is that all we may endure here or suffer is but little compared with the glory that is awaiting us, if we are His. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard" and the apostle Paul refers to this too where he says "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us". O what a wonderful mercy it will be, if it should be our lot, one day to close our eyes on earth, as it were, and open them in heaven! Can you believe that? Does your life, your walk and your conduct all point that way? Is there any conformity to a suffering Christ, any giving up of anything? If there is no

denying of self, there is no following. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

I was struck with two particular things here about Peter. I suppose we read more about Peter in the gospels than any other disciple. We read of Peter boasting, Peter smiting, Peter weeping, Peter saying great things about going to prison and to death with Christ, but later denying that he knew Him! Very solemn is all this, and may show that even the best of men are only safe as kept and that all are poor changeable creatures in themselves. There are two points about Peter in this chapter to which I would refer and the first one is a commendation; the second a reproof. We find that when the Lord Jesus Christ came into the coasts of Cæsarea, "He asked His disciples saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? and they said, "Some say that Thou art John the baptist, some Elias; and others Jeremias, or one of the prophets". But the Lord did not leave it there, "He saith unto them, but whom say ye that I am? "And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God". There is something very beautiful about this, and this was not the only time that Peter made such a noble confession, for on another occasion, in the 6th of John, we find him saying similar words "Thou hast the words of eternal life and we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." Not, we have an opinion, O no, we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ the Son of the living God.

These remarks too, link very beautifully with the Eunuch's confession he made when Philip said to him concerning baptism "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest" for "He answered and said I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God". Have you ever said that in your heart? O say you, 'That is easy, anyone could say that;' but if said in this way it would be but little less than blasphemy. If said from a believing heart, it is wonderful. It is the result of a view by faith that a sensible sinner gets in his soul of the Lord Jesus. Where this is the case there is a belief and confidence that He is the true and almighty God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, full of grace and truth. "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God". The Lord commended Peter for this, and it has often been sweet in my heart "Blessed are thou, Simon Bar-jona for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven," Revealed! Revealed that Jesus was the Son of God, the Christ, the Son of God. Ah poor sinner, flesh and blood will never reveal Him, never make Him precious, never soften your heart, nor enable you to build your hopes upon Him. Flesh and blood will

never do this, but the Holy Spirit can and does. What a wonderful mercy it is to possess a knowledge of Christ! But a little further down this chapter we see something very different, very different! When the Lord began to show unto His disciples that He must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised again the third day, this same Peter we read, "Took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee Lord: this shall not be unto Thee". Peter appears to have said this, dear friends, very soon after, or following up his noble confession of "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God." We see Peter in a different light now. Peter began to rebuke Christ, but he got a sharper rebuke from Christ, "He turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan, thou art an offence unto Me, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men". This is the point, it would seem as though it grieved the Lord, wounded His spirit, that Peter should say such a thing as this, "This shall not be unto Thee", particularly as the Lord has just referred to the fact that He must suffer and die! Nothing did the Lord resent in any of His disciples so much as for them to wish that He might be spared those sufferings that were appointed to Him. This seemed to wound the Saviour more than anything they said, even more than when they contended who should be the greatest.

What poor things we are, and so were these disciples. At this particular time their minds seemed very dark in relation to the dear Redeemer in His sufferings, death and resurrection from the dead, though He had often spoken of it to them. Nevertheless, there are some very sweet things about Peter. We find that after the resurrection, when the disciples went to the sepulchre, that the angel said to those that were there, "Go tell His disciples, and Peter, that He is not here but is risen." There seems something too, in regard to Peter in the Lord's appearing to the two who were going to Emmaus. When they returned to Jerusalem, they found the eleven "saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon", Simon Peter. Yet we do not read any details of that appearance, but the same fact is confirmed in 1 Cor: 15 v 5 "He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." There must have been some particular appearance to Peter after the resurrection, for there does not seem, as far as I can tell, to be anything from the time when Peter "Went out and wept bitterly" till He appeared in that particular way to him:- "The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared unto Simon".

But here we have something with reference to our pilgrimage here below. Thus said Jesus unto His disciples, after this sharp rebuke to Peter "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me, for whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it". That is to say that if we live to this world, we die to the next, or as we die to this world, we live to the next. It cannot be both. We cannot serve God and Mammon. Now this following is an evidence of true discipleship because in another place we find the Lord saying "So shall ye be My disciples" by which we may understand that if there is no following of Christ there is no evidence of being a disciple. This can be a very close point indeed with us, but so it is, if there is no following there is no evidence of life, no evidence of grace, no evidence of teaching, and no evidence of discipleship. This following must be attended with a denial of that we value most, that is to say, following cannot be without sacrifice more or less. In other words we cannot have Christ and the world. We cannot have this, for if we will save our life, in saving it, we shall lose it, but if we, by His grace lose our life, rightly understood, we shall find it. The point of this is to show that nothing is of comparable value to the soul. The reason that we lose sight of this and the value of eternal realities is because we live so far away from Him and that is why we have such a dim view of things. I was struck with this in the hymn

"The blessings from His death that flow,  
So little we esteem,  
Only because we slightly know,  
And meanly value Him."

but I do like this last verse

"O could we but with clearer eyes,  
His excellences trace,  
Could we His person learn to prize,  
We more should prize His grace".

I can believe that with all my heart, but here is a point to consider just now. Whatsoever we may possess here upon earth, cannot be placed upon the same level as the soul, and indeed, as the body from this point of view; for life is of more value than substance and possessions in this life. If that is true of the body, how much more of the soul.

Why is the soul of such great value? Why? because it is the life of God in us. How can that be? I believe it is so because in the creation we read that God made man from the dust of the ground, that was his body, but later we read that God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, God breathed it in, that was his soul, and that

is what you and I have, we have a body and a soul. A solemn consideration this, and here the Lord says, supposing we were to possess the whole world, would that be as valuable as our soul? would that be of the same value? His point is to show that it would be of no value at all in comparison with the value of the soul. Why? because the soul is immortal! Because the soul must live for ever. What concern have you about your soul? You and I must soon die - in any event it must be soon as compared with eternity. Young people want to get on in life, want to be successful, and so far this is proper in its place, but what about your soul? Have you ever had to tremble before God for fear your soul would be lost? While man is trying to gain the whole world, he is losing his soul. While he is trying to gain all he can in this life, he is losing the more valuable treasures of the next world. That is to say, if this world is our god, or while self is our god, we are losing our souls, and if we live and die so, our souls will be lost eternally. Does this make us tremble? Has it ever made you tremble for fear you should be lost one day? Are first things first? Are they the greatest concern of all to us? "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it." If we live to this life, if this life is first and last to us, our souls will be lost if there is no change. But Christ says, "Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it", that is to say, if he is brought by divine grace to renounce all for Christ's sake as to any merit of the creature, he will find eternal life. This does not indicate that the salvation of the soul rests with the creature, but rather shows the effect of the divine operations in the soul. How much do you think about eternity? How much does our life conform to that which we profess?

Let us for a few minutes look at this following. Following is a true indication of discipleship. But how? By what means do the Lord's people follow Christ? I believe they follow Him in a number of different ways. They follow Him first of all by renouncing self. If there is no renouncing of self or suffering loss for His sake, in this sense, there is no real following. The Apostle Paul speaks of counting "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". That is a beautiful explanation of this "Whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it." The apostle lost his life for Christ's sake. He did not even count the life of his body

as important for the excellency of this knowledge. This is following Christ! following Him by renouncing or counting all things else of no value: in fact there cannot be any real following of Christ without denial of self, according to the Lord's words here "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself," That is the greatest denial that can be made. Why? because self comes closer to us than anything else. It is to deny our own strength, wisdom, merit and everything of ourselves and to fall flat before the grace of Christ, for to deny self is to glory in the grace of Christ, to renounce everything of our own with regard to the soul's salvation, and to place our entire dependence upon the finished work of the dear Redeemer. Have you ever done that once in your life? Have there been a few minutes in your life when the world has faded away and been as nothing to you, when His sweetness has filled your heart?

"Let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me". This is not easy. O how close it comes! "Let him take up his cross". It has been said that there is a great difference between bringing the cross down upon one's own head, and taking up what the Lord lays upon us. Have you ever brought a cross down upon your head by your own sin and folly, or by falling a prey to something in your own heart, or by some grievous backsliding? This is a very different thing from taking up the cross the Saviour lays upon you. The Lord is very emphatic about this. He says in Luke "Take up his cross daily," daily not just occasionally. Perhaps you may look at yourself and your circumstances and say 'Things are very comfortable, I have not much to bear with, I have health, a comfortable home and my needs are supplied' Then you have no cross? Where is the cross? It is in your own heart. The cross is within, it may be without too. The cross does not so much consist in the being of sin, for that applies to all, without exception, but to the inward grief on account of sin, and the trouble that sin is to you, the burden of sin. All is so opposite to what you would have it; but there should be an outward cross in some way. Is there something in your life you do not like? There is a cross then. Can you bear it, take it up? Is it easy? You know it would be no cross if it were easy. If the cross is one that the Lord lays upon you, take it up! The more you are enabled by His grace to submit to it, the easier it is to carry. O, it is hard to kick against the pricks, The cross is easier to carry when you can be still, still, when you can look to that which lies beyond. It will not be long here, will it?

There are two things the cross usually indicates. One is Christ suffering for us here, and the other, our sufferings for Christ. Are

there any sufferings? There are not many compared with our forefathers; they yielded up their lives. They saved their lives by losing them. "Whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it"; this means there must be a giving up of something. If we set our affections on things below, then we die to better things. Which are of most importance to us, the things of this life, or the things of eternity? Which way are you going, the broad way or the narrow way? If you are going the broad way then you are saving your life, so to speak, in this sense considered, but, if by His grace you are going the narrow way, then you are losing your life, and the result of that will be that you will find eternal life, come into possession of it. This is the Lord's covenant to His people, who by His grace take up their cross and follow Him. Are you taking up your cross, are you suffering anything for the Lord's sake? You may not be suffering outwardly, though you may have something outwardly, which often seems more important to us and is the first consideration. There will be at least a little fellowship with Christ. If Christ suffered for us we shall in some measure suffer for Him. We shall suffer the giving up of that which we value most in order that we may place our entire dependence upon Him.

Glory in His cross? Can you walk in it? Perhaps you look at another's cross and say, I could bear that much more easily than my own. Perhaps you have even said, I could bear it more easily than they can. O yes! we can be like Peter when he said: "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if Thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles: one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias." We can mean well, not knowing what we say. That particular cross that the Lord may lay upon us must be taken up. Perhaps you are throwing it off. The point is just this, His dear people do follow Him. How do they follow Him? They follow Him in hope, in love, in confidence, their eyes look to Him; He is the Captain of their salvation, made perfect through sufferings. The eye of faith looks to Him and is not offended with the cross. If you are enabled to keep a steadfast eye on Him, you will not be offended with the cross. Take it up, take it up! There can be much sweetness in taking it up. You will have grace with it, you will have grace in it, but it is not easy. Nothing is easy to flesh and blood, yet that which is impossible to nature is acceptable to faith.

I do not know much of what I have been talking about. Some of the Lord's people have a much heavier cross. But with each it is in the way the Lord has appointed. Are we walking in such an appointment?

Can you walk in that which is not pleasing to nature? The end will be well if we are enabled by His grace to cast the world behind our back. All this is the result of teaching. It all results from the building of the poor sinner's hope upon the all-sufficient merit of a once crucified Redeemer.

May the Lord help us, be very near to us, keep us from falling and eventually make us more than conquerors through Him. Amen.

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