

The Runner's Pattern.

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"Who for the joy that was set before him endureth the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."—Heb. 12: 2.

We are so much accustomed to regard the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ as being the channel of our salvation, and the ground of our hope, that we are somewhat apt to overlook the other aspect of them as being the type of Christian life and the realized law of conduct. That aspect is insisted upon by all the New Testament writers, but it is by no means so prominent in the thoughts of the ordinary Christian of this day as it is in the Scripture. Nowhere is it more strikingly—one would almost say startlingly—set forth than here. We have seen that, in the previous clause, the writer is regarding Jesus as being himself the leader of the great host of the faithful, and the perfect example of faith. He is carrying on that same thought in the words of our text, and bringing out how, even in these points in Christ's history which seem most remote from our experience, and least capable of being repeated, he stands before us as the example to which we are to be conformed, as the realized perfection of Christian faith. The Cross and the Throne, which we are accustomed to think belong to him alone, are the very points which this writer insists upon as being capable of being reproduced, and as being, in regard to the cross, obligatory upon all the soldiers of the army, upon all the runners in the race. The very nerve and emphasis of this whole context is that the life of Jesus Christ, even in these two parts, of earthly sufferings and of heavenly glory, is the type to which the Christian life is to be conformed. And that thought the writer carries out in this text, in regard to three particulars—the governing impulse, the accepted sorrows, and the ultimate triumphant issue. "For the joy that was set before him," that is the governing impulse; "endured the cross, despising the shame"—there are the accepted sorrows; "and is set down on the right hand of the throne of God"—there is the triumphant issue; and all these three are our pattern. He is the pattern of the sufferings. He is the prophecy and the precursor of the glory. Now let us look at these three points.

I.—THE TYPICAL LIFE IN ITS GOVERNING IMPULSE.

For that joy that was set before him." That joy was clear to Christ's faith. Now in this letter faith is considered mainly, if not exclusively, as being the confident anticipation of an unseen future in reliance on the divine promise. And if you will glance your eye, at your leisure, over the preceding chapter, which I have called in former sermons the master-roll of the army of the faithful, you will see how that conception of faith is always cropping up. Take Noah, for instance, in his life-long preparation against the coming deluge, by the ark of safety. Take the patriarchs, dwelling in tabernacles, and consenting to be aliens from the civilization amidst which they inhabited, because "they looked for a city;" or the dying Jacob, pouring out his farewell blessings, because he believed that the tribes would go up to the land; or Moses who "endured as seeing him who is invisible." All these noble lives were made noble because a starry hope, visible only to the eye of faith, was the guiding star for each of them. And this is the kind of faith which the writer here tells us was the governing impulse in the life of Jesus Christ.

"The joy that was set before him," what was it? Can it be anything else than the joy of saving the world? That was the future good which ever drew the Master onwards in all the rough and thorny paths, trodden often with bleeding feet, but never with averted will—of his daily passion and of his ultimate death. Jesus Christ lived and moved and had his being, in his humanity, in these two things, which were one thing, obedience to the Father's will, and yearning desire for the world's salvation. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Looking out over the world, he said: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd." And again he said, linking together, precisely as my text does, his confident faith and what was needed in order to realize it, "If I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." A Galilean peasant, recognized by nobody but a handful of fishermen and a few brave women, stretched out his hand, and laid it upon the world and said, "It is mine!" Was it the insanity of diseased self-importance? If it was not, what was it? My text tells us faith that built upon the Father's promise. And today it looks more likely than ever it did that the audacious dream is going to come true, and that the world will one day recognize him as its Saviour and its King. And that was "the joy that was set before him."

In like manner implies my text, and treading in our Master's footsteps, we professing Christian people are to live in the future rather than in the present, and the governing impulse of our lives, if they are to be strong and pure and noble, is to be derived from that penetrating and assured look into the far-off future which exercises, in a measure, the divine prerogative of annihilating distinctions of time, and "seeing things that are not as though they were." We all know that the remoter a

man's object and aim, in the general, the nobler and stronger his life is. The men that get their wages every Saturday are not in such a good position for economy, and thrift, and many other virtues, as are those who are paid once a year. And the further off our aim, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, the nobler will be the course which we pursue. We all recognize that it is a poor, shabby thing, unworthy of men whose large discourse looks before and after, to live cabined and confined in this paltry present, and that the two wings of the soul, which lift it clear above the bogs and morasses of this quicksand of today, are memory and hope; and these two are perhaps but the same mirror turned in two opposite directions. Be that as it may, we all admit that whatever lifts a man from the present, *pro tanto*, elevates the man. The highest of all visions of the future is the one that should burn bright before the Christian, "the joy that is set before us."

The previous context has spoken of the race that is set before us. It will look a very hard, and a very steep, and a very rough course, unless at the end of "the race set before us" we see "the joy set before us." The man that is always contemplating duty, and screwing himself up to that, without the inspiration and the magnetic attraction of the joy that lies beyond, is but a slave after all. But if you want wings to your feet, here is the way to get them. Let the forward look comprise not only the work, the race, the sweat, and the dust, but let there shine clear beyond these, and magnified even by the medium of these through which we see them, "the joy that is set before us." If you are to live nobly in the present you must live much in the future. If you wish to come down with force and effect on to-day, you must come down from the height of that great to-morrow. The higher the cliff from which the cataract descends, the mightier the impact with which it strikes the stones at the base. "Other worldliness," as some people sarcastically designate the Christian attitude, is the true way to make "this worldliness" mightier and nobler. So, then, the life of Christ is our type in regard to its governing impulse.

II.—THAT LIFE IS THE TYPE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, IN REGARD TO ITS ACCEPTED SORROWS.

"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the Cross, despising the shame." Now, of course, I need not remind you, or do more than just remind you in a sentence, that the view which is taken here of our Lord's death as being the pattern in some sense imitable, and capable of being reproduced in our copies, by no means excludes the other aspect of it. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, solitary in the depth of its passion, solitary in the sweep and might of its efficacy, is abundantly insisted upon in other parts of this same letter, and is pre-supposed in my text. But the point which the writer wishes to urge is that not in quantity, not in efficacy, but if I might so say, in quality, that is in motive, the passion of Jesus Christ sets the keynote for all melodious and noble Christian life. Of course, we do not forget that it stands, as I say, unique and solitary, incapable of repetition, and needing no repetition, blessed be God! for "by one sacrifice for sins forever, he hath perfected all them that are being sanctified." True, there have been many lives and deaths of noble self-sacrifice, but there is only one that is the "offering for sin." True, there have been many lives and deaths which have taken away some portion of human misery, or have opened the way to some higher good, but there is only one that has taken away the sin of the world, and opened the "gates of the kingdom of heaven to all believers." We are not to bring the death of Jesus Christ down to the ordinary level, as if there were nothing in it but that which is common to all men's deaths; still less, if I may so say, are we to lift it up on to an isolated height, as if there were nothing in it which can be reproduced, and must be reproduced, by us.

So my text points to the Cross, with all its uniqueness, with all its solitary power, and says, "There! that is your life, if you are a Christian man." "Take up thy Cross daily, and follow me," says Jesus. And you find the same teaching running through the whole of Scripture. I need not recall passages which will be very familiar to your memories. "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." "He died for us," says one apostle, bringing the propitiatory and solitary aspect of the life into the front, and then, in the same breath, going on to say, "Leaving us an example that we should follow in his steps." What a light the thought in our text throws upon the whole of that earthly life, "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the Cross." Does that apply only to the hours on Calvary? Surely not. It covers the whole ground, as I believe, of the life of the Lord. These two thoughts brought up each other, inevitably. They were like a couple of paired stars, one dark orb and one radiant, and they were held together by a nexus that could not be broken, and revolved round each other. The sunshine always brought the shadow, and the shadow always proclaimed the sunshine. Never did Jesus Christ look into that far-off future, and see the sunny lands beyond, but the eye necessarily traveled across the deep dark gorge that lay between him and it. In testimony whereof we may quote, if no other,

his own pathetic words: "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." And so that life, in its forward look, embraced and accepted the sufferings and the death, for the joy that was set before him."

Such are to be our lives. As I have said, there can be no copying, and there is no need to copy, the quantity and the efficacy of the Master's sufferings. But there is need, if we are Christian men, that the spirit of them should pass into our lives.

Made like him, like him we rise,
Ours the Cross, the grave, the skies!

Our faith will make suffering inevitable. I need not dwell upon that, only I do believe that if a man to-day will set himself to live up to the very height of his convictions, an out-and-out Christian life, whether he traverses or conforms to the conventionalities of the average Christian life of to-day or not, he will find out that still "we must go forth to him without the camp, bearing his reproach." I do not think that silver slippers have yet come to be the equipment for treading the narrow way. But I pass that.

My faith will not only make endurance inevitable, it will make it possible. If we see that great vision beyond, it will bring the foreground down to its proper dimensions. Very little knolls look like high hills down in the Fen country, but if the clouds were to roll away, and the white Alps rose on the horizon, what would the little knolls look like? They would dwindle to mole-hills, and so these huge sorrows in our foregrounds, these sore trials that stand frowning and threatening, how small they would all look if we had learnt Moses' secret of endurance, the sight of the invisible. The "light afflictions, which are but for a moment," are very heavy, and seem dreadfully protracted and long-lived, as long as we keep our eyes fixed on them; but when we look at the things that are unseen and eternal, then the near things in the foreground reveal themselves as they are, fleeting and trivial, and we can endure them for a little while. When the mist lifts, and the harbor lights are seen, it matters very little though the wind is blowing hard, and there is a big sea on since we shall be moored before long. "For the joy that was set before him, he endured the Cross, despising the shame," and my life may become "a solemn scorn of ills" if my eye is fixed on the supreme and ultimate good.

And now, lastly, let me ask you to think for a moment, and only a moment can we spare for it, of

III.—THE TYPICAL LIFE OF FAITH IN ITS TRIUMPHANT ISSUES.

"He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Your time will not allow me to deal at all adequately with these great words. Let me only, in the briefest way, indicate what I intended to have expanded. What does this great saying indicate for Christ? It means repose—repose which is not vacuity. It means authority, it means judicature, it means participation in the divine nature and government. He is my brother, and it is the man Jesus who now wields the government of the universe, "and is for us entered, our Forerunner and High Priest."

And what does it mean for us? It means that—he, in his present glory—as expressed in highly metaphorical language by this figure of my text, but meaning the great things which I tried to enumerate—is for us the guarantee and the assurance of life eternal. Whether there is any other proof or not, I do not inquire here and now, but this, at all events, is certain, that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, of which his ascension and session at the right hand of God are but the prolongation, practically stands or falls the belief in immortality. But that sitting at the right hand of God not only thus establishes the fact of our future life, but it is for us the prophecy of what that life is to be. Identity of life by means of the communication of the "Spirit of Life that was in Jesus Christ" to every believing soul, is the very key to all the teaching of the New Testament as to the relation between Christ and believers. And that identity of life which secures forgiveness and acceptance and sonship to the Christian man here on earth, for the very same reason, and in precisely the same fashion, secures that, as he said, "I will that . . . these be with me where I am." It is impossible that with the life of Christ in our spirits our future should be separated from him. He has given us himself, if we have taken him, by our humble faith, and in that gift there are necessarily involved pardon for the past, power for the present and complete conformity with him, and union with him in the eternity that is to come. So, not only where but what he is, there and that shall his servants be. All the runners, as, one by one, they reach the goal, will pass out into the dark beyond, and then will be seen, having found their way thither by corridors that we know not of, seated on the benches of the amphitheatre, by the side of the Emperor, who himself ran "the race set before him," and is entered into the joy that was set before him, gives his servants to "enter into the joy of their Lord."—Baptist Times and Freeman.

No wise mother's care carries her child when it ought to learn to walk. Babes are not desired to be babes always. Pat him down; let him stagger, fall, get bumped; extend a helping finger, take obstacles out of the way, but make him grow to youthful glee and manly strength. We battle desperately with sore temptation. Omniscience watches the struggles; and at the right moment makes a way of escape that we, not He, may be able to endure it. Divine care did not prevent Joseph's being sold into Egypt. Nay, rather provided for it. That was the hinge-point in the world's early history. So no chastisements in the close of the nineteenth century are joyous, but grievous. Nevertheless, they yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby.—Henry W. Warren.