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THE POWER OF THE CROSS IN SOCIAL RE- DEMPTION.

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The present is a time of change and readjustment. The men of today live in a different world from the men of yesterday. During the past century the frontiers of the universe have greatly widened; in fact, the frontiers have really disappeared and the universe has become boundless. During the present generation humanity has made the great discovery of the Kingdom of God; at any rate it has rediscovered that central Christian conception. And during the present generation, also, a great new field of interest and activity has opened before us; and Social Service now claims equality with the other accepted items of the Christian program, such as Evangelism and Missions. All this, as any one can see, means a changed conception of the universe, a new interpretation of humanity and a readjustment of working programs.

It is not my purpose here to attempt this readjustment in its larger bearings. But there is one factor in it which in a sense is central and all-determining; and that is the relation between the Cross of Christ and the new interest called Social Service. In this time this new direction of thought, this new method of action, claims a

considerable share of human attention and asks for an honorable place in the Christian program. But it is at this point that most confusion exists, and it is this item of our program over which men are most doubtful. It is feared by many that this interest in Social Service may divert attention from more central matters; that in this effort to eliminate social evils, to reduce temptation, to train life in moral ways, to give every person a fair inheritance in society, we are ignoring regeneration and are making the Cross of Christ of little effect. It is feared, also, that in this new emphasis upon charity and philanthropy, this attempt to construe duty and goodness in terms of the second commandment equally with the first, we are making mere good nature a substitute for regeneration and are leading men to believe that they can be saved by their good works.

It is not possible here to discuss these questions in detail, but it must be said that there is some meaning in these objections. It is certain that no interpretation of Christianity can be true and adequate which does not sound the depths of human sin and need. And no conception of life can be satisfactory and Christian which does not make the Cross its central fact and does not emphasize the need of moral renewal in man. But many of these doubts concerning Social Service grow out of a mistaken conception of its aim and method. More than that, many of these misunderstandings concerning the relation of the Cross and Social Service grow out of a narrow and formal conception of the Cross itself. There are some questions here which must be met in a frank and open spirit. In a large sense we can best meet these objections by noting the inner meaning of the Cross and gathering up some of the implications of Social Service.

I. THE MEANING AND PLACE OF THE CROSS.

It would carry us too far afield to consider in any detail the relation of the Cross to the being of God. But one or two things may be noted. The Eternal God, so

the Scriptures plainly teach, loves the world and has bound up his life with the life of his people. In all their afflictions he is afflicted; he is bound in their bondage and he becomes free in their freedom. Not only so, but he feels their sins, travails in pain for man's redemption, and becomes the saviour of his people. In one sense the Cross is the revelation in time of this eternal saving will of God. In another sense it is the human means through which his love is revealed and the world is redeemed.

1. The Cross of Christ is *the revelation of that which is deepest and most central in the life of God*. It is the disclosure in human terms of the very law of the eternal. It is the particular expression of God's love in the face of man's sins and rebellion. It is God's way of revealing the divine law of life, of breaking the power of sin in man's life, of winning men unto himself, and establishing them in the law of righteousness. It is the certification to the world that sacrificial love is the final law of the universe, that life finds its highest uses in saving service, that God himself gains his ineffable crown by loving men and saving the weak. It is the revelation in human terms of the law of life, that true service is costly, that the world is redeemed through sacrifice and travail. The Cross means that the divine, the strong, the good, must stoop to deliver the needy, to bear their burdens, to become one with them, and to find his freedom in and through the freedom of his people. All that the Cross means to God; how it affects his relations to men, we may speculate but we cannot fully know. But in all, behind all, this great central essential meaning of the Cross abides unchanged and unchanging.

In a real sense the Cross of Christ stands unique and solitary in this universe. Other men, as we shall see, are called to bear a cross and to share in the divine travail over man. But it was true yesterday, and it will be true tomorrow, that there are depths and heights in Christ's sacrifice which man does not know and cannot fathom.

But if we stopped here, as so many are inclined to do, we should stop far short of the great truth; we should make the Cross of Christ a mere transaction when it is rather a living experience. More than that, we should lose sight of the true meaning of man's life and should fail to fulfill our part in the redemptive process.

2. The Cross is *the disciple's law of life*. In a simple and yet comprehensive statement the Master lays down the law of discipleship: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me". (Matt. 16:24.) The world has made much of Christ's Cross, and has found in it the fullest revelation of God's love and the surest pledge of the world's redemption. But the world has too often forgotten that Jesus speaks less about his own Cross than of that cross which every disciple is called to bear. In the law of discipleship which he announces he declares that there is a cross for every disciple, just as real and as important as his own. In fact, the Cross of Christ is the type and pattern and power of that cross which every disciple must take up and bear. The disciple is not above his Master, and the servant is not greater than his Lord.

The Cross is more than an historic fact, a solitary event, the material of a doctrine; it is the revelation of the disciple's law of life, the badge of Christian discipleship, an experience in the life of every servant of God. The Cross of Christ does not make the disciple's cross unnecessary; rather it is the type and power of that cross which every man must bear.

The New Testament is full of this great truth, and it is writ large across the page of every book. Thus Paul affirms that he is crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20); and it is evident that he thinks of the sacrifice of Calvary not merely as something accomplished for him, but as something in which he actively participates. He tells us again that the old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed (Rom. 6:6). He speaks of him-

self as a partaker of the sufferings of Christ (2 Cor. 1:17), and he longs to fill up on his part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24). Again, he counts everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord; "that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil. 3:10,11). With Paul it is evident that the Cross of Christ does not stand alone in the world, but that it is the type of that cross which every man is called to bear. In a remarkable statement to the Philippians he declares that it is granted unto them not only to believe on Christ, but also to suffer in his behalf (Phil. 1:29).

The same truth is made very plain in the writings of other disciples. Peter and John emphasize the same great truth, though with a different bearing. Thus Peter bids Christians rejoice, inasmuch as they are partakers of Christ's sufferings (I. Peter 4:13). John declares that in this we perceive the love of God, that he laid down his life for us; and he makes this the reason why we should lay down our lives for the brothers (I. John, 3:16). In the Apocalypse the seer beholds a lamb standing in the midst of the throne, as though it had been slain; and he means to say that suffering love is at the very heart of God's sovereignty. Later the followers of the Lamb go forth to make war against the dragon and his hosts; and they overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives even unto death (Rev. 5:6; 12:11).

It is easy of course for one to say that all of these words are figures of speech; but that is just what they are not. We have no more right to attenuate them into figures of speech when applied to men than when applied to the Lord Jesus. Hence when the Son of Man lays down the law of discipleship,—“If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and

follow me'', his words go deeper than a figure of speech. These words are no less real to the disciple than they were to the Master himself; they mean as much to the disciple as they meant to him; the disciple's cross is identical with the Master's. The teaching plainly is that, as Jesus honored the law of God and gave himself in sacrifice for man, so every one who would follow Christ must honor the same law and give himself for the same end. The necessity of the Cross that was upon Christ is upon every man. The life of love and self-sacrifice is the very life of the Eternal God; and the life of love and self-sacrifice is the only kind of life that one has any warrant for living in this universe of sin and suffering.

3. This *human universal meaning* of the Cross has been *almost wholly overlooked* in the thought of Christendom. Men have thought of Christ's Cross and have rested upon that; Christ thinks of our cross and calls upon us to bear it after him. Men have gloried in the Cross of Christ; but somehow they have lost much of its simplicity and power. Many people live in the delusion that the Cross of Christ is a substitute for any cross on their part. This conception is a part of the formal and artificial thought that has so long dominated the life of the church. The righteousness of Christ is no substitute for the righteousness of man. Rather it is the revelation and power of that righteousness which God requires of every man. The Son of Man has died, not that man may escape the demand of God's righteous law, but that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in men who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit.

II. THE REDEMPTIVE SERVICE OF THE MEN OF GOOD WILL.

There is one great truth that breaks upon our souls in its meridian splendor; the Christian disciples are here to repeat and continue the wonder and the glory of the Incarnation. They are called to bear their cross after the Master and to share in his redemptive sacrifice for mankind.

The world is redeemed and that redemption is a fact. And yet that redemption is a process always continuing and ever growing more and more. The Son of Man, once for all, has wrought the redemption of the world; and yet that redemption must be wrought out in and through lives and sacrifices of men. In the sacrifice of Christ and the redemption he has achieved we have the statement of the things Jesus *began* to do and achieve in the redemption of the world. In the service of his people and the transformation of society we have the definition of the things he *continues* to do in realizing this redemption. The redemption is a fact achieved by Christ; and yet it is a process wrought out by men. It was achieved by Christ in and through his Cross; it becomes effective for the world in and through the crucified lives of his disciples. One or two things implied in this we must note here.

1. The Kingdom of God is a *kingdom of living men*; and hence men themselves are the factors the King uses in the establishment of his Kingdom. This fact is made very plain in the life and teaching of the Master. Thus he calls men into his service that they may become workers in his cause. He declares that these men are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The Son of Man depends upon personal witnessing and human effort in the work of the Kingdom, and he never relied upon any other means or agents. It is worth noting that he does not say the truth is the salt of the earth; nor does he intimate that a book is the light of the world. He does not say that a doctrine is the leaven of the Kingdom; nor does he suggest that hosts of angels shall publish the good news. On the contrary he distinctly declares that men are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. The children of the Kingdom are good seed sown in the field; the men in whom Christ lives are to be his witnesses unto the ends of the earth.

2. The law of progress is the *law of self-sacrifice*.

The Master has formulated this law, the law for himself, and the law for all beings: Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. (John 12:24). This is the law for the Master and for every disciple. Except their lives as grains of wheat fall into the ground and die, they abide by themselves alone; but if they die, they bring forth fruit. This is the divine and universal law of fruitfulness, and there is no other law given under heaven. The condition of life and fruitfulness for the King is the condition of life and fruitfulness for every member of the Kingdom. No life can come to its best estate except through death. No life can bear fruit till it has died unto self. As Christ gave his life away for others, and thereby prevails to fulfill the counsel of God; so men must give their lives away for others if they would further the cause of God. There is not one way for Christ and a different way for his people. There have been men, there will be men, who seek to climb up some other way into life and power; but all such efforts are proved futile and vain. Self-sacrifice is the price that must be paid for every step of progress. There is no other way under heaven known to man whereby the world can be saved than the way of the Cross. The world is full of people who are expecting some one to come along with a patented process that is guaranteed to save the world without any man getting under a load or bearing a cross. We do not know of any such process; in fact, Jesus himself did not have any such process. The only way he knew of saving this world was by cross-bearing and sacrificial service. To the end of the chapter this will be the way of social progress and world redemption.

3. The service and sacrifice of the men of good will are *part of the redemptive process* in the life of the world. The law which the Great Servant knows and fulfills, is the law for every man who would serve in his cause. The Son of Man in fulfilling the divine law of self-

sacrifice shows its divine meaning and eternal necessity, and then he restores it to man with a more claimant conscience than ever. The man who knows Jesus Christ and loves his fellows and prays for the coming of God's Kingdom, enters into the spirit of Christ's life and has a part in his vicarious sacrifice. Self-sacrifice is the price that must be paid for every step of progress. It matters not in what sphere of life the progress is made, the inevitable and invariable cost is self-sacrifice. The old tradition tells how, in ancient Rome, a great chasm opened in the city and refused to be closed till the most precious thing in the city had been sacrificed. And a young knight of noble blood, one Curtius, leaped into the chasm and the breach was healed. The progress of the world's thought has been purchased at the price of self-sacrifice and tears and blood. The progress of the Kingdom in every direction has been purchased by the sacrificial lives of God's people. To illustrate this principle fully is to tell the whole story of the Kingdom of God in the world. This principle is true in the world of thought; it is true in the world of missionary extension; it is true in the work of social reform. From all lands and from all ages they come, these makers of the world, these martyrs of the truth, to join the glorious fellowship of apostles and saviours.

Without shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins, no liberty of man, no progress of society. The man who supposes that the world can be saved by general education and genial feeling, knows nothing of the malignity of sin and the facts of human life. It costs blood and tears to win salvation for the sons of men; and it will cost blood and tears to have that salvation made real in the world. In every sphere of life this principle prevails; vicarious sacrifice and sacrificial love is the price at which every truth is made vital among men. A French philosopher who had unveiled a new and improved Christianity, conferred with Talleyrand, and confided to him his

disappointment at his ill success. His propaganda made no way, he said: what was he to do? The ex-bishop consoled with him, feared that it might be a difficult task to found a new religion;—it was so difficult a task that he hardly knew what to advise; “Still,” he went on, “there is one plan which you might at least try. I should recommend you to be crucified and to rise again the third day”. Nothing but a crucified discipleship can ever win the world unto a crucified Lord.

III. THE KINGDOM OF GOD THE CENTRAL IDEA OF THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

In the rediscovery of the Kingdom of God we have found that it is the central idea of the Christian system. This Kingdom, it has become evident, covers the whole life of man and makes provision for all his needs. And in any adequate and Christian conception of the redemptive purpose of Christ we see that it is all-inclusive, and contemplates the saving of the whole world. In a word, it implies the salvation of man and of society and the building up in the earth of a divine and righteous social order.

In all that has been said it is implied that the Cross is the power of God unto the salvation of man, and the power is fully adequate to the need. It would be a most profitable study to show how the Cross is the power of God unto fruitful service in all realms of human life and in all parts of the Kingdom's program. We can here illustrate the power of the Cross in the realm called Social Service. In what follows it will appear that what we call Social Service is simply one way of fulfilling the law of the Cross, of expressing the divine love for the world, of saving men and carrying on Christ's redemptive purpose.

1. Social Service *opens a vast field* for the expression and action of sacrificial love. The moment we consider the meaning and effort of human love we see that Social

Service is inevitable and necessary. Love, the love of men, is no vague, abstract sentiment, but a real and personal interest. We do not love into the empty air; we always love people; and loving people is something more than a vague sentiment, a passive good will. To love people means to honor their personality, to seek their good, to carry their burdens. To love people means therefore to shield them from evil, to lift the pressure of temptation from them, to seek the unfolding of their lives, to ensure them a full and worthy life. Love says to the one loved, "Let me carry your burden, let me bear pain that you may escape, let me decrease that you may increase". The glib and easy way that some church members talk about Christian love, and yet do nothing to abolish city slums, to secure sanitary housing for the people, discounts both their sanity and their religion. The smug and complacent piety of some people who talk about spirituality and yet live on dividends wrung from the ill-paid labor of women and children, is the standing scandal of many churches. A real and intelligent love for people must express itself in a real and active effort to help them.

Our love for men is a mere pretense if it does not lead us to help them whenever they need help. Our love for men amounts to nothing if we do not fight against the things that hurt and hinder them. Love wants every life to be well born. It wants every child to be well nourished and well protected. It wants every child to have a chance to play and to be a child. It wants every life to have such conditions as will enable it to grow up tall and straight and clean and strong. It wants every person to have a fair opportunity in life and a chance to earn and eat his daily bread. It cannot be satisfied so long as unnecessary temptations exist and stumbling blocks are placed in the way of men. It cannot rest so long as injustice is done anywhere and a single abuse tarries in society. It will express itself in every way that can help men. It will make men inventive in finding ways of helping their fel-

lows. And this is simply to say that what we call Social Service is a natural and necessary way in which the spirit of sacrificial love will express itself.

2. The Christian life must seek to *incarnate itself* in outward forms and social institutions that are the expression of its inner spirit. The ideal of Christianity is a social ideal; that ideal never can be satisfied till it is realized in social institutions. Life, all life, especially the Christian life, ever seeks to conform to its type; and this means that it is ever and forever seeking to express itself in institutions that reveal its love, its justice, its righteousness, its brotherhood.

This is not all, but this life by its very nature is an all-pervading and all-transforming force. It is like the leaven which touches every particle and leavens the whole lump. It permeates that it may transform—and whatever it permeates it must transform—the whole life of society. It creates as it goes, social ideas and sentiments; it expresses itself in a pure family life, in social customs and civic ordinances; it reveals itself in human legislation, in just industrial systems, in sacrificial social institutions.

3. The men who possess the spirit of Christ and live by the law of the Cross will *make life one great redemptive effort*. They will do all that lies in their power to help men, to win them away from sin and self unto righteousness and love; they will do all in their power to deliver their fellows from such evils as ignorance and temptation, poverty and misery, disease and anxiety, and to make their lives rich and strong; they will seek to take up stumbling blocks out of the way of the people, to make straight paths for men's feet, to make it as easy as possible for them to do right, to open before them the door of opportunity into life and joy. To love one's fellows and to seek their good is to work in line with Christ's redemptive purpose and is to give clear evidence of one's own redemption.

What is the innermost fact in the redemptive work of

Jesus Christ? It is the deliverance of man from the power of sin and selfishness; it is his establishment in the law of righteousness and love; and it is the devotion of his life in sacrificial and loving service. There are various evidences that the redemptive work of Christ has been fulfilled in one; but what we call Social Service is one of the clearest and most positive. This is certain; that no amount of profession, no claim that one has been redeemed, no mere theoretical knowledge of the sacrifice of Christ, avails ought where the life is selfish, unloving and unloving. This is certain also; that where men are thus unselfish in thought, righteous in life, and loving in deed, the redemptive grace of Christ is manifest.

4. The love and service of men is the *authentic sign and seal of the Kingdom*. "Every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God" (John 4:7). It may be that some of the men who are interested in their fellows and are seeking to help them do not confess Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. It may be true that some of those who are most active workers in Social Service cannot claim the Christian name and do not cherish the Christian hope. But far be it from me to complain at this; for we remember the experience of an apostle of old, "Master", said John one day, "we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followed not with us". You were young, said the Master, "Forbid him not; for there is no man which shall do a mighty work in my name, and be able quickly to speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is for us". (Mark 9:39; Luke 9:50). More than this, we will rather rejoice that by every means and by other workers men are helped and Christ is made known (Phil. 1:18), Those who claim to be so orthodox in life because they repeat a confession, and yet disfellowship others, fail to heed that warning of the apostle: "He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love". (1 John 4:8).

We must recognize the fact, however, that a large proportion of the social workers in every land are men and

women who have grown up in the churches and are motivated by the love of Christ. We must recognize the fact, also, that nothing but the life and love of Christ can move men to undertake the most humble and unpleasant tasks in social redemption. A sympathetic heart, mere natural humanity, may carry one far and make great sacrifices. But only those who are sharers in Christ's Cross will stoop to the lowest depths of human need and will lead the forlorn hopes of the social warfare. But passing beyond all these considerations one thing is clear; granted that many men are living brave lives and are serving their fellows; this is a double reason why those who know Jesus Christ and cherish his hope should outlove and outserve all others: there is a double reason why these men with their larger vision and truer faith should be foremost in every fight against injustice and every self-forgetful service. Granted that Social Service is a form of effort which appeals to many outsiders and possibly to some unbelievers; granted even that some people are satisfied with what is called mere philanthropy and never confess their faith in Jesus Christ. Yet this is no reason why those who call themselves Christians should be indifferent to this work; rather it reveals the double obligation to excel all others in every form of helpful service. There may be a philanthropy without Christianity, but there cannot be a Christianity without philanthropy. The least and lowliest member of the Kingdom of God ought to be better and braver than the greatest and best man outside that Kingdom. The faith that does not move men to loving, helpful, sacrificial service is not the Christianity of Christ. The religion that is not more active, more courageous, more humane than any so-called humanitarianism, does not know Jesus Christ.

They who live in phrases and formulas may object to all this; they are sure to say that we are making the Cross of no effect and are reducing the privileges of the Christian. Does not faith in Jesus Christ mean anything? Yes, we say, just so far as it makes the believer more

faithful and good. Does not the Cross of Christ do anything for man? Yes, much every way, provided it makes him more unselfish and loving. Is not the Cross the power of God unto salvation? Yes, we say, insofar as it becomes a reality to them and makes them live a crucified life. That old mystic was right who declared: "The Cross of Christ avails thee nought till it is erected in thine own heart also".

The world ought to have learned by this time that the mere profession of faith, the mere naming of Christ's name, avails absolutely nothing without obedience and law. "The head can as easily amuse itself with a knowledge of Christ's Cross, as with any other notion," said Richard Baxter. "The true doctrines of Christ may be believed with a faith which is not true," said another. And we ought to have heeded the word of the Master that they who love and serve their fellows are really possessors of his spirit and sharers in his Cross (Matt. 25:31-48). The most fatal heresy here and hereafter is an unloving heart and an unloving life. The final evidence that one is of Christ, whatever his mere profession, is found in his loving spirit and his sacrificial service. Some men will understand all this and in the name of the simple Gospel will oppose it. But such men misunderstood this truth when lived by the Master himself, and in the name of the old faith they sent him to the Cross. This is certain, that the men who boast of their understanding of Christ's Cross and condemn others who do not accept their formula, are themselves under solemn obligation to be the most loving, the most patient, the most self-sacrificing, the most forgiving people in the world.

This statement of the relation between the Cross of Christ and the Social Service program completely answers the objection that can be raised. Those who say that Social Service makes light of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, do not understand the nature of Social Service nor the meaning of the Gospel itself. The Son of Man has come to save the world, and by his life and

sacrifice he has set mighty redemptive agencies to work. But the Cross of Christ, we have seen, does not stand alone and solitary in our world; on the contrary, it is the type and power of that cross which every disciple is to bear. The Cross becomes the power of God unto Salvation when it is set up in man's own life, and becomes at once the disciple's law of life and the inspiration of a sacrificial service. In a half-blind way, perhaps, sometimes without even confessing the source of their inspiration and power, social workers are seeking to enthrone the Cross in the life of the world and to organize society by the law of self-sacrifice. The social worker who is instructed into the Kingdom of God never thinks that Social Service can outgrow the Gospel or make the Cross of Christ unnecessary. On the contrary, he finds in the betterment of the world and the salvation of society the very evidence of the Gospel's power.

Some people seem to fear that the Gospel will be minimized, if the world grows better, and temptation is lessened, and men no longer wallow in the mire. They seem to suppose that, in this effort to create a better world from which such things as crime and poverty, vice and disease, are eliminated, we hope to outgrow the Gospel and make the Cross of Christ no longer necessary. They do not see that the creation of such a world is the very end and aim of Christianity, and that the power of the Gospel is measured by these redemptive results. They do not see that this service of man, this unselfish effort to create better social conditions, this willingness to spend and to be spent for men, is the best way to honor Christ and is the continuance of his saving ministry. The social workers who are seeking the removal from society of needless human ills and are creating a better community for boys and girls to grow up in, are the very people who find in these results the evidence of the Gospel's power. In a real sense Social Service is the culmination and consummation of Christ's redemptive mission and program.