

The Cross - Only the Death Sentence Will Avail

“Nay, we had, as we still have, the sentence of death within our own selves, in order that our confidence may repose, not on ourselves, but on God Who raised the dead to life” (2 Corinthians 1:9 WNT).

An event in my preschool years had an impact on me. As a result of a pleasant, natural event, I had a realization that somehow I wanted to be with God, His saints and angels in Heaven. But I also realized that in order to get there, I had to die. The entrance to Heaven would cost me everything I held dear, my parents, even my life.

I am told that in some, if not all, armies, men are trained to die. I have heard motivators say that in order to be successful, one must approach an obstacle or a challenge with this mindset: “I am going to do it if it kills me, and it probably will.”

It was His solemn duty to pay the ultimate price.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ came to earth for one purpose only. It was not to preach. It was not to start a religion. It was not to help the poor. It was not to be a nice example. He came to do the will of His Father. What was the Father’s will? It was that His Son should lay down His life for all men. Jesus Christ came to die. It was not a matter of probability. There was no other option. God predetermined it:

“The next day John sees Jesus coming to him and says, Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 MKJV)

“This One given to you by the before-determined counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken and by lawless hands, crucifying Him, you put Him to death; Whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts 2:23-24 MKJV).

Though He had healed everyone, provided for every poor person, performed every great miracle possible, and displayed a lifetime of the greatest example of how to live, but had not died, we would be without hope. Only by His death does man have hope of redemption and restoration to harmony with God. Our debt to God was too great for us to pay, so great that we could not pay any fractional portion of it. His blood was so precious that He could pay for it all.

As prophesied in Scripture centuries and millennia before, it was His calling, His job, His solemn duty to pay the ultimate price. He came, and He paid it, in full. On the cross, He referred to His great mission, saying, “It is finished.”

In three days, He raised Himself from the dead, even as He prophesied He would. Nothing could prevent Him, not the Jews, not the Roman army, not the powers of Hell, and not death itself. By His resurrection from the dead:

“Having stripped rulers and authorities, He made a show of them publicly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15 MKJV).

He overcame all. After the resurrection, He was able to declare:

“All authority is given to Me in Heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18 MKJV).

Death must come; no death, no victory.

After His ascension to Heaven, He declared:

“Do not fear, I am the First and the Last, and the Living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for ever and ever, Amen. And I have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:17-18 MKJV).

To Him, the Father said:

“Sit in the highest position in Heaven until I make Your enemies Your footstool” (Psalms 110:1 GW).

All those who have taken up the cross and followed their risen Lord and Savior to the end have come to know the power of His resurrection. They have learned by experience that there is no victory without death. Death must come; no death, no victory. There is no other way. Indeed, a true Christian is the very representation of that truth by his or her very existence.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone; but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit” (John 12:24 MKJV).

Only those who truly love Him will lose their lives for Him. He expects nothing less:

“He who loves his life shall lose it. And he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there also My servant shall be. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:25-26 MKJV).

To call oneself a Christian means to die.

His faithful servant Paul made the call and responsibility of the genuine Christian very clear:

“I beseech you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God to **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, pleasing to God, **which is your reasonable service**. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2 MKJV).

Taking up the cross is not considered exceptional. It is not the duty only of Christian ministers, such as apostles or pastors. It is not an *option* to those who would take on the Name of Jesus Christ (calling themselves Christians or spiritual Jews). Indeed, to call oneself a Christian means to die. A Christian is one who continues the life of Jesus Christ on earth. Paul was set forth by the Lord as one to follow even as he followed Christ. He said:

“I fill up the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, on behalf of His body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24 MKJV).

He was drawing me to Calvary.

Only the death sentence will suffice to God, and prevail with Him. To all believers, Paul said:

“For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8 MKJV).

When I first believed in the year 1973, these verses that I quote above came to me in the same cluster, together with those I will yet quote. I looked around and saw everyone playing church, indulging in religion, revelling in works and doctrine, and adopting profession of Christianity as a good, useful and even enjoyable thing to do. With many, it seemed a social thing as much as it was anything else.

I wondered that they were not seeing, hearing and feeling that patient, yet urgent, tug at the heart, which would often bring me to tears. I knew I was called to death but they didn't know. Why didn't they know? God was not dealing with them. He was dealing with me. He was drawing me to Calvary.

If I was going to be His, I would be no longer the world's or even my own.

It was a bittersweet experience that lasted for some time. It was bitter because it meant parting with everyone and everything I held near and dear. I knew I would become at enmity with men, not that I would be their enemy, but that even those

closest to me would become my enemies. They would not understand. He personally warned me in advance, even as He spoke of these things in Scripture:

“And a man’s foes shall be those of his own household” (Matthew 10:36 MKJV).

I knew that if I was going to be His, I would no longer be the world’s or even my own:

“I have been crucified with Christ, and I live; yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me. And that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith toward the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself on my behalf” (Galatians 2:20 MKJV).

Rare indeed is the one who calls him or herself a Christian that has the death sentence upon him or herself. The first Christian must go, that Christian of the first Adam, to make room for the Christian of the Last Adam. The first Adam must decrease that the Last Adam might increase. There is no alternative, any more than the sun has a choice to set in the east, north, or south.

Satan knows he can do everything but raise himself from the dead.

Tares are “Christians.” They claim all the rights and virtues of believers, and they *are* believers, at least in appearance, profession, and conviction, but they have not taken up the cross. Death is the threshold over which Satan, the deceiver, refuses to step. He can mimic words, appearances, doctrine and even, if not especially, love. He can mimic devotion and sacrifice, and be superbly eloquent in preaching the gospel - memorizing the Bible, if necessary. He can even perform miracles, signs, and wonders.

He will give his body to be burned, but he refuses to surrender his identity and lose it entirely for Christ. He is the Great Pretender, the Angel of Black Light, the Liar of liars. Only one thing exposes him and stops him dead in his tracks - the cross. The cross divides the sheep from the goats. The cross is where the rubber meets the road. Satan knows he can do everything but raise himself from the dead.

First sorrow and suffering, then peace and joy.

Tares have no seed and no heart. Tares are shallow, full of pious words but void of all good fruits, though they might be full of good works. They are the seed of the enemy, who transform themselves into ministers and brethren of Christ. In the last day, which is today, He says to them:

“I tell you, I do not know you; from where you are. Depart from Me, all workers of unrighteousness!” (Luke 13:27 MKJV)

Who is for life? Let him be for death first, because death comes first from the hand of the Lord. First sorrow and suffering, then peace and joy:

“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh” (Luke 6:21 MKJV).

The enemy would have the world believe that first comes life.

“But woe to you who are rich! For you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full! For you shall hunger. Woe to you who laugh now! For you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you! For so their fathers did to the false prophets” (Luke 6:24-26 MKJV).

Fear - The Rejection of Death

The fearful cannot prevail. What is fear? Fear is the unwillingness to lose, fail, suffer or die. Fear is a selfish disposition. It is a dangerous hindrance and treacherous to all those involved:

“And the officers shall speak further to the people, and they shall say, Who is the man that is fearful and faint-hearted? Let him go and return to his house, lest his brothers' heart faint as well as his heart” (Deuteronomy 20:8 MKJV).

**Fear denies the rulership of the Kingdom of God
over all things.**

“Now, therefore, speak in the ears of the people, saying, Whoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and go away early from Mount Gilead. And twenty-two thousand of the people returned. And there remained ten thousand” (Judges 7:3 MKJV).

Fear denies the rulership of the Kingdom of God over men and all things, including death and hell.

Jesus said this:

“No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13 MKJV).

Was this a necessity only for Him, or is it for all those who follow Him?

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12 MKJV).

John, one of many who laid down his life in and for the Lord, said this:

“In this is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, that as He is, so also we are in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love” (1 John 4:17-18 MKJV).

A righteous death is the doorway to victory.

How is fear overcome? Paul said this:

2 Timothy 1:7-11 MKJV

(7) For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

(8) Therefore you should not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner. But be partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God,

(9) Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given us in Christ Jesus before the eternal times.

(10) But it is now having been manifested by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, Who has made death of no effect, bringing life and immortality to light through the gospel;

(11) to which I am appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the nations.

A righteous death is the doorway to victory. That death begins the moment one becomes a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, following Him outside the gate and the camp, where saints and angels are, and where men fear and find it impossible to tread:

“Therefore Jesus also, so that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach” (Hebrews 13:12-13 MKJV).

Any other form of Christianity is pseudo. Said Jesus:

“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26-27 MKJV).

This is the true faith and the only way to victory of life. It is the way of the cross.

What is it to take up the cross? It is to surrender that which is of great value to one, in obedience to the Lord. Unless it costs without the guarantee of return, except by miracle, it isn't the cross. The cross means parting with what is valuable, when directed by God.

The cross is obedience in that which costs the one who obeys, even as Abraham offered up his beloved son Isaac by faith. It is an exit from this world and entry

into another nature, step by step, here a little, there a little. The cross is obedience to God, counting the world to come of greater value than the present one.

The cross is life surrendered that leads to life eternal. With God, only the cross, the sentence of death, will avail.

Victor Hafichuk

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