

Price of Discipleship

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the profound cost of discipleship, emphasizing obedience, suffering, and the marks that signify true allegiance to Christ.

Duration: 27:09

Scripture: Acts 9:6-19, 2 Corinthians 11:23-25, Galatians 6:17

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the physical suffering and persecution that the Apostle Paul endured for his faith. The speaker highlights Paul's multiple beatings and lashings, emphasizing the severity of the punishments he endured. The speaker also references Paul's statement in Galatians 6:17, where he declares that he bears the marks of Jesus on his body. This statement serves as evidence of Paul's apostleship and his commitment to serving Christ, even in the face of extreme suffering. The sermon encourages listeners to reflect on the sacrificial nature of Christian service and to be willing to endure hardships for the sake of the Gospel.

Transcript

Will you please turn with me for a little while to the words of Saint Paul as they are found in the epistle that is written to the Galatians in chapter 6 and in verse 17. I would like to base the message that I think the Lord has committed to me tonight on the words of that verse as found in the New English Bible. There we read, I bear the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

I bear the marks of Jesus branded on my body. Now this autobiographical statement in the first place calls attention to the evidences of Paul's apostleship. But at the back of that there is something else.

Paul is unquestionably pointing here to what he considered to be the price of discipleship. Not to something which an apostle only was asked to give or to do, but to a price that all God's children in one way or another are asked to pay. What is the test of discipleship and the price of discipleship? You cannot judge a man's profession by the manner in which he attends the means of grace, nor even such a convention as this.

There are those who come to the house of God and there are those who come even to a convention such as Keswick, who may not be really the Lord. Neither can you judge a man's profession by the manner in which he may speak of various experiences in his life. The one infallible indicator of an authentic Christian

experience is this, whether or not we are obedient to the word and the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.

If he loves me, says the Lord Jesus Christ, he will obey my commandment. And it is to the price of discipleship, necessitating obedience, that I want to turn tonight as it is illustrated in this remarkable word that comes from the pen and from the heart of the apostle Paul. My dear friends, I need not remind you tonight that we are living in an easygoing, undisciplined age.

The cult of softness rules the life of the nation, and the vast majority of professing Christians are at ease in Zion, as the prophet Amos would tell us. Indeed, that is not all. There are some who are genuinely troubled and sometimes painfully hurt when told that though in one sense they are free from the law, in no sense are they free from the duty of obedience to the lawgiver.

The Christian is essentially a bond slave of Jesus Christ, the purchased possession of his one and only Lord. If the word of God has savingly wrought upon us, and we have thus, in the words of James, received with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save our souls, then the very fact that that law is inscribed upon the fleshly tablets of our hearts will mean that we shall desire to do our master's will. Truth that is not being endured to the point of being obeyed has scarcely been endeared to the point of being redemptive.

Now we turn then to Paul's revealing words in order to see how he conceded to Jesus Christ a place of unchallenged lordship, counting it his life's greatest honor to be a bond slave of Jesus Christ. Now this we shall see looking at the text, and seeing two main things here, the mark and their message. First of all let us look at the marks which Paul bore in his body.

I bear the marks of Jesus branded in my body. Now these marks to which he calls attention could very well have been holes or punctures in the flesh, or the kind of impression sometimes branded upon the body by a hot instrument or by needles. The point is, of course, that these marks are actually embedded in the flesh, causing pleasant disfigurement and pointing to a power-suffering of an acute nature.

Now the word that Paul used is very suggestive. It has rather an illuminating history. It was sometimes used as a mark of ownership.

The stigma was a mark of ownership. It was a branding upon an object, or sometimes upon a slave, a branding that clearly marked an object or a person out as belonging to someone in particular. And I suppose we have something of that still perpetuated among sheep farmers and cattle farmers in different parts today.

That's the way that Paul used, Paul uses here. Then a stigma was also at one time, at any rate, a kind of military declaration. When a soldier had proved his loyalty in battle, he was sometimes permitted to have his commander or his emperor's name or mark stamped upon his body, sometimes upon the arm, sometimes upon the body, sometimes even on the forehead.

Now this, of course, was not permitted to the young recruit, but to the pride soldier who's been in battle and proved himself faithful. It was a mark of distinction and of honor. And then the same word had a religious connotation.

It could be a token of allegiance to a deity or to a god. One historian tells us that at the shrine of Heracles on the Egyptian coast, some years before Paul was writing these words, it was the custom to brand the devotees of the religion that was practiced there with a stigma. And so they were known everywhere, and

if there was anything that went wrong in their lives, they could always claim the asylum of the shrine there.

Now this is the richly flavored term that Paul uses concerning his lacerated body with its common, its military, and its religious usage. And let us make it quite clear, he's not grumbling at the pain, but he's glorying in the privilege. You will read a few verses earlier on in the chapter, he says, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

And if I interpret it rightly, that same note of glorying is carried on into our text. Look, says the apostle, I bear in my body the marks of Jesus branded. There then are the marks, but now what is the message of the marks? If you can but feebly envisage the sight that greeted the onlooker as Paul reticently rolled up his sleeves or bared his back, then you will be face to face with a permanent scar.

And the silent witness of the wounds in Paul's flesh speak unerringly of what he considered to be the demands of discipleship and the deserves of the Savior. Now there are two main messages here that are effectively preached by those gaping wounds in the body of the apostle. Those wounds speak, first of all, of the mastery that he gladly conceded to Jesus Christ.

And they speak, secondly, of the ministry that he gallantly pursued for Jesus Christ. First of all, then, those wounds speak of the mastery that he gladly conceded to the Lord Jesus and to Jesus Christ alone. Let's ask the question, whence came that hideous mass of weals and scars that now disfigure the once pain-free, proud soul of Titus? Where did they come from? Why is it that he is gladly accepting the opprobrium of being called the obscuring of all things, the refuge of the world? Why? Has he been involved in what we sometimes and wrongly think of as an accident? Has he fallen prey to wild beasts or something like that? The answer is no.

These marks branded on the body of the apostle are the telling tokens of his bond slavery to the Lord Jesus. Every solitary mark on that body and every corresponding wound upon his heart is the direct consequence of his obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the folk that inflicted those wounds in the body of the apostle Paul had basically no argument, nothing to quarrel with Saul, the man.

Their argument was not with him, but with his Lord. Their hatred was not against Saul of Tarsus as such, but it was with the Lord Jesus Christ and what he stood for. Paul, the apostle, receives those wounds in his spirit simply because he represents the Lord Jesus Christ among his folk.

The darks are aimed at his master, and the apostle, let us say so quite clearly, the apostle could very well have avoided those darks. He could have abandoned his Lord. He could have turned his back upon him.

He could have said, no, no, not for me. But such was his concept of the Christian discipleship and of the Christian life that he could not do that. He had made himself the bond slave of Jesus Christ.

And therefore, he submits to every humiliation and every pain and anguish of body and of soul that is involved in being loyal to the Lord Jesus. Now, if you carefully look at this passage, you will find that the obedience that is thus rendered by the apostle Paul is both passive and active. And all truly Christian obedience is both passive and active.

By passive obedience we mean this, the sometimes wincing but always willing acceptance, by the apostle or by the Christian, of any insult or injury that is aimed at our Lord. You have only to read the record and see what this meant. Take, for example, just a few verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 11, where Paul

allows us to know something that otherwise we would not have known.

Just let me just, just let me quote a few verses, a few words rather from there. Often he says, I am near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one.

Three times I have been beaten with rods. What's he referring to? The forty lashes less one was the maximum penalty meted out by the Jews under the Deuteronomic law. And though administered within the synagogue in Paul's day, it was a brutally savage operation.

The bear's victim was scarcely alive when it was over. The deeply furrowed body oozed with blood and smarted with pain. And once a man had been thus mutilated and humiliated, he very rarely went that way again.

There were very few that were thus beaten a second time, and few indeed that were thus beaten the third time. And yet, my good friends, listen to me. Up to the time of Paul's writing the second letter to the Corinthians, which corresponds with the nineteenth chapter of Acts probably, he had been beaten five times.

The first thirty-nine strokes were received upon the body. Paul recuperated. What does he do now? Does he leave the country? Does he abandon ship? Does he forsake his Lord? He continues on the pathway of obedience, and it comes again.

And the third time, and the fourth time, until a total of one hundred and ninety-five strikes have left their indelible mark upon his flesh. That was not all. The beating with rods was no less savage.

This was the Roman form of punishment administered by lictors, armed with rods of birchwood. So very humiliating was it that no Roman citizen was allowed to be subjected to such indignity. And yet, interspersed with a Jewish flogging, Paul was three times subjected to this gruesome savagery up to the point of Acts 19.

It is no wonder that he says that he was oftentimes near death. There were many who never recuperated from one of these floggings. Paul says, I've received five of the one and three of the other, and they're the mark.

I've branded indelibly upon my body. They can't be covered. But we would be wrong if we thought of Paul's obedience as being merely passive.

It was active as well. In obeying the known will of God, Paul was actively giving his life away. Now, this to me is something which is terrifyingly challenging.

I blush when I come to this. To him, obedience meant nothing short of actual life-giving, the pouring out of his life of the libation. He was dying daily, daily spending his life at any cost.

As long as there was breath left in his nostrils, there was life to be given away for Jesus Christ. And that was the sole purpose of life. It was to be given.

It was to be sacrificed for his Lord and in his service. And the fear of the last beating or lashing must not be allowed to deter him from such obedience. He must go on.

Brethren, the high watermark of obedience known among us, with some shining exceptions whom we salute from recent days, the high watermark is far, far short of this. We are only prepared to serve and obey insofar as we can keep our life intact and unscarred. Is not that the reason why so many of the more dangerous and difficult stations in the kingdom of God and the church of Jesus Christ are tonight unmanned? Let us not forget that this concept of service, the apostle Paul of God, from his master of whom it is written, even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and remember, to give his life.

There is a kind of service which performs what is asked of one without this giving of one's life, the pouring out of a life in sacrifice for Jesus Christ. Paul is giving his life, the mastery he gladly conceded to the Lord Jesus Christ, his Savior. And lastly, think with me for a moment of the ministry that he gallantly pursued for Jesus Christ.

You remember the story? You remember the Shekinah glory that blazed on that Damascus road and halted this maddening dig up on his career of hate? Almost instinctively the cry comes from his soul, Lord, may we dare translate it Jehovah? I think so. Jehovah, what wilt thou have me to do? The reply was not given immediately nor directly, but in his own good time the Lord gave the word to Ananias, and Ananias brought to Saul, now converted, the commission that was from above. You have a record of that in Acts chapter 9 verses 15 and 16, and there we read these words.

Tell him, says the Lord to Ananias, he is a chosen instrument unto me to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for my name's sake. Now will you notice the ministry that is committed to the apostle Paul? It's put in the delightful words, to be a bearer of the name. Time is going and I can't say anything about that.

Paul's ministry was one of exploring and expounding the wonders of the name of Jesus. What I want you to notice is this, the method whereby he was to perform his ministry. The Lord told him, I'm going to tell him, says the Lord Jesus, not yet but in due course, what great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

If he is to be a bearer of the name, he must suffer. Now will you please notice this, when Paul says in my text tonight in Galatians 6 17, I bear in my body the mark, he uses precisely the same words as Jesus did in his commission. He shall bear my name.

Jesus said, he shall bear my name. Paul said, I bear in my body the mark. Now that's not an ordinary word for bearing.

Alexander McLaren writes in these words, he says, it is a somewhat remarkable word, which does not express mere bearing in the sense of toleration and patient endurance, although that is not, nor mere bearing in the sense of caring, but it implies a bearing with a certain triumph, as men would do who coming back victorious from conflict and being received into the city, were proud to show their scars, the honorable signs of their courage and their constancy. Listen again, Jesus said, I've appointed him to bear and carry my name, so that everyone can see and understand, to bear it a lot. Paul says, look at my wound, look at my body.

I bear in my body the mark. By that he is indicating this. Not only has he been true to the task that was commissioned him in a general way, and been an expounder and a preacher of the name, he has submitted to every lash, every ignominy and pain, because he has sought to do it in his master's way.

Oh, my good friend, how far are you prepared to obey the Lord Jesus Christ? How absolute is his lordship over you? My dear unscarred friend in this tent tonight, or listening to my feeble voice elsewhere, you who have managed to avoid the cross and evade the clear pathway of obedience, you who are tucked away somewhere in a cushy job, where the will of God is that you should be spending and being spent elsewhere, I want to tell you tonight that there is a day coming when beneath the luster of the eternal throne of God, and the glare of his all-seeing eye, you will give anything for a scar. Now is your time. A scar that proves to whom you belong.

A scar that shows that you have stood the test and obeyed, and proved that you've worshipped the Lamb's claim. Let me close with these words. Hath thou no scar, no hidden scar on foot or hand or side? I hear thee sung as mighty in the land.

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star. Hath thou no scar? Hath thou no wound? Yet I was wounded by the archers. Fence leaned me against a tree to die, and rent by ravaging beasts that compassed me, I swooned.

Hath thou no wound? No wound? No scar? Yet as a master shall the servant be, and pierced are the feet that follow me, but thine are whole. Can he have followed par, who has nor wound, nor scar? I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, wholly acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, and be the wounds in body or in spirit at last. They will earn for you his well-done, good, and faithful service.

May it be so. God is the answer.

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