

Communism, Islam, Sept 11, Sovereignty of God - Part3

by Josef Tson

Josef Tson explores the theology of martyrdom, emphasizing its significance in the spread of the Gospel and the believer's call to embrace suffering for Christ's sake.

Duration: 17:28

Scripture: Revelation 11:9

Topics: "Suffering And Martyrdom", "Spreading The Gospel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares their personal journey of studying linguistics and literature before being called to study theology in Oxford University. They express their realization that preaching the gospel in Romania could result in martyrdom, and they explore the purpose and significance of martyrdom in spreading the message of Jesus Christ. The speaker refers to 2 Timothy chapter 2, where they explain that suffering and martyrdom are invitations to partner with Jesus in spreading the gospel. They emphasize that suffering for the elect is a means to obtain salvation through the cross of Christ.

Transcript

I was asked to give a 20-minute meditation, but with a specific command to finish exactly at 10.30. So my 20-minute thing will be actually 16 minutes, or 17 minutes. I started in life by studying linguistics and literature. I have a first degree in that.

And then the Lord worked a great miracle in my life. I was able to go to England and study theology in Oxford University. And so I developed my theological mind there.

When I went back to Romania, I realized that they may kill me for my preaching. And for many, many years, dying was an imminent thing. I'm a thinker and a theologian, and I immediately said, well, why does God choose some of his people to be martyrs? What does he accomplish through that? What are his purposes in us dying? In a nutshell, I asked the question, what's the theology of martyrdom? Now, you have stories of martyrdom.

Lots of stories of great martyrs. But I discovered that there was no book to explain what martyrdom was and what it works. So I plunged into that field.

I did a 20-year study. When I was exiled from Romania in 1981, we were asked to leave the country. We settled in Wheaton, Illinois, and I was asked to teach a course at Wheaton College.

And part of that course was what I started to see as the theology of martyrdom. Eventually, I put it in a Ph.D. dissertation. I only found one professor in the world who knew something about martyrdom and who could lead my dissertation.

And that was a professor in Tübingen, Germany, Dr. Peter Bayerhaus. And I did this dissertation entitled Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven. It's still the only book that has ever attempted to put together what is the theology of martyrdom.

What I do is I start from Job, Isaiah, Daniel in the Old Testament, and then all through the New Testament what it speaks about. Suffering, martyrdom, and rewards in heaven. These three go together.

Then I start from 100 A.D. to 1700 A.D. scanning all the stories of martyrdom for little explanations of how they understood their martyrdom. And I put them all in this book, and at the end, on 14 pages, I summarize and say here is what I think is my theology of martyrdom. So here is the only book on that thing.

If you are interested in becoming a martyr, this is the only textbook. The book doesn't sell great. But you can find copies there on the table.

There is no big market in America for it. That's what I wanted to say. Let me give you that theology in a nutshell.

It starts with the teaching of Jesus, of course. In Matthew 16, he really stunned the disciples who were believing that he was going to be king in Jerusalem, and they were going to be ministers in his majesty's government. And then he brings the news to them.

We go to Jerusalem. I'll be arrested, tortured, and crucified. What? God forbid.

That's absurd. That's impossible. And Jesus nicely quiets down the man and says, just behind me, Satan.

You don't think as God thinks. Well, Peter, you were shocked that I spoke about my crucifixion. Let me give you the other part of the news.

Not only me. You too. You have to pick up your cross and do what I do.

You will be crucified in Rome. Andrew, you will be crucified in Greece. Matthew, you will be martyred, I think, in Ethiopia.

Thomas, you will be martyred in India. And just like that, every one of them was going to be a martyr. Picking up your cross for them meant being martyred.

I'll die on my cross. You have to pick up your cross and die. So picking up your cross is part of the business and it's accepting to die as a martyr.

Then I ask the question, the cross of Christ has the function to reconcile us with God. What is the function of my cross if I die for the Lord, for the gospel? What is the function of my cross? And here I had the biggest problem. That was where I realized was the clue to the theology of martyrdom.

I came to see in 2 Corinthians 1-3 a shocking statement of Paul. All my afflictions are for your comfort and salvation. From 3-6 there, he elaborates that.

What? I suffer for your salvation? Didn't Christ suffer for salvation? He explains it in full in 2 Timothy 2. He first tells Timothy in chapter 1, come and be a partner with me in suffering for the gospel. This is the invitation to suffering and martyrdom. And you will hear more about this invitation in my sermon.

But it's strange, isn't it? You never saw it there, that there is an invitation for suffering and for martyrdom, for the gospel. Then in chapter 2, he says you have to suffer as a soldier, as a farmer, and as an athlete. All these three, in order to obtain what they want to obtain, have to suffer.

So am I. It is for this reason that I suffer for the elect. 2 Timothy 2.10 I suffer for the elect. Wait a minute.

What's the business for you to suffer for the elect? So that they may obtain the salvation that is in Jesus Christ. Now here is the picture. Salvation is in the cross of Christ.

But the issue is how do people in the world obtain it? For them to obtain what Christ procured for them, I have to accept to go there where they will crucify me. And when they crucify me, through that very event, they will see the light. And very, very many times it is the death of the preacher that opens the minds of the unbelievers.

I will be crucified for the salvation of the elect. Because that's the only way they may obtain that salvation. So I put it this way.

I said, the cross of Christ works on the vertical. To reconcile us with God. Our crosses work on the horizontal.

And English is not my mother's tongue. It's a second language. When I understood this concept sometime in late 80s, I was in England and preached in a church, explained it as I did here.

There was an old British theologian in the audience. And at the end he came to me and he said, Joseph, I saw how you struggled for words. And I said, let me help this young man with better words.

And he said, Joseph, here is what I came with. Put it this way. The cross of Christ is for propitiation.

Our crosses are for propagation. And I almost shouted hallelujah. The cross of Christ is for propitiation.

That's reconciliation with God. Our crosses are for propagation. The issue is, how does salvation procured by Christ reach people in the Muslim world? Closed.

Hating us. There is just one way. If we travel there and we give it to them, and when they find out what we are up to there, they kill us.

And if we are an army, they just cannot go on killing, just like in the Roman Empire. They killed and killed and killed until that lawyer, Tertullian, wrote to the king, to the emperor, and said, don't you see, the more you kill, the more they multiply? Because every drop of blood of a martyr becomes seed for a new Christian. And he launched that slogan of the martyrs.

The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, the seed of new believers. That is how it works. And it worked like that until they suffocated the Roman Empire.

And they conquered it. It took 400 years only. How long it will take for us to suffocate the Muslim world with our martyrs? Until they accept the gospel.

That's God's strategy. God's strategy has never changed. And so, in a nutshell, what is the theology of martyrdom? The theology of martyrdom has two aspects.

One of them is what it achieves out there in the world. And I put it at the end of my book here. First of all, it makes the truth triumph.

The truth has no other weapons but itself. And the truth conquers by dying. Very strange.

The truth conquers by dying. And another thing is that as a martyr dies, Satan is defeated. That's one of the strangest things you have to understand.

It's in Revelation 11, verse 9 to 11. I saw Satan falling down from heaven. They, the martyrs, conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony because they didn't love their lives even unto death.

You know, Satan has two weapons with which they enslave you. First weapon is your sins. They are his title deeds on you.

But when you know the value of the blood of Christ, apply it on yourself, that first weapon of Satan is gone. That's why we defeat him by the blood of the Lamb first. Second, Hebrews 2, 14 and 15.

By fear of dying, Satan kept them in slavery all their lives. Fear of dying. I kill you if you move.

And we froze in inactivity. But when I understand that dying is a privilege and a glory, I go there and I tell them kill me. I preach till I die.

Kill me. Because I am no more afraid of dying. That Satan's second weapon, my fear of dying, is broken.

He falls down. I defeat Satan by understanding that dying is not in his favor. Dying is a privilege that my Lord gives me and it is my very instrument of destroying the power of Satan.

Of course, this is what martyrdom does out in the world. Then there is another thing. What that martyrdom does for the very person that accepts martyrdom.

And I will not tell you that because I explained that in the sermon. The ones who were there, they heard the explanation and the others will come and hear what I have to say. So exactly 10.30. Let's bow our heads for just a short word of prayer.

We thank you Lord for accepting to come into this world and die to procure our salvation. And thank you for calling us to be your instruments to distribute it. To propagate it.

Thank you for our crosses that have a great function in spreading the gospel in those dark places where they will kill us if we go there. Thank you for the glory that is ours if we accept to be like Jesus Christ. Partners with him.

And we'll always give you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit all the praise and all the glory. Amen.

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