

Vii. the Confession of Faith

by Martyrs of the Catacombs

The sermon recounts the story of Marcellus, a soldier who chooses to embrace Christianity and face persecution rather than uphold his military duties.

Scripture: Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:23, Acts 5:29, Romans 8:18, Philippians 1:29, 2 Timothy 3:12, Hebrews 11:25, 1 Peter 4:16, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "Persecution", "Faithfulness"

Description

In the sermon 'Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution,' the preacher recounts the story of Marcellus, a young soldier who chooses to become a Christian despite facing persecution and consequences. Marcellus's unwavering faith in God leads him to make a bold decision to stand with the Christians, even at the cost of his own life and worldly honor. Despite the warnings and pleas of his friend Lucullus, Marcellus remains steadfast in his faith, ultimately choosing to follow Christ over the expectations of society and the Roman government.

Transcript

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."

Four days had elapsed since the young soldier had left his chamber. Eventful days they had been to him; days full of infinite importance. Endless weal or woe had hung upon their issue. But the search of this earnest soul after the truth had not been in vain.

His resolution had been taken. On the one side lay fame, honor, and wealth; on the other, poverty, want, and woe; yet he had made his choice, and turned to the latter without a moment's hesitation. He chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Upon his return he visited the general and reported himself. He informed him that he had been among the Christians, that he could not execute his commission, and was willing to take the consequences. The general sternly ordered him to his quarters.

Here in the midst of deep meditation, while, conjecturing what might be the issue of all this, he was interrupted by the entrance of Lucullus. His friend greeted him most affectionately, but was evidently full of anxiety.

"I have just seen the general," said he, "who sent for me to give me a message for you. But first tell me what is this that you have done?"

Marcellus then related everything from the time he had left until his return, concealing nothing whatever. His deep earnestness showed how strong and true the impression was that had been made upon him. He then related his interview with his general.

"I entered the room feeling the importance of the step I was taking. I was about to commit an act of virtual treason, a crime which can only be punished with death. Yet I could do nothing else.

"He received me graciously, for he thought that I had met with some important success in my search. I told him that since I left I had been among the Christians, and from what I had seen of them I had been forced to change my feelings toward them. I had thought that they were enemies of the state and worthy of death, but I found that they were loyal subjects of the emperor and virtuous men. I could never use my sword against such as these, and rather than do so I would give it up.

"A soldier's feelings,' said he, 'have no right to interfere with his duties.'

"But my duties to the God who made me are stronger than any which I owe to man.'

"Has your sympathy with the Christians made you mad?' said he. 'Do you not know that this is treason?'

"I bowed, and said that I would take the consequences.

"Rash youth,' he cried sternly, 'go to your quarters, and I will communicate to you my decision.'

"And so I came here at once, and have been here ever since then, anxiously awaiting my sentence."

Lucullus had listened to the whole of Marcellus's recital without a word or even a gesture. An expression of sad surprise upon his face told what his feelings were. He spoke in a mournful tone as Marcellus ended.

"And what that sentence must be you certainly know as well as I. Roman discipline, even in ordinary times, can never be trifled with, but now the feelings of the government are excited to an unusual degree against these Christians. If you persist in your present course you must fall."

"I have told you all my reasons."

"I know, Marcellus, your pure and sincere nature. You have always been of a devout mind. You have loved the noble teachings of philosophy. Can you not satisfy yourself with these as before? Why should you be attracted by the wretched doctrine of a crucified Jew?"

"I have never been satisfied with the philosophy of which you speak. You yourself know that there is nothing certain in it on which the soul may trust. But the Christian religion is the truth of God, brought down by himself, and sanctified by his own death."

"You have thoroughly explained the whole Christian creed to me. Your own enthusiasm has made it appear attractive, I will confess; and if all its followers were really like yourself my dear Marcellus, it might be adapted to bless the world. But I come not here to argue upon religion. I come to speak about yourself. You are in danger, my dear friend; your station, your honor, your office, your very life is at stake. Consider what you have done. An important commission was intrusted to you, upon the execution of which you set

out. It was expected that you would return bringing important information. But instead of this you come back and inform the general that you have gone over to the enemy, that you are one of them in heart, and that you refuse to bear arms against them. If the soldier is free to choose whom he will fight what becomes of discipline? He must obey orders. Am I right?"

"You are, Lucullus."

"The question for you to decide is not whether you will choose philosophy or Christianity, but whether you will be a Christian or a soldier. For as the times are now you see that it is impossible for you to be a soldier and a Christian at the same time. One of the two must be given up. And not only so, but if you decide upon being a Christian you must at once share their fate, for no distinction can be made in favor of you. On the other hand, if you continue a soldier you must fight against the Christians."

"That is no doubt the question."

"You have warm friends who are willing to forget your great offense, Marcellus. I know your enthusiastic nature, and I have pleaded with the general for you. He too respects you for your soldierly qualities. He is willing to forgive you under certain circumstances."

"What are they?"

"The most merciful of all conditions. Let the past four days be forgotten. Banish them from your memory. Resume your commission. Take your soldiers and go at once about your duty in arresting these Christians."

"Lucullus," said Marcellus, rising from his seat with folded arms, "I love you as a friend, I am grateful for your faithful affection. Never can I forget it. But I have that within me to which you are a stranger, which is stronger than all honors of state. It is the love of God. For this I am ready, to give up all, honor, rank, and life itself. My decision is irrevocable. I am a Christian."

For a moment Lucullus sat in astonishment and grief looking at his friend. He was well acquainted with his resolute soul, and saw with pain how completely his persuasions had failed. At length he spoke again. He used every argument that he could think of. He brought forward every motive that might influence him. He told him of the terrible fate that awaited him, and the peculiar vengeance that would be directed against him. But all his words were completely useless. At length he rose in deep sadness.

"Marcellus," he said, "you tempt fate. You are rushing madly upon a terrible destiny. Everything that fortune can bestow is before you, but you turn away from all to cast your lot among wretched outcasts. I have done the duty of a friend in trying to turn you from your folly, but all that I can do is of no avail.

"I have brought you the sentence of the general. You are degraded from office. You are put under arrest as a Christian. To-morrow you will be seized and handed over to punishment. But many hours are yet before you, and I may still have the mournful satisfaction of assisting you to escape. Fly then at once. Hasten, for there is no time to lose. There is only one place in the world where you can be secure from the vengeance of Caesar."

The Arch of Titus

Marcellus heard in silence. Slowly he took off his splendid arms and laid them down, sadly he unfastened his gorgeous armor which he had worn so proudly. He stood in his simple tunic before his friend.

"Lucullus, again I say that I can never forget your faithful friendship. Would we were flying together, that your prayers might ascend with mine to Him whom I serve. But enough, I will go. Farewell."

"Farewell, Marcellus. We may never meet in life again. If you are ever in want or peril you know on whom you can rely."

The two young men embraced, and Marcellus hastily took his departure.

He walked out of the camp and onward until he reached the Forum. All around him were stately marble temples and columns and monuments. There the arch of Titus spanned the Via Sacra; there the imperial palace reared its gigantic form on high, rich in stately architecture, in glorious adornments of precious marbles, and glowing in golden decorations. On one side the lofty walls of the Coliseum arose; beyond, the stupendous dome of the Temple of Peace; and on the other the Capitoline Hill upraised its historic summit, crowned with a cluster of stately temples that stood out in sharp relief against the sky.

Roman Temples

To this he directed his steps, and ascended the steep declivity up to the top of the hill. From the summit he looked around upon the scene. The place itself was a spacious square paved with marble, and surrounded with lordly temples. On one side was the Campus Martius bounded afar onward to the Mediterranean. On every other side the city spread its unequalled extent, crowding to the narrow walls, and over-leaping them to throw out its radiating streets far away on every side into the country. Temples and columns and monuments reared their lofty heads. Innumerable statues filled the streets with a population of sculptured forms, fountains dashed into the air, chariots rolled through the streets, the legions of Rome marched to and fro in military array, and on every side surged the restless tide of life in the Imperial city.

Far away the plain extended, dotted with countless villages and houses and palaces, rich in luxuriant verdure, the dwelling-place of peace and plenty. On one side arose the blue outline of the Apennines, crowned with snow; on the other the dark waves of the Mediterranean washed the far distant shore.

Suddenly Marcellus was startled by a shout. He turned. An old man in scant clothing, with emaciated face and frenzied gesticulation, was shouting out a strain of fearful denunciation. His wild glance and fierce manner showed that he was partly insane.

"Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen,

And is become the habitation of devils,

And the hold of every foul spirit,

And a cage of every unclean and hateful bird;

For God hath remembered her iniquities.

Reward her even as she rewarded you,

And double unto her double according to her works.
How much hath she glorified herself and lived deliciously,
Therefore shall her plagues come in one day,
Death, and mourning, and famine;
And she shall be utterly burned with fire;
For strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.
The kings of the earth
Shall bewail and lament,
Seeing the smoke of her burning,
Standing afar off for fear of her torment,
Crying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon,
That mighty city Babylon,
For in one hour is thy judgment come.
The merchants of the earth,
Standing afar off for fear of her torment,
Shall weep and wail.
Crying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon,
That was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet.
And decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls.
For in one hour so great riches is come to naught!
And every shipmaster, and the company in ships,
And sailors and traders by sea,
Shall cry when they see the smoke of her burning,
Standing afar off for fear of her torment.
'What city is like unto that great city!'
And casting dust on their head they shall cry,
Weeping and wailing,

Alas, alas, that great city,
Wherein were made rich all that had ships at sea,
For in one hour is she brought to naught.
Rejoice over her thou heaven!
And ye holy apostles and prophets,
For God hath avenged you on her!"

A vast crowd collected around him in amazement, but scarcely had he ceased when some soldiers appeared and led him away.

"Doubtless it is some poor Christian whose brain has been turned by suffering," thought Marcellus. As the man was led away he still shouted out his terrific denunciations, and a great crowd followed, yelling and deriding. Soon the noise died away in the distance.

"There is no time to lose. I must go," said Marcellus; and he turned away.

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