

Theology of the Cross and Martyrdom

by Dean Taylor

This sermon delves into the theology of martyrdom, emphasizing the endurance and faith required to face hardships and challenges. It highlights the power of the cross, the need to lay aside burdens and sins, and the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of God. The message encourages perseverance in the face of trials and the importance of keeping faith in Christ despite difficulties.

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Scripture: Revelation 5:5, Romans 8:35, Hebrews 12:1, Romans 8:37

Topics: "Martyrdom", "Perseverance in Faith"

Description

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Transcript

Let us meditate on hardship, and we shall not feel them. Let us abandon luxuries, and we shall not regret them. Let us stand ready to endure any violence, having nothing which we may fear to leave behind.

That's the drive of what the cross is doing to us. So today I'm going to continue on to this series in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and I was going to go all the way to 31. I'm not going to 31.

It just got too big, and the themes were too different. This one today I'm going to focus in on right to verse 25, and I'll read it to you, and then we'll maybe have a prayer that asks the Lord to illuminate His word. And so I'm going to focus on this theology of the cross and the theology of martyrdom that comes with that.

It's a theme I preach on frequently, and during this message, I really just tried to study some of the nuances of how this theology drives us and how it directs us. And so I wanted to look at how I'm going to have some quotes from early Christians and things like that of people who speak of the concept of martyrdom and the cross and how that motivates our behavior for life. And so let's read the scripture, and then we'll pray.

So I'm going to take it from verse 18 to 25. 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 18 through 25. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of

God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring it to nothing, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. Jews request a sign and Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified.

To the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greek, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God, wow, the weakness of God is stronger than men. Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, this is a sobering topic in many ways that you've given us here, but you've given it to us as an encouragement, as a power, as a something to look forward to. Well God, please let us be one of those that are being saved, that we will understand the message of the cross and the power and the joy that comes with that. I pray that you would be with this message today, that you would let your word and these testimonies of people that have gone before us encourage us to run this race, oh God, with endurance.

For God, I pray you'd be with us now in Jesus name, amen. So the passage that strikes me a lot, and I do ponder it a lot, and the theology of martyrdom here is found in this passage, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing. So this idea of the message of the cross and everything that the cross represents, it's sacrifice, it's suffering, it's resurrection, it's power, it's saving grace, there's so much to it.

And that message of the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, that are dying, that you're going to die and just die. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And so what I'm trying to bring out of this message is particularly how some of these ideas of the spirit of martyrdom and the theology of martyrdom actually can be a life-giving, a power-giving spirit in us that can just bless our life and encourage us.

And it says, for it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. You know, I remember the first time I was challenged with this topic. It was actually this day.

I was in the court hearing, and this is when Tonya and I were in the court hearing for our conscious objector trial in Germany. And I remember during that court trial, the officer who was challenging us, he said, and I was beginning to talk to him about how Christians can have an alternative to war, and that that alternative is the cross many times. It means dying.

It means suffering. And I was telling him of some of the sacrifice and things that were before that Christians have endured, and he hit me with, he said, well, isn't that just a martyrdom complex? Isn't that just a martyrdom complex? And that's what he asked me. I remember, I don't know if it was the first time I ever heard it, but it was something kind of new to me, and I just thought, well, it's not, I don't know if it's a martyrdom complex, but it is a theology of martyrdom.

And the idea that in the cross, and when we consider that our life is dead in and of ourselves, but alive to Christ Jesus, and that they can't kill you, that is so life-giving. I mean, I want you to imagine from a military standpoint. Let's say we had a military secret, and we had a bunch of soldiers, and we said, okay, here's

the way we're going to do it.

We're going to run out in this field, and we're going to try to do this battle, but here's the great part. They can shoot you, and it's going to look like you're going to die, but you're not going to die. You're going to live.

Imagine if the soldiers really believed it, and it was true, how empowering that would be. You would just run, and fight, and say, oh, I know it's going to hurt a little bit, but I'm going to wake right up, and we're going to keep going. That would be so life-giving to a soldier.

And I think that that's part of what's being said here in 1 Corinthians 1 is that there's power for us that we know that we will live forever. Jesus told us those who are in him never die, but those that are perishing, what a vain thing the cross is. What a worthless thing.

And so as I went from that and went further into studying the early church, I saw that they looked at it in such a, I don't know, a really rich and deep way that was just totally, totally blew my mind, and that they would look into this as with joy. And you know, and as I remember, I can remember, it's funny looking back on it, and I don't know, I was reading, I was just starting to read some martyr stories in some of the early church at the time, and getting out of the army, I remember that they take your blood to see if you have HIV or these are different things when you leave the army, and I'll never forget, I was just filling my head with a lot of these martyr stories, and they came and took my blood and showed you how much of a wimp I am, and I completely passed out. I remember, and I remember just thinking, man, I am such an unbelievable wimp.

If I can't get my blood checked without, I mean, literally, I was passed out. Tonya said I was like shaking, and they were putting smelling salt on my nose. I was out cold, and it was because they were just, and what had happened, he had messed up, and the thing sort of, you know, had a, yeah, terrible scene.

But, and I just pondered the strength and the readiness to suffer persecution that I was reading in the early church, and what a wimp, a total wimp I still am, in comparison to this, and it's like a mindset, and that's one of the nuances that I really want to get, and it's a mindset in two different ways. It's a mindset of being able to suffer, and because of that, we prepare our life in that way. I'm going to show you some really cool quotes on how the early church would speak of our lives as a life of the cross in this preparation for a day, like the picture you see there, but then also there's something powerful about it.

I'm going to try to show some little thoughts on that, on how it's forward acting, like the scene of the battle of soldiers, but you don't die. It's like this top secret, this top military secret that we can run forward into the most, the terrible places of earth that has persecution, and we can take the gospel of Jesus Christ, and martyrdom is not just, it is half, but it's not just dying bravely. Praise God that it is, and it's big to the early church.

It's not just that though. It's forward bravery to take the gospel forward, and that's just the amazing thing that I've seen on it. One of the early things you get when you start reading into the early church is these letters from Ignatius, and Ignatius was an early bishop of Antioch, and he was on his way to persecution, and he was writing several letters to all the churches because of Gnosticism and all this kind of thing that he was fighting, but the one thing that really made him nervous is that he was nervous that people were going to like stop him from getting martyred, and I don't know.

It seems like a little over the top, but I think it's because we have no idea of what a precious thing this is in their mindset, and we're so weak because I like pass out when I get my blood taken, and here's just one of the letters that he wrote. He wrote several of these with the same kind of spirit. I'm going for my reward and this joy of the persecution.

He said this. He was writing to all the churches, and I bid all men know that of my own free will, I die for God. Unless you should hinder me, I exhort you.

Be ye not an unreasonable kindness to me. Let me be given to the wild beasts. For through them, I can attain unto God.

I am God's wheat. I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the wild beasts that they may become my sepulcher and may leave no part of my body behind so that I may not, when I am fallen asleep, be burdensome to anyone.

And this kind of spirit, you see the same thing with polycarp was another one around the same time period, and many of these early martyrs of this day would just, you see them just caught up in a rapture of joy, of the idea of the joy of being able to suffer for Christ. And there's something to this that's, that I just feel so soft, so weak, so easily to feed my own comforts. There's an interesting one I like to check because it's one of the earlier commentaries we have from Chrysostom who wrote in the ancient Greek.

And he's taking that passage and he's challenging, I skipped it for time's sake, but he's challenging Plato and the different philosophers. He said, you produced nothing. What you died of hemlock and you killed yourself with a hemlock, you philosophers.

And he goes on, he said, and then he says, but I can produce for you these armies of martyrs that are representing the early church. And I got these quotes from him and this is from the line, from his sermon on this very passage that I'm preaching today. And this is what his take on that was.

So remember the foolishness of the world, God made nothing compared to the cross. So that's the comparison and Chrysostom is preaching on that. He says, but the cross, you platonist philosophers did nothing, but the cross wrought persuasion by means of unlearned men.

Yet it persuade even the whole world and not only about common things, but in discourse of God and the godliness, which is according to truth and the evangelical way of life and the judgment of things to come. And of all men, it made philosophers, the very rustics, the utterly unlearned behold how the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness stronger. How stronger? Because it overran the whole world.

This is 350 or so. It overran the whole world and took by main force. And while men were endeavoring by ten thousands to extinguish the name of the crucified, the contrary came to pass.

You tried everything to kill us, everything. The contrary came to pass that flourished and increased more and more, but they perish and wasted away. The philosophers, they perish and wasted away.

And the living at war with the dead had no power. So that when the Greeks call me foolish, he shows himself above measure foolish, since I am esteemed by him a fool, evidently appear wiser than the wise. When he calls me weak, then he shows himself to be weaker for the noble things, which publicans and fishermen were able to affect by the grace of God.

These philosophers and rhetoricians and tyrants and the sorts of the whole world running 10,000 ways here and there could not even form a notion of it. It goes on. For what did the cross introduce? Ponder this.

So all those philosophies, all those things, what did the cross, the whole concept of the cross, the philosophy of the cross introduce? The doctrine concerning the immortality of the soul, that concerning the resurrection of the body, that concerning the contempt of things present, that concerning the desire of things future, yea, angels it has made of men. And all everywhere practice self-denial and show forth all kinds of fortitude. You see how this is interesting with Chrysostom? He's mentioning that the cross, it's not just a philosophical thing, that it creates a character, a character in people.

And here's the way that they spun this concept of the difference between Christianity and philosophy and why the foolish things of this world, and my message next time will be getting more on this. With a philosopher, you kind of climbed your way up the ladder and more and more brilliance. You did, you figured this out and that out and that out and that out and finally you get to the final spot and you're getting to the point where you're trying to perceive God.

And what Chrysostom in the early church would say, but the difference in Christianity is handed to you. Here it is, the truth in Jesus Christ, the incarnation, it looks like Christ. And so the most simple can take this as a treasure and as an inheritance and then we can take all lives and all kinds of things to try to explain it, but we start from receiving instead of just trying to philosophize.

And that's how we interpret that concept that Paul was speaking of in first Corinthians. Where's the wisdom of the wise? Where's the great debaters? It's come to not over just a simple receiving of the word of God in Jesus Christ. And I love this and he gets challenging with them.

He says, okay, so who did you convert? You died on your own. How did it work for you? What did you even die for it? And he makes this challenge. This is his explanation of Christianity in his day.

Challenging the philosophers and there were still a lot of philosophers. It's interesting, I've interviewed, read Chrysostom's confessions. One of the things that got me in that, and this is about 400, 420 or so.

And how many philosophers, there still were schools of philosophy. There were still things that Augustine was still trying to find his way through all that stuff. And here he's challenging the philosophers of his day in the middle 300s with this.

And he says, but show me someone enduring firm and torments for godliness sake. And I want you to pay attention to the way Chrysostom talks about the character building qualities of the cross. But show me someone enduring firm and torments for godliness sake.

And I'll show you 10,000 everywhere in the world who, while his nails were tearing out, notably endured. Who of the philosophers, while his body joints were wrenching asunder. Who, while his body was cut in pieces, member by member.

Or his head. Who, while his bones were forced out by levers. Who, while placed without intermission upon frying pans.

Who, when thrown to the cauldron. Show me these instances. For to die by hemlock is always one with a man's continuing in a state of sleep.

Nay, even sweeter than sleep is this sort of sleep, if the report is true. But if certain of them did endure torment, yea of these too, the praise is gone to nothing. For on some disgraceful occasion they perish.

Some for reviling mysteries. Some for aspiring to dominion. Others detecting in the foulest crimes.

Others again rashly and falsely and foolishly, there being no reason for it, made away with themselves. But not so with us. Listen to the confidence he says about Christianity.

But not so with us. Wherefore of the deeds of those nothing is said. But these flourish and daily increase.

Which Paul having in mind said the weakness of God is stronger than men. The weakness of God is stronger than men. This idea of coming to, oops I lost my notes, of seeing Christ and walking in his ways.

It's not just the early church. You look through history and it's a common thread. The Waldensians and the different groups that were persecuted, certainly the Anabaptists, the different persecuted group in China today.

It's like, it's kind of like the way there was a theology in the 70s or the 60s, maybe a little earlier, the 50s and 60s called liberation theology. And it was claiming that you can't read the Bible unless you're an oppressed poor person. The Bible was written for these, you know, that kind of a thing.

And it got big for a while and then it ended up with some revolutions and things like that. But the early church felt, and maybe in a more way than just being oppressed, being martyred. And that there's something living in your life, there's something should be living in your life that looks like this suffering Christ, something.

In other words, it's not about your life isn't just about trying to live your best life now or to how to have all the comforts in the world. But Jesus Christ has a purpose. He has a drive that he wants to accomplish in the church.

And he's given us a way to do that. And I don't know why, but he's chosen suffering and he's led the way in that. And he's told us I must be baptized.

Many of the different martyred churches and a Baptist and different martyr churches would speak of the baptism of the blood, the concept that this is a suffering. And if we are the body of Christ and the body of Christ endures, if Christ endures suffering and the message of these people have always been, where is the suffering? What are we doing wrong? It should be making us a little nervous when we're just living our best life. Some of the passages that you frequently see coming out in this genre is like this one in Colossians.

It's very controversial if your theology is messed up. But if you have this theology of martyrdom, it's a beautiful passage. And Paul speaking in and just pondering his suffering and the suffering he's seeing in the church and what he's and his going forth with this passion to fulfill Christ's command on this earth.

He says, I now in Colossians 124, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you. What do you don't just read over that because we've heard it a lot. I rejoice in my suffering.

Do you think it was just poetry? Do you think it was a poetic thought of Paul? I think that there's somehow that there's a theology of martyrdom that we don't get or I don't get that comes out in those passages. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the

sake of his body, which is the church. This idea that Christ is the body of Christ and he's that Christ is given to the body of Christ, the continuing of his body and continuing of his growth, that that's going to continue to require a cross in each of these places.

And Paul is rejoicing. So when he sees this suffering, he knows that it's, he knows that it's prospering and what Christ has wanted to do. I've heard it said, if you ever see growth in the church, one or two things are happening.

It's because you're enduring suffering or someone has suffered for you, but there's built into this. And there's something in this Colossians 1:24 that someone has suffered for the fruit of what you're experiencing. Like what Paul is saying, I'm rejoicing in the suffering that I have and now to see what's happening in Colossians, in the Colossian church.

And this is what was coming out of this. This became so much a phrase, so much part of early Christianity, that the word for witness, this word martyr, it became the word for martyr, that this is how we witness, this is how we tell people who we are, is that we die for our faith. In the second century, that word martyr became a technical term for a person who died for Christ.

And they had a different category. It's interesting. And I'm going to show you some fascinating quotes about how they made some distinctions with this.

They had, that a confessor was someone who got close. So let's say, you know, you're in a foreign country and they drag you into prison and things and did all these terrible things to you. And you say, yeah, I'm really suffering persecution, you know.

And many times that would be considered what, you know, someone who's suffered and they become a confessor. And this was very important to the early church. And that at least the early church had this concept of having confessors, if not martyrs themselves.

I was talking with brother Zach and we were talking about, and I have some slides of his No Blood But Our Own coming up here, his concept that I think should just distinguish this forward direction. And he says at Wheaton College, they have a wall there. It's the wall of martyrs.

And have you seen it? I haven't seen it. I have to see it someday. And they have the wall of missionaries, the wall of martyrs.

And I just pray to God, to pray to God that we here at a local church can have that. And we at Sattler can have that. You and your families can have that.

I mean, what a, what a, that's a treasure. And that's somehow this concept of what we're seeing in this. Listen to this quote here I found from Eusebius.

Eusebius was writing around at the end of Persecution, right around the year 325 or so. And he's talking about a persecution that happened in Lyons around Irenaeus' time. And the difference they made between a martyr and a confessor.

And just the language strikes me. I've told you before, I don't know if I've mentioned that here or somewhere else. Sometimes when I read other people's letters, like of really holy people, I don't know, I get convicted by their letters to their moms.

You know what I mean? It's just, I feel my language sometime is so casual, so casual that I read in these kind of attitudes and I realized I'm just, am I even scratching the surface of some of the depth that I see in some of these people's letters. So here's a particular spot where they're making a distinguishing between a martyr and a confessor. And it says, so Eusebius writing about the persecution in 177 during the time of Irenaeus.

Quote, they were also so zealous in their imitation of Christ. Now catch that. They were also so zealous in their imitation of Christ that though they had attained honor and had borne witness, not once or twice, but many times have been brought back to prison from the wild beast covered with burns and scars and wounds.

Yet they did not proclaim themselves martyrs, nor did they suffer us to address them by the name. If any one of us in letter or conversation spoke of them as martyrs, they rebuked us sharply. And they reminded us of the martyrs who had already departed and said, they are already martyrs whom Christ has deemed worthy to be taken up in their confession, having sealed their testimony by their departure.

We are lowly and humble confessors. It's just, it's such a different spirit. Interesting.

There's a document called the Apostolic Traditions of Hippolytus. It's kind of a strange document. And it talks about several different things on the way Hippolytus would want someone to get ordained this way and that way.

But there's a curious thing that even in 250, around the year 250, that he had all this special way that Hippolytus wanted people to be ordained, but when it came, but if you were a confessor, if you've lived this life to Hippolytus, he said this, if a confessor has been placed in chains for the name of the Lord, hands are not to be laid upon him for the office of deacon or elder. He has the honor of the office of an elder through his confession. I just, I just ponder that.

I read something like that and I'm like, I'm just dipping into a different kind of piety, a different kind of Christianity that I feel so foreign to, but I want so much more in my life to understand it. And I see this in like Hebrews 11, you know, the Hebrew 11, the famous passage, there's a, you'll see the, what I've highlighted there at the end, and we don't usually focus on this last passage in Hebrews 11, but don't read it yet. So you read the Hebrews 11, you know, right at the end, it gets really bad.

First, you've got these great stories of Abraham and Noah and, and, you know, all that, but he finally get to this end in verse 25, he says, others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trials of mockings and scourging, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned.

They were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins being destitute, afflicted, and tormented of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth.

That does not sound like the best life now. He goes on, all of these having obtained a good testimony through faith did not receive the promise, the fulfillment in Christ. God having provided something better for us.

Now watch this, that they, all that testimony, all of Hebrews chapter 11, that they should not be complete or made perfect without us. Do you get that? That that whole story is not done unless we are a part of that

story. That's not finished unless it's finished in us.

And that's what he's saying here. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging us to this very thing. So the theology of martyrdom, that kind of a spirit is a power, but it's also a way of life.

And not in a weird, you know, grumpy, you know, cranky kind of a way, but an enlivened way that you don't have to please your flesh. You're free not to please your flesh and to just serve yourself in this world. Some of the passages that strike us with that is in second Timothy, he hits it twice, one chapter right after another.

He says, you therefore must, you therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that he may please who enlisted him as a soldier. And then in the next chapter, chapter three, verse 12, second Timothy, yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.

It's a really challenging sermon. I remember years ago, reading from John Wesley and his coming out of his diary, and he was getting kicked out of one church or another and getting stoned and all the different types of things. And he said that this is, this should follow Christianity.

And when it doesn't, we should question. Now, what does that kind of a thinking do to your lifestyle? And so instead of kind of looking at, oh, modest dress or entertainment issues as something like church standards or something, what you're trying to do is to live a life of the cross and that that's driving you in a positive and forward way. Listen to the way Tertullian addresses the clothes issue and the luxuries issues and living a life of luxury.

He's not trying to make just some weird, you know, guideline or something. He wants to see that we're facing and we're running this race in that way. And he says this, talking about just living a worldly life and fancy and fashion and ease.

And he says, for such delicacies as tend by their softness and effeminacy to unmanned, the manliness of faith are to be discarded. Otherwise, I know not whether the wrist, listen to this. I know not whether the wrist that has been want to be surrounded by a palm leaf like bracelet will endure till it grows into the numb hardness of its own chain.

I know not whether the leg that has rejoiced in the anklet will suffer itself to be squeezed into the shackle. I fear the neck beset with pearls and emerald nooses will give no room to the broad sword. Wherefore, blessed sisters, let us meditate on hardship and we shall not feel them.

Let us abandon luxuries and we shall not regret them. Let us stand ready to endure any violence, having nothing which we may fear to leave behind. That's the drive of what the cross is doing to us.

If we're taking this kind of a concept, this is a really touching story in the martyr's mirror. Written around the year 1539, Anakin of Rotterdam in Holland. She was being taken off, that's an etching of her there, and she wrote a letter to her children.

And it's really touching. And the last line is really challenging. I have it on a different slide.

But so she's being dragged away. I gave her some time to write a letter and she wrote this letter. I've been in Amsterdam and saw this letter in the archives.

Oops. She says this, my son, hear the instruction of your mother. Remember she's being dragged off to be taken to kill.

Open your ears to hear the word of my mouth. Behold, I go today the way of the prophets, apostles, and martyrs. And drink of the cup they all have drunk.

I go, I say, the way which Christ Jesus himself went. And who had to drink the cup ever as he said, I have a cup to drink and a baptism to be baptized with. And how am I straight until it be accomplished? Having passed through, he calls his sheep.

And his sheep hear his voice and follow him, whether so ever he goes. This way was trodden by the dead under the altar. And this way walked all those who were marked by the Lord.

Then she says this, for where you hear of the cross, there is Christ. From there, do not depart. And that's something.

Now that's, the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing. For us who are being saved, it is the power of God. And if you don't hear the cross, run away.

This is the message. You're wondering, will my children stay in the faith? Will my children still be walking with Christ after I'm gone? And she says, let me just put it down into one thing. For where you hear of the cross, people getting persecuted for their faith, there is Christ.

For there, do not depart. Years ago, I had this chance to go to Bonhomme Colony. And the ancient Hutterian chronicles are kept under the bishop's bed there in Bonhomme Colony.

There he is. He pulled it out with that wooden box. You see that picture.

There it is laying on the desk. It was mailed to him in the late 1800s. And it's mildewing and it's getting ruined under his bed, but he's not about to take it out.

And so I had it and I looked over it. And there was one particular scene that I really wanted to see when I was there. And he allowed me to flip through it and take a look at it.

And as I look through it, there's one scene that in the English version of these chronicles, you have these columns that mention all the different martyrs and all the different cities and when they were killed and everything. And I was trying to find that because I was curious what it looked like in the original. And I came to it and here's what I found.

And it's really cool. So in the original, it goes straight to the next section. And there's not this whole extra page here.

And you see how in between this column is verses like I send you out as sheep before the wolves. And I looked at that and I pondered the bishop guy was sitting there and I and I said, why are those gaps in there? I've never noticed. I think it's kind of obvious, don't you? The guys that wrote this thought it wouldn't fit.

They thought that people would be continually being martyred for the faith, but something happened. And the martyrdom stopped. Something happened.

And I said to him, you are supposed to be written in there. What happened? What happened? And that kind of spirit is something that, I don't know, I just feel I can play with, I can encourage my spirit, but I want to understand it in a deeper way. I want to understand it deeper.

There's a quote from Van Brought in The Martyr's Mirror. He said this speaking of just the way they understood Christ. He was born under the cross, brought up under the cross, walked under the cross, and eventually died on the cross.

And the way they would see this is is a concept of suffering, a concept of the life of surrender, a life of giving to God everything you had. But here's the thing. I've mentioned this before, but I was giving a talk once in a colony and a little Hutterite young man said to me when I was mentioning all the missionary exploits that were part of them, he said, I knew that we died good, but I never knew that we ever lived, we never did any of these things that I was telling him about.

Because here's the part, the nuance that I want you to get about the martyrdom, the theology of the cross. Dying well is incredible, but it's dying well in the place of service. In other words, we can have a Marine Corps and we can all be on Parris Island somewhere as training and just die on Parris Island and that's noble, but even more noble is going to Iwo Jima when you're dying in service in a carnal crown.

And we in the cross, in the cross of Christ, Jesus has a purpose that he wants the church to fulfill and this goes forth. And this is what you get. Again, it's impressive.

Soon as you start getting people writing different things that are about this. One of my favorite stories in the 1527 is a martyr's synod and they got together all the guys that were kind of any kind of leaders and they had 60 of them there and they came together and they said, okay, you're going to go this way, you're going to go that way, you're going to go this way. And they were excited and they knew they were all going to die.

And as a matter of fact, you know why they call it the martyr's synod is because in five years of those 60 ministers that were there, only two were still alive. In five years of those, only two were alive. And that's a 95% death rate in their missionary efforts.

I ran across this one castle scene in the martyr's mirror. And this is the Falkenstein Castle. I've had the privilege of being there and pondering this.

And they were killing so many of the Christians there that the persecutor said in despair, wrote, what shall I do? The more I sentence and have executed, the more numerous they become. And this fulfills Tertullian statement that the blood of the martyr is seed. It grows.

And over and over again, this has been the case. Because here's the way Jesus framed the cross like this. And it's not the way you typically would think of a prosperity pep talk or something, self-help.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. I found this picture because it makes you think. It's so kind of poetic to us that we lose the punch, I think.

But if you think about it, it's really quite a very disturbing analogy. You're going to go out there and you know what's going to happen to that poor guy. He's going to get ripped to shreds.

That's what I'm going to send you out to do. I'm with you. Lo, I'll be with you.

Lo, I'll be with you. I appreciate... Oh, this was actually... Brother Zach has just recently done... In the class that he's done there, Zach Johnson has done some. And as we want to go forward and make a change in his life, he came up with these beautiful things.

And I bring it here because I think it applies. I'm trying to really get him to write a book on this. But as most people want to make it, if you want to make a difference in the life, there's different ways you can do this.

If you're a militant person and you want to make a difference in the world, you'll use as much blood as is just. Just war theory. If you're more... Oh, and if you're just a war guy, totally as much blood as necessary.

I don't care what it costs. Atomic bomb, we're going to do whatever it costs to get this justice through. We're going to do whatever we can.

If we're kind of, you know, people who are politically pacifist, but they're trying to be, you know, do some things this way, as little blood as possible, we're still going to shed some blood. Jesus Christ gave us a radical example. He told us, I'm going to send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

He did not tell that we should just stay idle, stay in isolation, stay cloistered out somewhere, but go forth and change this world with no blood, but your own. And this is the mandate of Christianity. I love this.

He came up with this flag. He has a flag in his office. I'm just so blessed with this concept.

No blood, but our own. This theology of martyrdom, this axiom of us to go forth, taking the things of Christ, the commissions of Christ, prospering the kingdom, and we can't die. It's a theology of martyrdom that is so life-changing.

You know, a lot of times people look back on the martyr's mirror and think, oh, those were good times, because imagine being when the martyr's mirror was written. Here's the introduction to the martyr's mirror. He would disagree with you.

Already in 1700, there was so much worldliness of the Mennonites in Holland. They had come out of persecution and burned Switzerland and come there, and now they're just living in want and prospering and just shipbuilding and becoming famous and all that, and he saw that these were much more difficult times than they had the 200 years before them, and he said this, and I want us to hear van Braat saying this in 1699 or 1700 and think about our times today, and then more so, Dean, think of you and how easy it is to forget this. He said these are sad times.

This is the introduction to the martyr's mirror. These are sad times in which we live. Nay, surely there is more danger now than the time of our fathers who suffered death for the testimony of the Lord.

Few will believe this, because the great majority look to that which is external and corporal and that which represents, and that in this respect, it is now better, quieter, and more comfortable, for only few only look to that which is internal and pertains to the soul on which everything depends. For what is it a man profit if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, and what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? It grieves us to the heart that we must live to see these times, and therefore speak in this wise. O Lord, strengthen our faith.

Help thy weak trusting lambs that they may not be led into error nor move from the foundation of the most holy faith. On the other hand, through his, Satan's instigation, the world now reveals itself very beautiful

and glorious, more than at any preceding time, and threefold pleasing for the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Almost all men run after her to worship her as queen supreme, but all are deceived thereby.

Yea, many have drunk of the poison wine of her lust, from the golden cup of her iniquities and deceptions die a spiritual death. As the first design is aimed at the faith, so this is directed against the true Christian life. Here lies great danger.

Who's going to escape these snares? Notice the word snares. He that would at no time be taken unaware by it would indeed be cautious and watchful, but our very flesh, oh I hear what he says here, but our very flesh seems prone to it. Here must be fasting, watching, praying, and calling upon God for help.

Otherwise there is no escape. I'm just really challenged by this. Now the last section of this message, I have something that really went on my heart.

It's why I bumped out the other part of my message. A lot of times in our preaching, we preach primarily to the young. It's good.

We want our young people to grow in the Lord in something. But as I get older, I read the Bible differently, and as I've gotten older, I've realized there's different temptations, and different sins, and different things that I suffer from that tempt me, and part of it is becoming calloused, becoming cynical, becoming burnt out, of becoming tired, of becoming offended. Luke 17.1 says this, and it is such an important passage.

Then he said to disciples, it is impossible that no offense should come. It is impossible that no offense should come, but woe to him to whom it does come. I went and got out my Logos Bible.

You text guys can check my Greek. But I really wanted to get into this word of fences, and the word of fences is scandalon. It's where we get our English word for scandal.

It's a trap. It's what we get like a trap, and so we see that it is impossible that there's not going to be some snares, some traps in your Christian wall. It's impossible.

It's impossible. There's no way around it. You will have these snares.

You're going to have them. Now, how are you going to deal with them? And let me tell you, as I sit around a room like this of mainly of a young congregation, I can't tell you how many people I've seen zealous for the faith who have departed. Look around the room.

If the same statistics of what I saw when I was in a radical church with David Bristow getting out of the army at the age of 22 is the same as today, half of you have apostatized. 75% of your children are gone. That's what I've seen, and I'm telling you most of them have come by a fence.

Most of them. You talk about church did this. We had that split.

We did this, those things over and over and over again. These are the things, and there's a cross in this. There's something that you've got to get.

I read Paul differently than I did when I was younger. I read a lot of pain in Paul. If you read 2 Corinthians 11, I don't have it here.

Just read 2 Corinthians 11, 16, where he says, they're apostles. I'm an apostle. They are Jews.

I've suffered more, done this more, gone through these things, and he's saying these things to try to rescue the influence of the Corinthians. I get that, but I just read this Paul that's hurting, and let me just tell you something. Church life is hard.

It's really hard. I tell the refugees that are coming over from Islam, see, it's the hardest thing you'll ever do. It's hard, but it's the cross, and God wants us.

He wants us to endure this, and it's impossible. Do you understand? He said it's impossible that you won't have this temptation, and here's one under the scene. John the Baptist.

Maybe he heard. I don't know where he was. Maybe he heard when Jesus was in Luke chapter 4 giving his inaugural address, I will set at liberty those captives.

I'm going to set at liberty the captives, set the captives free. Maybe he heard that. Maybe he read that in Isaiah.

I'm sure he did, and now there's John the Baptist in prison. Why, Lord? Why? So he sends his disciples to Jesus. Could you just ask him? This is John the Baptist.

This is John the Baptist. He leapt in the womb before he was even born. He saw this.

He's seen all these miracles, and now he said, and he's struggling. John the Baptist is struggling, and he's there in this. He says, send him, and Jesus said to the disciples, he said, and blessed.

Tell them I did these miracles. Tell them I did these great, these things that all fulfills the scriptures, and blessed is he who is not offended. That's trap, scandalon.

Blessed is he who's not ensnared of me, but the way of Christ. What has following Jesus done for you? I heard a preacher once say, it was a young, it was Shane Claiborne, and he said, you know, a lot of people talk about their life was a mess, and then they followed Jesus, and they got turned around, and now they were prosperous, and did all these types of things. He said, for him, it was just the opposite.

He was this kind of businessman kind of guy, and he read Jesus, and now he lives in inner city, and he has this messy life. What has following Christ been to you? Is it real? If you really follow Jesus, let me ask you a question. I ask this question sometimes.

Can a person be a follower of Christ without following Christ? No. Christ went to the cross. Can a person be a follower of Christ without following Christ? I asked that to a youth group once, and they're like, well, yeah, I mean, like theologically, you know, I mean, if you're born again, and no, you can't.

The cross is part of what he wants us to follow, and he's telling us, and blessed as he's not offended to me. Now, Jesus went on in this passage. He says, what did you come out to see? And he started saying, people, you know, with fancy clothes, those are in king's houses.

Then he said, and John the Baptist, no one has been, no one born of woman is greater than him, and he's talking about no one. John the Baptist just sent his people there. He knows John the Baptist is going through this suffering.

Jesus is responding. He even gives us an exhortation that he's not wearing soft clothes and saying, no one's better than him. That I just get inspired by, and so what is it, but what if it's my fault? Here's another snare.

I know what you're thinking. Now, listen to me. Satan is the accuser of the brethren, and many of you will be tempted to give up because of your failures.

What you tell yourself or what Satan whispers in your ear is, well, God would have saved you. Yes, God's promises are good for this and for that, but not for you. That was a pretty big mistake you made.

That was a dumb thing you did with your children. That was a really dumb place you moved. That was a dumb decision you made, and what you are saying, what Satan is whispering in your ear is that you've messed up too far and you can't return.

Let me just tell you, it's a lie of the devil. It's a lie. Jesus says to what is not as though it was.

All the promises of God are in him are yea, and in him are amen. He will restore, and you know what my favorite passages are in Joel? That he restores the wasted years the canker worm and the palmer worm has destroyed. That's my God.

So are you caught in the snare? Will you get caught in the snare 15 years from now, 20 years from now? I've been in these circles for 30 years, and I'm telling you, I've seen so many of them. People, I tell you, there's no way, you'd say no way that person would leave. No way.

No way that family would apostatize. No way. No way that man.

There's not a way that woman would do that. No way. I've seen it, and it happens there.

It happens there in the offenses, the theology. Now, this is where the theology of martyrdom comes into that accuser of the brother. So it's Revelation 12, 9. So the great dragon was cast out, the serpent of old called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world.

He was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, now salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ has come. Listen, for the accuser of our brethren who accused them before our God day and night has been cast out.

Don't read my punch line yet there. All right, you read it. This accuser of the brethren whispers in your ear and tells you you're a mess up.

He tells you, you might as well give up now. You've wasted time. I tell you, I've seen such terrible things.

I wish that I could take them out of my mind sometimes. An empty thinking, and I tell you, so many of it is a spiral of a trap of despair that you get to the bottom, and you think there's no hope, and it's a lie of the devil. And I'll ask you this, here's my punch line, and we must be careful as a church.

What's more difficult, the accuser of the brethren or the brethren that accuse? As we walk through that, as we walk through in faith, your children will make some mistakes. Some of you will make mistakes. Your wives will make mistakes.

You will make mistakes. I make mistakes. And we must encourage one another as soldiers and put the wounded on our back and keep fighting with them.

There was a man once that, in my early days, in the David Brissot days when we were there in Texas, and he was in our church. The next day, he left his wife and went and left her and ran off with a girl that he met at the bar. And I just couldn't deal with this.

I got in the car, I met with him, and I met him at the bar, and I said, I tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to grab you, and I'm going to drag you into the car, and I'm going to take you back to your wife. Will you let me do it? And he said, no.

And I said, do you want to let me do it? And he said, I do. But he didn't. And he left his wife.

And I tell you, there's so many stories like that. A lie of the devil, a life of comfort, a life of just living this life. And in a moment, it's gone.

Children who I have seen along the path with on this journey, gone, gone. But this is what it goes on to say. This is how the accuser of the, this is the next person, church.

And they overcame him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony. And they did not love their life to the death. That's the theology of martyrdom.

That's how you conquer this accuser of the brethren. That's how you live this. You live in your testimony.

I'm going to get up. He's going to restore my wasted years. He's going to be faithful.

And I'm going to be faithful. I'm going to rise up. And we're going to do these things.

I'm not going to read this whole passage, but one of my favorite is Psalms, Psalm 73. And this is the one where Asaph, the psalmist, he goes in and he just says, I've washed my hands in vain. This is a man who's jealous of things that are going on in the world that everyone's prosperous but me, everybody's going an advantage of me.

And we feel that Satan lies to us. And he tells us all these lies for all day long. This is where I have I have highlighted their verse 13, Psalm 73, verse 13, where he goes on.

He says, I'm I'm just so jealous of all the worldly people and all these things and people. He says, surely I've cleansed my heart in vain and washed my hands in innocence for all day long. I have been plagued and chastened every morning.

Jesus tells us in Isaiah 53 that he not only bears our sin upon the cross, but he bore our sorrows when you have these really, really, really, really low moments. He's there and he bore our sorrows and you share in that suffering with Christ. He's there.

And then the psalmist goes on to say that when he comes into the church, he realizes what he has in Christ and God. One of my one of my most head-shaking passages of the scriptures is Genesis 34. This was a bad day for Jacob.

Remember, I'm not going to read it to you, I'll just summarize it. Remember Jacob in Genesis 34? If you recall, they were coming in and Dinah kind of walked was walking around, ended up getting raped by the

village that they were living in. Suddenly, all the 12 tribes, future 12 tribe boys were all going out and said, well, we're going to fix this.

They went out and did a religious trick about circumcision and massacred the entire town and did this. And Jacob is just, I mean, his daughter was raped, his children are murderers and all these things. And this is the response of God to Jacob at that really, really, really bad day.

Then God said to Jacob, arise and go to Bethel, go back to Bethel and dwell there and make an altar there to God who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau, your brother. Listen, you kind of go through some hard times. You will.

It's impossible that you don't. And you might even go to a really, really, really, really bad time. But I want it to be different than you, than what I've seen over my life, that this promise lies before Jacob and it lies before us when we've made mistakes, when bad times have come, when your world is crumbling around you and your church is falling apart or your elders have let you down or your whatever has happened, God is there and he wants to fellowship with you and dwell with you again and walk through that with you again.

That's what he wants. I am almost done. One of the most heart-wrenching passages or things of history that I've read was the very famous Susanna Wesley, most commendable for the ladies are going through Susanna's biography and your sister's meeting and Tanya just loves it.

She says, well, I can't help. I just love reading this. We've always loved the Wesley story.

But it's interesting that even in all that right that she did through all the trouble and things that happened in England in those times, she had a really hard time with her girls. And there was a letter that John Wesley, and I was so touched by it when I ran across it, I think it was in his journals, that he was trying to encourage his mother, don't dare give up the faith of believing. He said, because she was like despairing, it's not looking good.

It's not looking good, John. And he said, but the scripture promises, train up a child in the way he shall go. And when he is old, it's funny, John was pushing the point to Susanna, they won't depart from it.

And she claimed that as a promise. And every one of them came into the Lord and fulfillment of the promise. She did not give up.

And I'm telling you, if there's one thing, if there's one thing that I can say has been the common denominator of all those casualties that I've seen in my life, it's just giving up, just giving up. Get snared here, you get snared there, you get offended here, you get this didn't go there, you didn't get this thing, and that's better or not. And then finally you say, you know what, I'm old, I'm tired.

And I'll tell you something, at 55, there's a lot of different motivations that have to drive you to keep going than at 25. There's a lot of different ones. And I want to put something deep inside of your heart now while you're young to remember this.

After Hebrews 11, and after all that sawing in two business and all that going on, and how they are not complete unless they're with us, the writer of Hebrews took us to this. Therefore, we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, listen to this, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares you, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,

the author and finisher of our faith, listen, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. You see how the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, but for us who are being saved, it is the power of God, because it actually has this sanctifying presence in you.

Tanya tells the story when she was in basic training. One time she was on the rifle range, and she had two big ponchos in her, oh, I forgot what you call those, BDUs, battle dress uniform. They had these big pockets, and she had a canteen and a poncho stuffed in there, and she was trying to run, and she said she was trying to run, and she just couldn't run.

You know, Tanya was a little bit of a frame, and she's trying to run with her army clothes on and her combat boots, so it's, anyway, so as she's doing that, she finally took them off. She goes, and she said, every time I read this verse, I think of that moment, took off those things. It's not necessarily sins.

It's sanctifying yourself. Now think, okay, young people, where are you going to live your life? Where are you going to go and serve? What kind of jobs are you going to take? Where are you going to live? What are you going to do? Who are you going to marry? What's driving the decisions in your mind? It doesn't necessarily have to be sins. It's the weight that so easily besets us, ensnares us.

There's the word. Is that the same word? Ensnarers? Scandalon, I wonder? It snares us. Look to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the Father.

All right, closing up here. My favorite painting. It's the Ghent Altarpiece, the most stolen painting in history.

There's an interesting TED talk on it. Most stolen painting in history. As a matter of fact, they've now, since 2017, realized we don't have the original.

So anyway, it's a great painting, but I think even the original is a copy and it's somewhere. For me, these passages about this drive the theology of mardom, not just in a dying well, that very much so, but in our action. My favorite scene, I preach this maybe too often, but my favorite scene.

Revelation chapter one, John is there getting a tour of heaven. He's there, and you saw on the right hand of him who sat on the throne, a scroll written inside on the back sealed with seven seals. The seals, you know, like a, I don't know, of all the curses and all the things that were coming, all the judgments.

Then I saw a strong angel, the scripture tells us, proclaiming with a loud voice, who is worthy to open the scroll and the lucid seals? And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or even to look on it. So I wept much because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll or to even look at it. I think, what a scene, you know? He's sitting there crying.

I just see John just crying, crying. No one's worthy. Think of all through church history, all through the saints, all through the people, no one is worthy.

But then, but one of the elders said to me, don't cry. Behold, the line of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has prevailed to open the scrolls and to lucid seven seals. And here's the point that I love.

The cross is foolishness to those that are perishing. The cross. Now, the power, the strength, the, you know, what he must have imagined at this line of the tribe of Judah.

And when he turned around and I looked and behold, in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures, in the midst of the elders to the lamb, as it has been slain, which have been seven heads and seven eyes, which were the seven spirits of God sent out of the earth. Then he came and took the scroll out of the right hand of him who sat upon the throne. And I just find it incredible that at the very center of the universe, in the center of heaven, the center of everything is a lamb that has been slain.

Oh, the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, but for us, it's the power of God. All right, last verse. Brother Finney, you just said this is one of your favorite verses.

It's certainly mine too. I call it the Christian atomic bomb and I call it the way that we walk through our life. All right, so here we go.

Any scene, your failures, your church problems, your family problems, your children's problems, your job problems, raids of America on America, crime, warfare, disease, cancer, your deathbed, the death of a spouse. All those are wrapped up in the word that it is impossible that there will not be some snares. But in all that, in all that, the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, but for us, it's the power of God.

Listen to these verses and I'll close. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

Don't let that just become poetry to you. This is the way the lamb will conquer. Remember, at the center of the universe is a slain lamb.

God has a purpose he wants to accomplish on the earth, and this is how he wants to do it. As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter.

But nay, in all these things, which things? Famine, nakedness, peril, sword. Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us, for I am persuaded. I love when Paul gets persuaded.

And are you persuaded? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life. Sometimes it's easier to die than to keep on living in your misery, but I'm persuaded that neither death nor life. Sometimes when you're going through so much pain in your journey that you have ahead of you, you'll think that it'd be better to die of a martyr, but Paul says not even that.

I am persuaded that neither death. Some of you, by the grace of God, may endure persecution and go through these terrible things. He's telling us that will not be anything to take away from the love of God, for I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels and demons or anything nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor things to come nor height nor death nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

So I'm blessed with this challenge from the Apostle Paul. I'm blessed with it. And as I ponder our journey together, as I ponder all of you, your children, the church, I just pray that God would give us the Holy Spirit grace to have a supportion of what those early Christians have had through the times of persecution.

Let's pray. I'll turn it over to you. Brother Mark.

Dear Heavenly Father, I do thank you for the great cloud of witnesses. Oh God, please grant everyone in this room and everyone that hears the voice of this message the endurance to run the race now and to keep running and keep running and keep running and keep running. Oh God, I pray that each one of us would receive the grace of endurance to keep running and keep running.

And God, that you would put this spirit within us, this lamb, and let us see in one day and sing with all those around the throne worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive glory. And so, Father, I ask this, please, please, oh God, have mercy on us today and fill us with your Holy Spirit for these things. In Jesus name, amen.

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