

Scars That Speak

by J. Glyn Owen

J. Glyn Owen's sermon emphasizes the importance of glorying in the cross of Christ and embracing the scars of faith as marks of true discipleship.

Duration: 40:08

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 20:28, Acts 9:3-6, 2 Corinthians 11:23-25, Galatians 6:14, Galatians 6:17, Philippians 3:5-6

Topics: "Mistakes"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on two verses from Galatians chapter 6, specifically verses 14 and 17. The speaker emphasizes that Paul saw that God had done everything in Jesus for salvation, and that it is free. The speaker highlights the importance of representing a crucified Christ with scars, both in our bodies and in our spirits. The sermon concludes with a call to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God.

Transcript

Will you kindly turn with me in the Word of Scripture to that passage that was earlier read for us by Mr. Lowe, namely Galatians chapter 6. And I would like to share with you some of the very obvious truths that emerge looking at two verses that come in that concluding section of St. Paul's letter to the Galatians. I would like you kindly to focus upon verses 14 and 17. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

And then in verse 17, Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus, scars that speak. Portuguese traders, following in the footsteps of the explorer Vasco da Gama, came as far as the south coast of China where they settled. On the crest of the hill overlooking the harbour they arrived at, they built a magnificent cathedral.

It did not stand very long, however, but a gigantic typhoon tore it to shreds. That is, apart from the massive front wall. That front wall was standing when Sir John Bowering, then governor of Hong Kong, visited Macau in 1825, I believe it was.

As he came in towards the harbour and saw this massive, this gigantic wall with a triangular top, he was amazed, and yet it was not that which amazed him most. It was rather the cross of bronze that stood high aloft above that erect front wall, standing sheer against the sky, and as Sir John Bowering looked at it, he

said to himself, that is a picture of a reality, which he put into the hymn that we sung at the beginning this morning. In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time, all the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.

We might not agree with Sir John Bowering in all his views and all his ideas, particularly his theology, but we would most certainly agree with him in his estimation of the cross of Christ. He here represents the sentiments of the great Apostle Paul, and indeed of the whole community of the early church, for they gloried in the cross of their Lord. They not only believed that God was in Christ on the cross reconciling men to himself, but they proclaimed it.

Neither did they simply proclaim it. They proclaimed it as those who were proud of it, and we must express that pride, I believe, in terms of glorying in it. God forbids, says the great Apostle Paul, that I should glory in anything else, save in the cross, the emblem of suffering and shame.

In the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, we have come a long way from that situation. Have we not, brothers and sisters? Is it not true, is it not true that you and I, even when we are loyal to the tenets that relate to the cross, are all too infrequently failing to glory in it? Yes, we may believe in it.

Yes, we may trust in what God did in and through his Son upon that old rugged cross. But, brothers and sisters, how many of us glory in it? How many of us have been so captured by the wonder of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, that we are more proud of it than the house we live in, than the clothes we wear, than the office we hold, than the person we are, than the relationships that are ours? That's the thought that has been haunting me this last week. I am amazed that I cannot glory in the cross, as the great Apostle did, or at least cannot manifest it, as this amazing soul of Tarsus now become Paul the Apostle did in life and in death.

Now, we cannot go into the details of what is said in these two verses this morning. We can only glean a few things from the surface. Why is Paul talking about glorying here? Well, the context is, of course, that there were so many Judaizers, as they're called abroad in the Galatian churches.

It seems that some of them at any rate, if not all of them, had made some kind of profession of faith in Jesus. But they believed that having Jesus was not quite enough. You needed over and above the Lord Jesus Christ at least to be circumcised like a Jew.

And so, you see, they came to depend on Jesus plus. And more than that, they were going around from place to place, not simply to preach the gospel if they were Christians, but to get the Gentiles to be circumcised. To them it was a marvelous thing to be able to say at the end of a month or a quarter or whatever, so many circumcisions have been registered.

And Paul saw them and he sensed their zeal for the unessential. Indeed, not only for the unessential, any addition to Jesus Christ is a subtraction. It takes away from it.

You cannot add to the finished work of God in Jesus Christ. What you deem you add takes away from Him. And the Apostle Paul was able to see through the facade and see these men running around wanting to see people circumcised and to count their heads and their scalps, so many more.

And oh, they were so proud of it. And what was their circumcision but a detraction from the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Says Paul, I too am circumcised.

The eighth day of the stock of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin and Hebrew of the Hebrews as touching the law of Pharisee concerning righteousness which is according to the law impeccable. Nevertheless, he says, God forbid that I should glory, says in one thing, the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ. Why Paul? How can you say that? What's the difference between you and these other people? Can I put it to you in a nutshell here? I think it is this.

You see, Paul saw that God had done everything in Jesus, everything. That salvation from beginning to end is in Him and it is done and it is finished. And then to climax, to cap it all, it is free.

Hallelujah. There's no need for you to run about to seek something in addition to the Lord Jesus Christ. By the purchase of His atoning blood, you not only have forgiveness of sins, you have life everlasting that will be consummated in the very presence of God and in a God-likeness within your own soul.

And the creature that was first made after the image of God will be so renewed after the image of God that God's glory will be reflected even in us. It's all accomplished. All finished.

And all free in Christ. But now, in terms of his experience, Paul tells us this. In terms of his own experience, it came to this.

He gloried in the cross because, according to that 14th verse, the cross had come between him and this world in its totality. God forbid that I should glory in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which I've been crucified to the world, this world, and the world is crucified to me. Let's put it like this.

He says, I glory in the cross because it has made me dead to this world. It has spoiled me for this present world and it has spoiled the world for me. Well, you say, that's nothing to glory about.

Well, now, wait a moment. You see, he had only been separated from the world in order to be united to his Lord. But you say, how do I know that Paul was so united to his Lord that being severed from the world, cut aloof from the world, he had something to compensate that loss in Christ, in God in Christ.

Now, that's what that 17th verse tells us. I bear in my body the mark. What are you talking about, Paul? Well, let's look at the marks for a moment.

What are they? When Paul calls attention to these marks, he could be referring to holes or punctures in the flesh, in the body, or to the kind of impression sometimes branded on the body by a red hot instrument or by needles, as well as to the more obvious results of beating. Now, the essential thing to notice is that such marks are actually embedded into the flesh. Please get that.

Whether you translate, I bear on my body the marks, or I bear in my body the marks, it doesn't really matter, but the marks are there. They're in the flesh. Marks in the flesh.

What's he talking about? Before we come to that, let me take up the word that Paul uses. He uses the word here, stigma, and its plural, stigmata. This word had a history, and I think its history helps us understand something of what Paul had in mind.

First of all, the stigma was a mark of ownership. In common currency, this is what it probably meant in the first place. Sometimes it was just that.

A mark in the flesh, a branding of an animal, a sheep, or a bullock, or in old times, of a slave. The branding into the flesh of a sign or a signature of the person who possessed the beast or the slave. And what Paul

is saying here, if that's what he had primarily in his mind, is this.

I bear in my body the brand, the stigma, the brand of the name of the one to whom I belong. I don't need simply to tell you that I belong to Jesus. Let me take my garment off and bear my back, and you'll see his brand there.

And he wasn't ashamed of them, he gloried in them, for he gloried in his Lord. The stigma was also a military decoration in Paul's day. When a soldier had proved his loyalty and bravery in battle, he was often honored, or as it was said, decorated.

Just as we would use the same word today. He was decorated by having the name or the stigma, either of the emperor or of the commander-in-chief, inwrought into his flesh. Now this was always, of course, when a soldier has proved his faithfulness.

He's been involved in battle, he's proved his loyalty, and having proved his loyalty, he bears in his body the mark. The emperor was proud of him, the commander-in-chief was proud of him. Here's the mark, he doesn't need to say any more, just roll up his sleeve and let people see it.

I believe Paul saw himself also in that category. He was told at the very beginning of his Christian life that it was his privilege not only to witness to Christ, but to suffer for him. And he accepted the sufferings of the Christian life as a privilege, and he gloried in them.

But the stigma was also a word with a religious connotation. One historian, Herodotus, records that at the shrine of Heracles on the Egyptian coast some 500 years before Paul's day, and right on to Paul's day, it was the regular custom to brand the devotees of a certain religion, maybe more than one, but I'm only referring to one, with the special stigma of the shrine. So wherever a man went, he did not need to say anything with his lips, he would show the stigma on his hand, the brand, or on his arm.

Some were so proud to bear the stigma of a certain shrine, they had it on their forehead. Now I'm not sure which of those is uppermost in the Apostle Paul's mind, but does it matter? You see what it boils down to is this, this man was proud of the cross, and the marks, the sufferings he bore as he preached the cross, and as he lived according to the cross, and the cross of Christ alone. But you say, I still haven't got it clear, what are these things in Paul's body? Well now let me just read to you a few verses.

I said to you, we can't go into this subject in detail, you can do it in your leisure. But let me read to you a few verses from 2 Corinthians 11, 23 to 25. Paul is talking about some false apostles, and they're disparaging the apostles of the Lord, and particularly the Apostle Paul, and he says that he's speaking like a madman, because he's going to compare himself with them for a moment, and he says I shouldn't do that kind of thing, but I'm going to do it nevertheless.

And this is what he says, are they servants, are they slaves of the Christ? Deloy, I'm out of my mind to talk like this, he says, I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Now listen my friends, if you've never heard these words before, please listen to them today.

Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, this is the Roman flogging. Once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

Now I can't go any further. Whence came those hideous wheels and marks on Paul's bare back? What are the stigmas to which he refers? Well they're just precisely that. They're the results of flogging, and beating, and stoning.

Where did you get them from Saul? How did you get this way? Couldn't you have looked after yourself better than that? Oh yes. None of these, none of these were meted out to the Apostle Paul, because anyone had a quarrel with Paul as son. Paul was not caused to go through these indignities because men hated Paul per se, personally.

They were aimed at Paul's Lord, every one of them. Paul only suffered these because he would not quit his Lord. Because he insisted on preaching Christ and Him crucified.

Because when he went strutting into Corinth, he said, God, I've got nothing to tell you but Christ and Him crucified. When he came to Galatia, he says, I placarded Christ crucified everywhere. Nothing else.

Paul could have avoided all this trouble. And he could have had a nice, clean back like yours and mine. Without a wart, without a wheel.

But he couldn't forsake the cross. He couldn't deny his Lord. And it was because he stuck through and true to his Lord, he got the lashes.

The forty lashes minus one was the maximum penalty meted to the guilty, according to the law of Moses in Deuteronomy. In Paul's day, it was administered in the synagogue itself. And it was exceedingly brutal.

The bared victim, stripped of his clothes, was scarcely alive when it was over. The deeply furrowed body oozed with blood and wracked with pain. And no man would lie down on that back for many weeks to come.

Thirty-nine stripes. I read somewhere, and I can't put my finger on it. And I like to be able to put my finger on things when I say them from the pulpit.

But I can't put my finger on this. But I read somewhere, that when once a man had undergone this dignity, it was a very rare thing for him to do that crime again. If he was punished once, with the forty minus one stripes, it was a very, very rare thing for him to do that evil again.

It was too harsh to bear. But listen, my friend. The forty-nine lashes, the thirty-nine lashes, would thus stop a man from doing the evil that led to it.

But it couldn't stop the man who gloried in the cross from going on to proclaim Christ and Him crucified. Five times, says Paul, I had it. With one hundred and ninety-five stars criss-crossing his back, the man said, I'm going on.

Now that hurts us in this day when the cult of softness is the mode. But this man went on, you see, and that's what he's saying. I don't need to tell you that I'm glorying in the cross.

Look at that there. I could have escaped every one of them. But all his glory, all his majesty, all his grace, he mastered me.

He crucified me to the world and the world to me, and he's bound me to himself. And there is more grace through his wounds than there is glory from the shame of the world. Now, brothers and sisters, what do we

know about that? I'm terribly nervous this morning.

I don't think we know much about this. And my dear people, we ought to know a little more. How can we represent a crucified Christ without a scar? If not in our bodies, then in our spirits.

And so many of us, you see, we are only concerned to serve the Lord Jesus with a little bit of our time, a little bit of our strength, as long as we don't spend ourselves, exert ourselves too much. So that, you know, we've got the best of our strength and the best of our time to give to something else. Oh, God, have mercy upon us.

You see, we're not in this world somehow. And when we talk of coming to communion with Christ crucified and with his church, by the grace of God, we really need something more of this. The beating with rods was no less savage than the Jewish thirty-nine stripes.

The beating with rods was the Roman punishment. It was so savage that no Roman citizen was supposed to bear the indignity under any circumstances. And yet this man, this apostle Paul, had undergone it three times by the time he wrote Galatians.

And Galatians was probably one of his first writings. But at that point, he'd known it three times. This was carried out by the lictors with their rods of virtue.

I don't need to go into the details of the physical side of it. All I want you to notice is this, my friend. Paul had the stigmata, the mark in his body.

And that was the measure of his glorying in the Lord Jesus and his cross. Now you see, you and I can come to church without glorying in the cross of Christ. Please don't be cross with me for saying this.

It has to be said, you know. You and I can sing these great old hymns without necessarily glorying in the cross. And I say to you, we can go through life as a Christian for twenty-five, thirty years without a scar.

And we're nice and healthy at the end of it all. You see, there's something missing really. There's something missing.

Not that we should go out to court disaster and to court pain. That would mean there's something wrong with us. But you see, if they crucified our Lord and human nature is unchanged, there will be darts aimed at him wherever he is properly represented.

And we can only avoid them by forsaking him. If we stand close to him, we'll catch the fire of the enemy. Even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many.

There was both a passive and a narrative acceptance of this on the part of the Apostle Paul. Let me turn to conclude the ministry he gallantly fulfilled for his Lord. Startled by the splendor of the Shekinah glory of the one who faced him on the Damascus road.

He really never got over that. You remember his instinctive reaction to the glory that shone around him greater than that of the midday sun. Lord, or let's put it in its own Old Testament phraseology, Jehovah, who are you? Now that doesn't make sense.

If he knows it's Jehovah, why ask? But he was bewildered that Jehovah should appear to him on the Damascus road. When he was going to incarcerate men and women because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Who are you Jehovah? And then came that sparkling answer, I am Jesus.

I am Jehovah is Jesus. This all glorious one, Jesus was crucified. Jesus was crucified.

I had a share, I can almost hear spasming. I had a share in the death of one of his servants, Stephen. I kept the clothes of those that stoned him.

Jesus is dead. I am Jesus. I've got something for you.

Go into the city, do what I tell you. Now send one of my servants to tell you what you're going to do for me. His question was, Lord, what do you want of me? Go, said Jesus, the Lord Jehovah.

Go, said Jesus Jehovah to one of his servants, Ananias. Go to this man, Saul of Tarsus. I'll give you his address, I'll tell you where he is.

Now you go to him. See, Ananias was a bit timid. He knew of Saul, he knew of Paul.

He knew of this arrogant, difficult man. Peeling out murder against the saints of the Lord. And he didn't want to go, saint though he was.

You go, says the Lord to him. And I'm sure he must have found difficulty in taking this in. Because he said, this man is my chosen instrument.

My chosen instrument. To carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings. And before the people of Israel.

Now notice. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name. Now I can't bring these two things together.

But I can tell you about them. The call of the apostle was to be a bearer of the name of Jesus Christ crucified. To carry the name.

But how did Jesus tell him that he was to carry the name? As he spoke to him through Ananias. I will show him what he must suffer for my name's sake. My friends, we cannot carry the name of Jesus simply in terms of words.

Oh, we've got to declare the news. We've got to spell out the truth. We've got to proclaim the revelation God has given.

And we've got to declare what God has done in Christ. Yes, yes, of course. But it doesn't end there.

He was called to suffer. To bear the name. You see, what we notice here is this.

That the apostle has been faithful to his commission as God gave it. See. Such was the mastery of the Lord over him.

Such was the ministry he offered to the Lord. Sometime later on, I finished my course. I've kept the faith.

I've run the race. I've done what you asked me, oh Lord. And I bear in my body the mark.

He uses the very word here in this context in Galatians that Ananias used. When he told him, he will show you how much suffering you are to bear for him. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The measure of Paul's glorying in the cross then. As well as the practical nature of it. Is expressed in the absolute mastery he was prepared to concede to his Lord.

In order to fulfill the ministry given him by his Lord. I conclude. My thoughts may have been very rambling this morning.

I trust not. But I speak to you, brothers and sisters, most of us, unscathed. Unmarked.

At least for the sake of Jesus Christ. You who boast of your orthodoxy. Perhaps of your zeal.

I want you and I to look into the face of this great apostle Paul. And I want you to hear his words. God forbid that I should glory.

Save in the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ. And here's the proof that I'm walking that way. I bear in my body the mark.

You know it is all incongruous that we have no wounds. There is a day coming, brothers and sisters, there is a day coming. When before the glare of the great white throne of God.

And before his all seeing eye. For even the throne, any throne of divine judgment. Must be great and must be white.

It cannot be other than that because God is holy. You and I will stand before it. And he will look at us.

I tell you, you and I will give anything that day. If we have one wound to show for him. If you have a scar that day.

You'll not be ashamed of it, you'll be proud of it. It's we scarless people that we'll be ashamed. That we did not give him more.

And go further and do more and offer more. That's the thing that's been haunting me. How much have I suffered in any way.

Simply for the sake of the cross of my Lord. You know this poem. I don't know who the author is.

Hast thou no scar. No hidden scar on foot or side or hand. I hear thee sung as mighty in the land.

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star. Hast thou no scar. Hast thou no wound.

Yet I was wounded by the archers. Spent. Leaned me against a tree to die.

And rent by ravening beasts that compassed me. I swooned. Hast thou no wound.

No wound. No scar. Yet as the master shall the servant be.

And pierced are the feet that follow me. But thine are whole. Can they have followed.

Who have nor wound. Nor scar. As you and I surround the table of our Lord today.

And bow our heads in the consciousness of his presence. As the lamb in the midst of the throne wounded for us. I bring you the same words of this same apostle.

I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God. That you present your bodies. Your bodies.

Your bodies. My body. Your body.

A living sacrifice. Wholly acceptable to God. Which is our reasonable and spiritual service.

And don't be conformed to this world. Let the cross come between you and it. And be transformed by the cross in your heart.

By the renewing of your mind. And you'll know the good. And the acceptable.

And the perfect will of God. You'll know it. Let us pray.

Father God. In heaven above. Be gracious to us.

And forgive our sins. Our tendency to self and self indulgence. And unwillingness to bear your cross.

Even when we verbally acknowledge you. Oh God. None of us are free to point a finger at another.

We all need your forgiveness. We've not counted all things. But lost for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

We've held on to some very dismal. Sometimes dirty things. Take them from us.

And cleanse us. And with a cleansed spirit in our souls. Oh help us this morning to have something that is worthy of the name communion.

With you the father who gave your only son. With you blessed son of God who did give yourself to die the death of the cross. And with you blessed Holy Spirit.

Self effacing. In order to magnify the Christ. In whom the father comes to us.

We ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

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