

Xv. Lucullus

by Martyrs of the Catacombs

The sermon tells the story of Lucullus, a non-Christian who is impacted by the death of his friend Marcellus and eventually converts to Christianity.

Scripture: Matthew 5:10, John 11:25, Romans 8:18, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Hebrews 11:35, 1 Peter 4:14, Revelation 2:10, Revelation 14:13, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Christian Persecution", "Faith Transformation"

Description

In the sermon 'The memory of the just is blessed,' the preacher recounts the story of Lucullus and Marcellus, highlighting the impact of faith and martyrdom. Lucullus, initially a bystander, is deeply moved by the Christian martyrdom of Marcellus, leading him to support and protect the persecuted Christians despite not sharing their beliefs. Over time, Lucullus undergoes a transformation, finding solace and joy in embracing Christianity, ultimately experiencing the love of the Savior. The sermon reflects on the enduring legacy of the persecuted Christians, emphasizing their unwavering faith and the eternal reward awaiting them.

Transcript

"The memory of the just is blessed."

At the scene of torture and of death there was one spectator whose face, full of agony, was never turned away from Marcellus, whose eyes saw every act and expression, whose ears drank in every word. Long after all had departed he remained in the same place, the only human being in all the vast extent of deserted seats. At length he rose to go.

The old elasticity of his step had departed. He moved with a slow and feeble gait; his abstracted gaze and expression of pain made him look like a man suddenly struck with disease. He motioned to some of the keepers, who opened for him the gates that led to the arena.

"Bring me a cinerary urn," said he, and he walked forward to the dying embers. A few fragments of crumbled bone, pulverized by the violence of the flames, were all that remained of Marcellus.

Silently Lucullus took the urn which the keeper brought him, and collecting what human fragments he could find, he carried away the dust.

As he was leaving he was accosted by an old man. He stopped mechanically.

"What do you wish of me?" said he courteously. "I am Honorius, an elder among the Christians. A dear friend of mine was put to death this day in this place. I have come to see if I could obtain his ashes."

"It is well that you have addressed yourself to me, venerable man," said Lucullus. "Had you proclaimed your name to others you would have been seized, for there is a price on your head. But I cannot grant your request. Marcellus is dead, and his ashes are here in this urn. They will be deposited in the tomb of my family with the highest ceremonies, for he was my dearest friend, and his loss makes the earth a blank to me and life a burden."

"You, then," said Honorius, "can be no other than Lucullus, of whom I have so often heard him speak in words of affection?"

"I am he. Never were there two friends more faithful than we. If it had been possible I would have saved him. He would never have been arrested had he not thrown himself into the hands of the law. O hard fate! At a time when I had made arrangements that he should never be arrested, he came before the emperor himself, and I was compelled with my own hands to lead him whom I loved to prison and to death."

"What is your loss is to him immeasurable gain. He has entered into the possession of immortal happiness."

"His death was a triumph," said Lucullus. "The death of Christians I have noticed before, but never before have I been so struck by their hope and confidence. Marcellus died as though death were an unspeakable blessing."

"It was so to him, but not more so than to many others who lie buried in the gloomy place where we are forced to dwell. To their numbers I wish to add the remains of Marcellus. Would you be willing to part with them?"

"I had hoped, venerable Honorius, that since my dear friend had left me I might have at least the mournful pleasure of giving to his remains the last pious honors, and of weeping at his tomb."

"But, noble Lucullus, would not your friend have preferred a burial with the sacred ceremonies of his new faith, and a resting place among those martyrs with whose names his is now associated forever?"

Lucullus was silent, and thought for some time. At length he spoke:

"Of his wishes there can be no doubt. I will respect them, and deny myself the honor of performing the funereal rites. Take them, Honorius. But I will, nevertheless, assist at your services. Will you permit the soldier, whom you only know as your enemy, to enter your retreat and to witness your acts?"

"You shall be welcome, noble Lucullus, even as Marcellus was welcome before you, and perhaps you will receive among us the same blessing that was granted to him."

"Do not hope for anything like that," said Lucullus. "I am far different from Marcellus in taste and feeling. I might learn to feel kindly toward you, or even to admire you, but never to join you."

"Come with us, then, whatever you are, and assist at the funeral services of your friend. A messenger will come for you to-morrow."

Lucullus signified his assent, and after handing over the precious urn to the care of Honorius, he went sadly to his own home.

On the following day he went with the messenger to the Catacombs. There he saw the Christian community, and beheld the place of their abode. But from the previous accounts of his friend he had gained a clear idea of their life, their sufferings, and their afflictions.

Again the mournful wail arose in the dim vaults and echoed along the arched passage ways, that wail that spoke of a new brother committed to the grave; but the grief that spoke of mortal sorrow was succeeded by a loftier strain that expressed the faith of the aspiring soul, and a hope full of immortality.

Honorius took the precious scroll, the word of life, whose promises were so powerful to sustain amid the heaviest burden of grief, and in solemn tones read that chapter in the first epistle to the Corinthians which in every age and in every clime has been so dear to the heart that looked beyond the realms of time to seek for refuge in the prospect of the resurrection.

Then he raised his head and in fervent tones offered up a prayer to the Holy One of heaven, through Christ the divine mediator, by whom death and the grave had been conquered and immortal life secured.

The pale sad face of Lucullus was conspicuous among the mourners. If he was not a Christian he could still admire such glorious doctrines and listen with pleasure to such exalted hopes. It was he who placed the loved ashes within their final resting-place; he, whose eyes took the last look at the dear remains; and he whose hands lifted to its place the slab whereon the name and the epitaph of Marcellus was engraven.

Lucullus went to his home, but he was a changed man. The gayety of his nature seemed to have been driven out by the severe afflictions that he had endured. He had rightly said that he would not become a Christian. The death of his friend had filled him with sadness, but there was no sorrow for sin, no repentance, no desire for a knowledge of God. He had lost the power of taking pleasure in the world, but had gained no other source of happiness.

Yet the memory of his friend produced one effect on him. He felt a sympathy for the poor and oppressed people with whom Marcellus had associated. He admired their constancy and pitied their unmerited sufferings. He saw that all the virtue and goodness left in Rome were in the possession of these poor outcasts.

These feelings led him to give them his assistance. He transferred to them the friendship and the promise of aid which he had once given to Marcellus. His soldiers arrested no more, or if they did arrest any they were sure to escape in some way. His high position, vast wealth, and boundless influence, were all at the service of the Christians. His palace was well known to them as their surest place of refuge or assistance, and his name was honored as that of their most powerful human friend.

But all things have an end; and so the constant sufferings of the Christians and the friendship of Lucullus at length were brought to a termination. In about a year after the death of Marcellus the stern emperor Decius was overthrown, and a new ruler entered into the imperial power. The persecution was stayed. Peace returned to the Church, and the Christians came forth from the Catacombs again to dwell within the glad light of day, again to sound in the ears of men the praises of Him who had redeemed them, and again to carry on their never-ending contest with the hosts of evil.

Years passed on, but no change came to Lucullus. When Honorius came from the Catacombs he was taken by Lucullus to his own palace, and maintained there for the rest of his life. He sought to repay his debt of gratitude to his noble benefactor by making him acquainted with the truth, but he died without seeing his desires gratified.

The blessing came at last, but not till years had passed away. Far on beyond the prime of manhood, even upon the borders of old age, Lucullus found the Saviour. For years the world had lost all charms. Wealth and honor and power were nothing to him; his life was tinged with sadness that nothing could cure. But the Spirit of God at length entered into his heart, and through his divine power he at last was enabled to rejoice in the love of that Saviour, of whose power over the human heart he had witnessed so many striking proofs.

Fifteen centuries have rolled over the city of the Caesars since the persecution of Decius drove the humble followers of Jesus into the gloomy Catacombs. Let us take our stand upon the Appian Way and look around.

Before us goes the long array of tombs up to the ancient city. Here the mighty men of Rome once found a resting-place, carrying with them even to their graves all the pomp of wealth, of glory, and of power. Beneath our feet are the rude graves of those whom in life they cast out as unworthy to breathe the same air of heaven.

Now what a change! Around us lie these stately tombs all in ruins, their sanctity desecrated, their doors broken down, their dust scattered to the winds. The names of those who were buried here are unknown; the empire which they reared has fallen forever; the legions which they led to conquer have slept the sleep that knows no waking.

But on the memory of the persecuted ones who rest below a world looks back adoring their sepulcher has become a place of pilgrimage; and the work in which they took such a noble part has been handed down to us to be perpetuated for evermore.

Humbled, despised, outcast, afflicted, fame may not have written their names upon the scroll of history, yet this much we know,

"These are they which came out of great tribulation

And have washed their robes

And made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Therefore are they before the throne of God

And serve him day and night in his temple;

And He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

They shall hunger no more; neither thirst any more;

Neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat;

For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them,

And shall lead them unto living fountains of waters,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

THE END.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/martyrs-of-the-catacombs/xv-lucullus/>

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