

Destined for the Cross

by Paul E. Billheimer

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of self-sacrifice and the cross as essential for true authority and spiritual life in Christ.

Scripture: Psalm 118:27, Matthew 26:53, Matthew 27:39, Luke 23:35

Topics: "Self Sacrifice", "The Cross"

Description

Paul E. Billheimer preaches on the foundational principle of self-sacrifice in the universe, exemplified by Christ's choice to stay on the cross despite temptations to come down and rule without suffering. Through Calvary, God reveals that the pathway to true power and authority is through self-sacrifice, not self-saving. Believers are called to follow Christ's example of staying on the cross, allowing it to deliver them from self-seeking and self-promotion, ultimately leading to genuine authority over Satan.

Transcript

Self-sacrifice is the foundation upon which the universe is built, the law by which it operates. If sacrifice were not the supreme law of the universe, would God, the supreme ruler of the universe, operate on that principle? Through Calvary God is saying to us, "This is the throne of the universe, not only for Christ; it is the only pathway to power, authority, and rulership for everyone.

Satan challenged this principle and lost. In all the circumstances of daily life and practice, God is giving each of us the choice of acting on this principle in preparation for eternal rulership - or of coming down from the cross in self-saving, thus losing the crown. The only people who have genuine authority over Satan are those who choose to stay on the cross, allowing it to deliver them from all self-seeking, self-serving, and self-promotion.

"And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking Him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He be the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him" (Matthew 27:39-42).

"And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself if He be Christ, the chosen of God" (Luke 23:35).

Satan Offered Christ A Crossless Conquest

At various times in our Lord's life and ministry, Satan offered Christ an easy pathway to supremacy, or to power without the cross. But as often as these offers were made they were refused. Jesus deliberately chose the cross. The temptation and opportunity to escape the cross were ever present during His career. But He set His face like a flint and even finally precipitated His own death.

At the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus faced this alternative. "All the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them will I give Thee, if Thou wilt but fall down and worship me." This was an offer of a deathless conquest, of a crown without a cross. Indeed the whole force of the temptation lay in the prospect of power apart from suffering, of elevation without humiliation.

The same alternative was presented to Jesus in the visit of the Greeks who said to one of the disciples, "We would see Jesus." It is thought by some that the Greeks intended to ask Him to come to their country, where He could continue His work in safety, free from the threat of death. Jesus met that invitation with the words, "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; But if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Christ knew that His death must precede an extension of His life to the heathen world, and He refused to be sidetracked.

A third time He met this temptation. While they were on their way to Jerusalem near the close of His ministry, Jesus told the disciples what would happen to Him at Jerusalem, that He would be mocked, spit upon, rejected, and crucified of the chief priests and scribes. To the fleshly mind of Peter this would be a tragedy and result in the nullification of His entire ministry, to say nothing of the frustration of Peter's ambition to become a power in a temporal kingdom. He, therefore, took Jesus and began to rebuke Him and to say, "This shall never be to Thee." Again Jesus refused the temptation, saying to Peter, "Get thee behind Me, Satan."

In the scene before us Christ hangs upon the cross. His prophecies about His death are upon the point of fulfillment. In this dread moment His anticipations are fully justified. The hour for which He came into the world has struck--almost, but not quite. Once more, in the agony of crucifixion, in the awful throes of death, in the last moments of agonizing pain, the temptation reappears, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross."

It is not necessary to say that Christ had the power to do so if He had chosen to use it. "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matthew 26:53,54). This He said to Peter in the Garden.

He could have come down. The temptation was sharpest to save Himself and evade the cross in the hour when He was draining the very dregs of the bitter cup of Calvary. With His pulses racing and the fever raging, with every nerve and muscle an agony of pain, with the sense of abandonment crushing Him, the taunt, "If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross," came with terrible force.

Will He come down? Will He answer the challenge to save Himself? Will He finally refuse the cross? The throne of the universe is at stake. If He comes down from the cross, He will lose the throne. For strange as it may seem, here is where Satan was finally defeated, completely undone, and cast out of his seat of authority.

As Dr. F. J. Huegel says, "The world's throne is a cross. Christ reigns from the tree." Because He went to the cross, today Christ is supreme in the universe and that supremacy will one day be openly manifested as the book of Revelation clearly teaches. Remember, beloved, there is not one way for Him, and another for us. This is a satanic deception.

This Truth More Than Historical

All of this is purely historical. Christ reigns today because He went to the cross and stayed there until death released His life unto the world. But it is more than a historical truth. It is moral as well, for Paul says, writing of believers in Romans 6: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." "Therefore, we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father; even so we also should walk in newness of life." "Planted in the likeness of His death."

And in Galatians 2, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

These Scriptures and others teach very clearly that all believers share in Christ's death. But as Dr. Huegel points out, our death in Christ is a potential communion. He says, "Though from the divine viewpoint it is a thing long since consummated, historically and objectively completed, yet from the human angle, it is something held in trust for us, which only upon the exercise of faith becomes effective in experience."

The Battle Begins

When we consecrate ourselves wholly to be sanctified, cleansed from the carnal mind and filled with the Spirit, we agree that our "old man," who has been judicially crucified with Christ, shall be actually and practically nailed to the cross. When God sees that we mean business, that the consent of the will is really genuine, He accepts the sacrifice. Then the battle begins!

What we have done theoretically has to be practically wrought out in all the endless varieties of daily life, Christian experience and conduct. Once we agree that our "old man" shall be actually and practically nailed to the cross, a great hue and cry is immediately raised by Satan, who begins to sympathize with all the life of nature and of self, just as Peter sympathized with Jesus when he said, "Lord, this shall never be to Thee."

Unless we are very careful, we will accept the sympathy, agree with Satan that our flesh must not die, that we are too good for the cross, that in our case the cross is a mistake. Sympathy is a very subtle thing, and while it is often a Christlike trait, it may also be of the flesh. Jesus refused Peter's sympathy, saying that it was of the flesh and not of God.

Christ knew that His throne was a cross and He would not be turned aside. When God is dealing with someone in discipline, when He is letting the cross work in a life, be careful how you sympathize with him. You may be taking sides with him against God. By such sympathy, you may indeed draw that person to yourself but you may draw him away from God.

Satan will always do everything possible to prevent your going to the cross in full consecration for the death of your self-life. When you have made the initial surrender to allow the cross to slay your "old man" of the flesh, he will do everything possible to get you to come down, as he tempted Jesus to do. He may

have some Peter or his brother to say, "This shall never be to thee." Oswald Chambers says that "No saint should interfere with the way God disciplines another saint." He calls that being an "amateur providence."

The Battle Intensified

As soon as you surrender your "old man," the old life of nature and of self, to be practically nailed to the cross, Satan or his instruments, like Peter, may begin to sympathize with all the life of nature which has not yet practically gone to the cross. While what we call the carnal mind, that which rebels against God, may indeed be slain, so that the whole being desires only the will of God, yet as each individual experience of new and deeper participation in and application of the cross arises, the temptation is always present--"Save thyself and come down from the cross."

Although we have yielded ourselves to be crucified, when it comes to individual instances of practical application of the cross, who is there who will dare say that he never yields to the temptation to "come down from the cross"?

While a great many people know what it means to take the position and commit themselves to the cross in a crisis of consecration and faith and to experience the consciousness of cleansing from the carnal mind, very few of us who are so-called sanctified believers and holiness professors know what it means actually to live the crucified life. There is utterly a fault among us on this point.

For lack of teaching on the daily and progressive application of the cross, for lack of teaching on moment-by-moment living the crucified life, we holiness professors have for the most part remained shallow and immature.

After you have yielded initially to go to the cross in full consecration for time and eternity, it may require real determination to resist the temptation to compromise your consecration and come down from the cross. Psalm 118:27 urges this kind of resolution: "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horn of the altar."

This does not sound like a picnic. For lack of emphasis upon the crucified life, our Christianity is sadly lacking in depth. Not realizing that the sanctified life is nothing less than a life of ever-increasing participation in Christ's death, we have, in unguarded moments, come down from the cross. Instead of majoring on a life of crucifixion constantly maintained by deliberately refusing to come down from the cross, we have depended upon a past crisis. When we have realized evidences of the flesh, instead of taking them at once to the cross by confession and restitution, we have merely pointed back to that crisis and said, "Since I have been sanctified, there can be nothing more in my life that needs the cross. I am through with the cross. I died once and I am through with death." That attitude is the mother of a whole brood of spiritual vices as ugly as they are numerous.

How One Comes Down From The Cross

Perhaps someone is saying, "Just what do you mean by coming down from the cross?" My answer is, "Any saving of self is a coming down from the cross." Any taking of an easy way where spiritual principles are involved is a coming down from the cross. To be explicit and exact: All efforts to excuse, defend, protect, vindicate, or save self are, in effect, a coming down from the cross.

Self-pity is coming down from the cross. Self-pity is a form of self-defense. It means that you think you have been wronged and you are sorry for yourself because you cannot do anything about it. When you

give in to self-pity, you have come down from the cross.

Submitting to resentment is a coming down from the cross. Resentment is self-defense. It means that you feel that you have been wronged and you are peeved because you cannot do anything about it.

Self-vindication is a coming down from the cross, for vindication is a form of self-defense. What troubles have resulted from efforts at self-vindication! Whole churches have been torn apart and souls have been damned because someone could not refrain from seeking to vindicate self. You have to come down from the cross in order to vindicate yourself. Vindication is self-defense.

Refusing to accept blame and placing it upon others is coming down from the cross. You know how hard it is to be blamed for something and how easy it is to throw blame on others. That is a form of self-defense and is a coming down from the cross, When one is misunderstood, undue effort to explain oneself is the same thing. We have not the faith to do as Jesus did: commit our souls unto God as unto a faithful Creator.

Self-justification means that we have come down from the cross. To take offense at a real or supposed slight is to come down from the cross. Most, if not all, unkind criticism is a form of self-defense and self-justification and is, therefore, a coming down from the cross. Party spirit, which is nothing more than rooting for my spiritual group or point of view, resulting in a definite reflection upon the intelligence or sincerity of all who do not agree with me, is only a subtle form of self-justification and saving of self.

I think no honest and informed person will dispute the statement that almost all of these things, if not prevalent, are at least common in practically every holiness denomination and many so-called Spirit-filled churches. I will agree if you say that even worse things than these prevail or are common in many large denominations, but that does not in the least justify toleration of these things in our midst. It only proves what I have been saying, that although multitudes of us can witness to having been saved and sanctified, or Spirit filled, very few of us would dare to say we are living the crucified life.

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