

The Cross and the Ministry of the Unveiled Face

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of the cross and the ministry of the Lord's people, highlighting the importance of recognizing and responding to the cross and leaving a trail of Christ's influence.

Duration: 1:06:59

Scripture: Romans 6:6, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 2:13-14, Colossians 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16

Topics: "The Cross"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the ministry of Christ in the world. He highlights that as believers, we are vessels through which Christ ministers to the spiritual needs of others. The speaker encourages the audience to read the letter to the Galatians and reflect on the distinction between the ministry of Christ and our own efforts. He concludes by acknowledging our weaknesses as human vessels but reminds us that we carry the treasure of Christ within us.

Transcript

Thy servant, Jerry, be not silent, Lord, wait my soul upon thee for the quickening one. Fill me with the knowledge of thy glorious will, all thine own good pleasure in thy child fulfilled. Lord, this we make our individual prayer.

No words could better express our desire at this time. So we say again, speak, thy servant Jerry, and when thou dost speak, give us the enlarged part, and the quickened run in the way of thy commandment for thy namesake. Amen.

We are well launched into this matter of the place and meaning of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, as it is in these various letters of the New Testament. There's a wonderful thing about these letters and their message. It is that although they were just the immediate outgoing of the heart of an apostle to companies of the Lord's people, here and there, in relation to some existing situation and need under the Holy Spirit's sovereign government, and all unbeknown to the writer, the apostle, they were documents for the whole dispensation, as much for us as for those to whom they were. The apostle did not know that he was writing the Bible.

He did not realize that people down two thousand years would be studying every word that he put down, and every syllable that he put down, and would be having their lives affected, one way or another, throughout all the centuries, and the effects and fruits to appear in the coming eternity. He had no idea of that, but the Holy Spirit did. And we are found here a little company in that sovereign ordering in relation to these writings, these personal letters of a shepherd apostle, concerned for the sheep.

Another thing which we have already indicated, which is quite wonderful, how that same sovereign spirit of God governed and controlled the arrangement of these letters, altogether out of chronological order. The Holy Spirit saw to it that this one came first, and that one came second, and that one came third, and that one came fourth, in a precise spiritual order, a sequence of wonderful progressiveness in the spiritual life. We have noted that.

We have considered the place of the cross in the letter to the Romans, how foundational it all is there, and all inclusive of what follows throughout the New Testament. And then, in such wonderful wisdom and understanding, the Holy Spirit saw to it the first letter to the Corinthians came next, beginning to break up the inclusive and comprehensive foundation of the cross in the Romans, to apply it. And everybody of us here surely has seen that this is the next thing.

The cross and the two humanities, something that has got to be settled before you can get any further. Everything waits upon the recognition and the response and reaction to this very wonderful thing, as the Corinthians, in their condition, perhaps at least six years after the apostle went to them, drew out this letter, and in it revealed for all time that there can be, and often are, as there was in Corinthians, two kinds of Christians. Two kinds of Christians.

Christians in two categories. The political Christians, called the natural, and the spiritual Christians. And they are in two very differently different categories, as this letter shows.

If you wanted to read again to see what the one class is, and what the other class is, they are so clearly and definitely defined, and one is shown to necessitate the application of the cross right into the very heart of Christians. Yes, right into the history of those who are the Lord. The cross is called for in a very serious and solemn way in many, many Christians, who, like these Corinthians, were Corinthian Christians.

God only knows how they needed the work of the cross to change them from the one kind of Christian to another. From the one category to the other. From the natural, or the merely holy, which is, in another word, the holy self kind of Christian, into the men and women of the spirit.

Now I'm not saying again to emphasize that distinction. It's here, and that is the first practical application of the cross, after its inclusive meaning has been set forth. It's been broken down now, and this, within the whole circle of the meaning of the cross, this is the first thing that has got to be settled.

It can't go on until that is settled. We're coming, this evening, to the great transition from the first letter to the second. And what a transition it is.

It's really a progression as well as a transition. That is, it's not only a changeover on the same level, it is the development of the new level, or kind of Christian. Wonderful transition, or partiover.

A wonderful progression in the spiritual situation, and what is now possible. Now let me say again, and I trust that you are seeking to take very careful part in what we are saying, because I want to say once more to you, dear friends, I am not here just to give you more doctrine and teaching and information. God does

not carry these things into our being and create a real issue in us.

We fail. This conference of conversation has failed. We never want to have another one.

It's very vital. This thing should be plowed right deep down into us, and I have it to say. So I repeat that this difference, this distinction, which is brought out so clearly and fully in the first letter, and I would ask that you go back to your room and read that letter again in the light of what we have pointed out.

Read it carefully. Not only verse by verse, but sentence by sentence, and you will see how true it is. We have, before we can move on, we have to have a settlement about this matter of the distinction that is brought to light in letter number one of the Corinthians.

There's got to be a settlement with us about this. A recognition of the fact that there are two kinds of Christians possible. One kind, a purely holy type of Christian.

They are a fact. And another type, a truly holy spirit kind. Very distinct are these kinds.

And the fact of that difference has got, first of all, to be faced, settled, accepted, before we can go any further. The Lord won't get us any further until we've recognized it as a fact, revealed in the word of God, that you can be what Paul calls carnal or spirit, natural, holy, or people of the spirit. Of course, we could spend a lot of time on that, but we have tried just to touch on it, to indicate what is meant by it.

Now, let me pause. May I pause to just add this word. A truly spiritual person, that is, a person who is governed and led by the Holy Spirit, who lives in the spirit, is one who brings everything to the Lord to ask his mind about that.

Even your dress, and anything else about your personal presence, your manner, your behavior, your talk, or your silence radiates holiness in just chatter. Sprinkling away the values of eternal meanings by just standing in ourselves to talk. You know, the cross means very really to be planted right into the tongue of many Christians.

And not mischievous tongues essentially, not evil tongues essentially, but just tongues that are not controlled by the Holy Spirit. The power of the spirit to be quiet and silent when it's right to do so. That's what I mean.

You don't believe in the inspiration of the scriptures, do you? Do you? Oh, wait a minute. Let the women adorn themselves in modest apparel. Do you believe in the inspiration of the scriptures? Look at the vast number of our Christian girls who dress in a shameful way, just attracting attention to themselves, making themselves just, you know, stirring factors in sensuality.

Christian girls dress in modest apparel. You know, I could say a lot about that. All that sort of thing.

A spiritual person would go to the Lord about it. These are practical matters. He said, Lord, is this glorifying to me? The Holy Spirit able to just put his finger upon things like that, all sorts of things, a thousand and one things, and make us aware of something not quite right or a little bit uncomfortable about something.

Remember, many years ago now, a dear woman came to us. She had a Roman Catholic background. She was in a very affluent position in a large business house in London as the chief buyer.

She cut her hair short. She wore an abundance of decorations and, you know, all the rest, and her dress. She came to us.

She was troubled about her spiritual well-being. She stayed in our guest house. No one said anything in such contrast to the simplicity and modesty.

No one said a word. She stayed on, went to her business, and came back. Suddenly we noticed that she was letting her hair grow.

It looked not too good, you know, to begin with. And then we noticed that some of the earrings were missing. And other changes were taking place.

Not so many months passed before she was altogether changed. Not cute, not shoddy, not careless. Nice.

Really nice. Good in dress and appearance. Then was the time to say, what made you change? Why did you do this? She said, the Lord just spoke to me about it.

She said, if anybody of you had ever mentioned that, I would have walked out and never come back again. The Lord spoke to my heart. She became a servant of the Lord.

She is now in India serving the Lord in there many years. She was in Spain before that, serving the Lord. Some here know her.

Getting on in years now, in her 80s. But something, a product of a walk with the Lord in the spirit. You understand what I mean by a spiritual person? It does not offend the spirit of God.

Well, have I said too much? I told you last night you were going to be hurt. Well, if it hurts, I trust it is the Holy Spirit. And you will say, go on Lord, go on.

Don't you spare anything. Well now, I have indicated in that way, so briefly and imperfectly, what we were talking about, the difference between a solely good person, that is not necessarily an unsaved person, but a solely good person and a really spiritual. And until that difference is recognized, seen and accepted, and we have had a transaction with the Lord about it and said to the Lord, now Lord, if that's the truth, and it's in the Word and I believe it must be true, I commit myself to you to be made a truly spiritual child of God in all of that means.

You've got to do that and then you can pass into the second letter to the Corinthians. You see, the cross comes in there, doesn't it? The cross comes in. My, yes.

It's the cross indeed when it touches us in these matters, very practical matters. It's the cross. That is the transition as a fact.

Now we have to go on to consider the nature of the transition and its necessity. And the second letter to the Corinthians is occupied with what? It is the ministry of the Lord's people. The ministry of the Lord's people.

The whole letter is occupied with this matter. Of the Lord's people in ministry. Now I'm going to stop to define that.

But I want you to notice this to begin with. While the apostle has more to say about himself personally in this letter than in any other letter that he wrote, you know more of Paul after you've read this letter than you would ever know by reading all his other letters put together. It's the most autobiographical of his writings.

Although he has so much to say about himself, he is saying it in the first place about himself as the Lord's servant. The Lord's servant. And in the second place he is transmitting all this to the church at Corinth.

And in effect he is saying what is true of me as the Lord's servant has got to become true of you. Not special people amongst you, but you as a church. That is each individual making up the church in Corinth.

For this ministry is corporate ministry. It is not just individual. It is corporate ministry.

And so he is speaking here about the ministry of the church in its localities. Which of course you can at once mentally make objective and say, well, group of people. No, you.

Me. This applies as much to us as to the whole church. It comes down to the individual.

There cannot be a church without the individual. It demands all the individuals to make up the body, the members to make up the body. So I must underline this to get very clear that what is here about ministry is shown by this letter to apply not only to Paul, though to him in the first place, but to every member of the church at Corinth.

And that means to every member of the church down through the ages into this very hall tonight. It is the ministry that is before us. Well, first of all, what is the ministry? What is the ministry? Could you answer that question? Well, it is getting a Bible.

Studying it. You know something about it. Put it under your arm and off you go.

Is that the ministry? Is it putting on a certain kind of collar and attire? Now you are a minister. That is the ministry. One of the most pathetically, pathetically, tragio-comedies that I have ever met.

Tragedy, yes. To me comedy was also. Some years ago, I knew a man who for 30 years had been ministering the word of God.

Here, there, all over the place. And he had been the leader of what was called the spiritual clinic in Corinth. Oh, he was fully occupied with this all his time.

And then one day I went to a convention and I saw this dear man coming toward me down the road. And he made his way to me in a person's stance and said, You see brother, I am now in the ministry. He was wearing a clerical collar.

I am now in the ministry. You know what I mean? I said tragedy of tragedy and in a certain sense comedy of comedy. That is not the ministry.

That is a false conception. Forgive me, I don't mean to draw a laugh and make things worse. It is too sad to have these false conceptions and notions of what the ministry is.

If you were asked now to put down on a slip of paper your definition of the ministry, what would you say? Now here you have the great New Testament document, as it has turned out to be, on the ministry of the

church and its members, which surprises us all. What does it reveal to be the ministry? What is it? It is just and only this, but this definitely, the ministration of Christ to other people. The ministration of Christ, bringing Christ into view, not mentally, but livingly.

And giving Christ, so that where you are and where you have been, something of Christ is left. Something of Christ is left behind. They do not know mentally something more about Christ, but they have felt the presence of Christ.

They have realized Christ by your presence. Now I am going to show that in a minute in this letter. But that is the ministry, if there is anything at all in this letter that speaks to the ministry.

Just that people who come into contact with us, and with whom we come into contact, come into contact with Christ. And that as we go on through life, what poor creatures we are, and all take account of that. Yet, somehow or other, we are leaving a trail behind us of the influence, the sweet flavor, that's all there is, of Christ.

People will at last, who have known us, touched us, be able to say, well, yes, plenty of human faults if you like, but something of Christ I have come into because of that woman, that man. That's very testing, isn't it? Very challenging. It wants spiritual people to be like that, but that is the ministry.

Get clear out of your mind all these other ideas, professionalism in ministry, ministerialism, and all the rest of churchianity and ecclesiasticism. Hold up, get rid of it. I'm right down to business.

My presence has to be a ministry of Christ in this world. And if people are in real spiritual need, I have something to minister to their need. Something of Christ.

Christ by the Spirit is ministered through me. That sounds very simple, isn't it? Upsets a lot of our high-flown ideas about the ministry, but it's very practical, very real. That is the ministry in this letter.

You see, the apostle gives us some illustrations of this in the letter. I wish you'd all read it before you came here this evening, so that you're all fresh in your mind, because we have only an hour. By the way, then, read the letter to the Galatians before tomorrow night.

But here, the apostle gives us some illustrations of the meaning of the ministry in the terms which I have used. First of all, he takes us to this wonderful matter of Moses coming down from the mountain with the table of stone of the law, and the glory of God being on his face. He came down.

Glory on his face. His face was shining with the glory of God. He came down, and as he moved towards the camp, that glory on his face was so strong that the people could not dare to look.

When he went in to read the law, the people could not dare to look because of the glory. And it was necessary for Moses to put a veil over his face when he read the law, the testament. A face full of glory.

But the people, unable, unable to live in the good of it, and live by the power of it, and to appreciate it, and to enjoy it. And for it to abide with them by reason of the lack of spiritual capacity. It says they could not look on his face.

They could not. They hadn't the capacity required for looking at the glory of God. Now you know the rest of the story as Paul outlines it.

He brings it over into this dispensation. And he says when it shall turn to the Lord, the Lord Jesus, the veil is taken away. And then he says this wonderful thing, this marvelous thing upon which, dear friends, you can dwell for the rest of your life without any exaggeration.

God who said let light shine, let light shine, the great spirit at the beginning, let there be light. God who said let light be has shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And there is no veil.

We have now spiritual capacity. We are spiritual people. We have the Holy Spirit.

The face of Jesus Christ holds the regulation of the glory of God. My, what a regulation of the glory of God the face of Jesus is. That word face of course is only symbolism.

You know, you know by a person's face a good deal about the person, don't you? A good deal about the person. The face is supposed to be the index of the person's character and the content of their life. That's how it's used here.

There is in Jesus Christ an unveiled regulation of the Father and that has shined into our hearts. Shined into our hearts. It is not an objective thing of sun or aurora or halo outside.

It's come into our hearts. In other words, by the blessed Holy Spirit we have come to see the Lord Jesus in the Spirit. To appreciate the wonder of God in Jesus Christ.

It's shined into our hearts. And the apostle is saying by implication, if that light of God's glory came upon the face of Moses and was seen by all the people in the same way what has shined into our hearts ought to be seen by people. You cannot have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining in your hearts without people knowing something about it.

That's the ministry. We dwell a great deal upon that part of the letter about the veil and so on. There's a lot more to do with it.

Now Paul is saying that's the ministry. It's the ministry of the glory of Christ revealed in our hearts. And then he uses another illustration which has already been mentioned in the living epistles.

He's moved into another realm. He's perhaps moved into the realm of what is called the ostraca, the broken pieces of earthenware which were cast out of every home in what you call the, what is it, the place where you put your rubbish? We call it the dustbin. You call it the, well, yes, rubbish.

They were thrown out there on these pieces of earthenware messages were written and sent like letters. That's how they communicated their messages and their information. They were taken many, many miles.

A boy was in the army, the Roman army, far, far away. His letter wasn't a nice thing like your air letters, you know. His was a bit of pottery with a message written on it from father or mother.

And when these were received and the message was taken, the pottery was broken, it was thrown outside. It was called the ostraca. That's where we get our word ostracism from.

Something thrown out. Now Paul is taking that up and he is translating it into the life of the believer in the matter of ministry. Not referring as a sideline.

He's getting his metaphors a bit mixed up. He usually does, Paul. He's too much in a hurry to sort things out and put them all in proper order.

He refers again to Moses. Tables of stone, pen of iron. No, not on tables of stone, the pen of iron.

But on tables which are hearts of flesh. Written upon by the spirit of the living God. Finger of God in the heart.

And you become a living letter. He will personally say, we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Here you have your earthen vessels with the message written.

We are earthen vessels and in us has been written by the finger of God. The knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. With the effect, we are living vessels read and known of all men.

And what do these documents say? What do these human vessels say? These vessels of fragile flesh, what are they saying? They are making known the glory of God in Jesus Christ. We are that. That's the ministry.

I say again, it's challenging. It's testing. But that is the ministry according to this letter.

He illustrates, you see, the ministry. The living letter. And there is a transition having taken place.

First of all, transition from the outward tables of stone. See, written with a pen. Outward to the inward in the heart.

This ministry is something inside now. Not objective. It's not your library.

Not your collection of commentaries. Pull them down and make a sermon. It's what the Holy Spirit is saying to you in your heart about the Lord Jesus.

These things may be useful afterwards. But first of all, what is the Lord saying inside of me? What is the burden, to use the prophetic language, what is the burden of the word of the Lord in my heart? In my heart. Thy word was like a fire in my bones.

This is the problem. Transition from the outward to the inward. That's the ministry.

What you've got inside, that makes the ministry. From the outward to the inward. From the letter to the Spirit, and the apostle draws that contrast.

The letter kills. The Spirit makes it alive. Transition from the letter, that is the mere verbiage of truth, even though it seems Christian, to the spiritual meaning and interpretation and power of that thing.

The livingness of that thing. Not the dead letter, but the livingness of it. See now.

That is the ministry. Transition from death to death, the letter to the Spirit, unto life. It all amounts to this.

Use Paul's own words here and elsewhere. The inward revelation by the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ as the manifestation of God the Father. I'm not saying apart from the scriptures, or independently of the scriptures, or as substitute for the scriptures.

I have had in my life of ministry very sad instances of people, I don't know why this has always been women, but that can both be left aside. Some of you say, the Lord has shown me so-and-so. And I have said, but that so-and-so is not according to the scriptures.

Now it doesn't matter. That doesn't matter. The Lord has shown it to me.

And you're not surprised if there is confusion in a life. No. Through the scriptures.

Oh, keep living the word. Live in the word. Let the word of God dwell in you richly, but in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

It is, dear friends, through the word, the Holy Spirit revealing. Some of us know quite well what it is to have a fairly large comprehensive knowledge of the content of the Bible so that we could take a blackboard and outline any book of the Bible at any given moment. And never to have seen in the way that has completely revolutionized our lives, what that means.

What that means. That's a very different thing, isn't it? What it means from just what it says. Do you understand that? But it is the Holy Spirit, through the word, revealing Christ within.

That is the ministry of the church. And that is, well now, the transition, the nature of the transition, the cost of the transition. It is here, of course, that the cross comes in.

Because such a life, such a life of testimony, such a life of influence, such a life of ministering Christ, such a ministry. This kind of ministry is a very costly thing. Don't make any mistake about it.

And we should dwell long and earnestly upon this day. The cost of such a ministry, ministry as it is called, is not always a costly thing to those who carry it out. It is mechanical, mechanical.

No, but this kind of ministry is very costly. And as I say, that is where the cross comes in. Now, isn't it rather impressive, it takes nothing away, but it is rather impressive that in this second letter to the Corinthians the cross is not mentioned once by me.

And yet there is no letter in the New Testament where the cross is more implicit or as implicit. Everywhere is implied, oh powerfully implied. And so you find that the outstanding words in this letter are the sufferings, the afflictions which abound to us.

You can look that up. I believe you will find that some nine times the sufferings and the afflictions of Christ are referred to in this letter. It is only another way, isn't it, of speaking of the cross.

The cross in the life of the servant and the service of the Lord. And if the apostle Paul is keeping himself in a right and proper sense in view in relation to service, what a lot he says in this letter about his sufferings. My, you haven't perhaps studied it, what this dear man had to go through.

He gives us later a catalogue of the outward adversities, shipwrecks and the privations and the nakedness and the perils on sea and on land, robbers and all that kind of thing. Well, that's pretty hard. But there is another list that you collect from this letter to which he refers, but not completely.

You have to arrive at it by deduction. And the strange thing is that it came to him from Corinth. The things that these dear believers who owe everything spiritually to him, the things that they said about him.

First of all, there is a clique, or two or three cliques in Corinth which wouldn't have Paul. They said, we are of Apollos, or I am of Apollos, and I am of Cephas, another superior clique, I am of Christ. Meaning, we are not Apollos.

Two or three sections who were not having Paul. And then the things they said about him. They said, his personal presence is despicable.

I suppose referring to his body, his physical appearance, the scars and marks of his suffering and of his physical affliction. They said, his personal presence is despicable. His letters are very bold.

He is an autocrat. He is turning everything to his own interest, trying to get a following for himself. He is even using the funds for his personal ends.

And where shall we go on? All these things are in this letter. They are all there. The man discredited by those who owed him so much, despised, humiliated.

And he says, the more I love you, the less I be loved. This letter is the cry, you might say, the sub of a broken heart. Because of what he met, not from the world alone, he could get on with that, go through with that, but from inside.

False brethren, false friends, treacherous and disloyal, and many other unkind things. And these are all called the sufferings of Christ, the afflictions of Christ. And then that one outstanding incident, and he said, I would have you know, seeing that they fail me, I was pressed beyond my measure of endurance.

I had the sentence of death, the sentence that it was death, pressed out of measure. And the sentence of death, and one more thing, the thorn in his flesh, which did not come either from the world or from Christians, something that the Lord allowed. There was given me a stake, thorn is not the word, it is not big enough, a stake in my flesh.

A messenger of Satan to baptise me, for which thing I thought the Lord Christ, that he would remove it. Can you visualize it? The man goes, oh Lord, can you not be pleased to relieve me of this thing? Begging the Lord, no answer. Back again, Lord, Lord, do, do something about this thing, take it away.

It does make the going so hard, so difficult, take it away Lord, no answer. Third time, and we see our Lord in Gethsemane in three sufferings of Christ. Would it be possible, third time, and then the Lord answers, and how did he answer? No, no, my grace is sufficient for thee, my strength is made perfect in weakness, the apostles response, most gladly therefore will I suffer.

Now, have I said enough? I haven't said all I'm after, to show that a ministry like this, which has been set forth here, is a costly ministry, and suffering is inevitable. That's fine, fine. God is more concerned with quality than with quantity.

God is supremely concerned with the essential, the intrinsic value, not the broad sweep and spread over of the superficial, but the deep, the real. The thing that is going to reproduce because of its intrinsic value, when this man is gone, what God is doing in him will last through two thousand years at least, and grow, and grow, and grow, till it fills the whole world. Through the sufferings of this man.

It's a costly ministry, this kind of ministry. Have I put you off the ministry? Well, it depends entirely upon what our hearts are set upon, dear friends. Whether we just want to be ships that pass in the night, and

speak to each other in passing, and then disappear forever out of sight.

We want to be just some butterfly flitting across the world, without any vital impact, effect, influence. You want to be like that? Is that what you want to be? Come and gone, and nothing very much to show for it when you're gone. Or do we really, in our hearts, want it to be like this? Something that will live on, and grow, and grow, when we are gone? When we are gone, that's the most testing thing, you know, for anybody, to live for a time to come when you'll not be here to know about it.

I wonder, maybe he does know, I don't know those secrets of what's known when you've gone in the presence of the Lord. But I sometimes wonder, if they don't know, if Paul was to come back here into this world today, and see all the world full of books written about his letters. And all the churches and Christians, whether they be spiritual or otherwise, who are just reading him, and studying him, and talking Paul.

I was a minister of a church in North London once, and the name of that church was the name of a well-known Doctor of Divinity of bygone days. And they built this church as a memorial to him. And the great Doctor Parker, have you heard of him? Minister of the City Temple, London.

He came to the funeral of this man, to take the funeral service, and there was something written about the great man who'd gone to the Lord. Something very, very, uh, congratulatory. There's lots of wonderful things said in this about the man who'd gone.

And Doctor Parker, I wonder if Doctor Raleigh, for whom the church was built as a memorial, I wonder if Doctor Raleigh were to come back here today, he would recognize him. And I wonder if he would agree that the people thought of him like that. Well, you know, it's the upward very largely is going to tell what the value of our ministry, our life here has been.

So, the apostle has something to say about that. We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay. Our outward man is perishing, so on.

But test the eternal value, perhaps of a short lifetime or a full lifetime. At most, and altogether inadequate things, so far as we are concerned, four vessels of fragile clay. Have you ever said to the Lord, as I have many times, Lord, you've got a poor piece of clay here.

A very poor piece of clay. I don't know why ever you chose it. Yes, and yet, and yet, the great apostle Paul would call himself a poor piece of clay, a vessel of fragile clay.

That the exceeding greatness of the power might be of God and not of ourselves. And he goes on with his catalogue of troubles. We are persecuted, we are, we are, we are, but the intrinsic value, the fruit of suffering, the fruit of suffering.

Well, I'm not mincing matters, as we say. I'm not hiding from you. It depends on what kind of ministry.

And surely you know, friends, if you have any experience at all, you know that it's the people who have helped you most. And most deeply in your spiritual life have been people who have gone through the fires. Who have come to know the Lord in suffering.

Isn't it true? And you know quite well that the people who haven't suffered, can't do any good for you, can't help you. You know that. You have to say, my, they haven't been through suffering yet.

They can't help us. Isn't it true? Well, here it is. Here's the kind, what ministry is.

What it is. It's nature. It's meaning.

It's value. It's eternal wealth. It's spiritual character.

Of life-giving. And the cost of it. I, not for anything, depress you.

I will not leave a cloud over your heart. God forbid. But, I know this is true.

And I believe that there are enough people here, if not all, enough people here, who would really, really respond and say, Lord, you make my life of some account. Some eternal account. Lord, do, do, whatever you don't do, do this one thing.

When I've lived my life, leave spiritual and eternal values behind. They may show themselves again in other lives. I'll not be here to see it.

Know anything about it. But nevertheless, Lord, that is not the point. My pleasure, my gratification, my satisfaction is not the point.

It's yours. It's what you get. Are you, are you really committed to the Lord in that way? And would you, therefore, take up your cross? That's, of course, the gospel way of putting it.

It's a figurative way. You don't get it like that after the actual cross. But what it means, you do get, taking up your cross, denying yourself, your soul, and following him.

I won't add more. I don't think you have enough to see. This is the seeing of the Lord by the Holy Spirit's illumination in our hearts.

And the spontaneous, the spontaneous effect of it. Oh, thank God for the spontaneity of this. You see, you don't have to struggle and strain for the ministry.

I did that for years, having to get up the sermons, and find the straw for the bricks, and keep the thing going because I was paid a salary to be a minister. Oh, the agony of it all. Until that great crisis of Romans 6, since when that strain, that kind of strain has gone out in spontaneity.

It's an open heaven. An open heaven for spontaneous living. Well, is that enough? Lord, give us silence and serious exercise about this, or come little, so that when we've gone from this, everything that's not gone with us, that we were here for, Lord, there may be that which has to be corrected, or straightened out, or more clearly apprehended.

But we have sought to convey to thy people something of what thou hast laid upon our hearts, and we can only commit the issues to thee. Blessed Lord, make this night really, cunningly profitable. There shall be intrinsic values from these lives.

Oh, make us these living epistles, read and known of all men. Make our hearts these tables upon which the Spirit of God writes the revelation of the glory of God, the face of Jesus Christ. All that this figurative speech really means, make real.

In us we pray, and give us grace. We may triumph, triumph in the afflictions, triumph in the sufferings, triumph in the adversities, and know that they are the sufferings of Christ, the fellowship of his Son. And

they must therefore be very profitable, very fruitful, if they are his.

So be it. And now, let thy hand be upon us as we leave this place, not wanting to quench anything that is really living and spiritual, but nevertheless to save us from in any way dissipating, dissipating, what thou, Lord, hast tried to save. So be it.

For thy glory, praise, and honor, forever and ever. Amen.

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