

"THE MARKS OF THE LORD JESUS"

"From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Galatians 6:17).

This verse has a plaintiveness, a tenderness, and a sweetness all its own. The Galatians were a fickle and spasmodic people. At first they loved Paul devotedly and obeyed him heartily. At one time they wanted to worship him as a god. Later they turned against him, questioned his authority, set aside his apostleship, and repudiated his doctrine of salvation by grace apart from works.

Paul had his troubles and many of them. Anybody who looked at him saw his body covered with the signs of pain and care. The haggard, wrinkled face; the bent figure; the trembling hands; the scars which he had worn since the day when they stoned him at Lystra, since the day when he was shipwrecked at Melita; all these had robbed him forever of the handsomeness which he had when he sat, as a boy, at the feet of old Gamaliel.

Paul was stamped and marked by life. The wounds of his conflicts, the furrows of his years, were on him. And all these wounds and furrows had come to him since his conversion. They were closely bound up with the service of his Master, to whom he had given himself at Damascus. He had suffered all this for the sake of his Christ.

Paul was familiar with grief, pain, sorrow, suffering, and shame. He had been beaten, mobbed, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, hounded, and persecuted. He was scourged with thirty-nine stripes by the Jews on five different occasions. He was beaten with rods thrice. He was stoned once and left for dead. He relates a part of his experiences as follows: II Corinthians 11:24-27. Paul was a great sufferer. I doubt whether any man ever suffered more than Paul. Without the sustaining grace of God to help him bear it, his frail body could not have endured so much.

However, Paul did not go around whining and bemoaning his fate because of his suffering. He rejoiced in all this suffering because God had accounted him worthy to suffer for his Lord. But the thing that did sting Paul to the quick was the fact that these Galatians whom Paul had led out of the grossest sort of heathenism were denying his apostleship, and repudiating his doctrine of salvation by grace apart from works. This is what made Paul sick at heart. He comes with the tender, personal, heart-breaking appeal of the text and says in effect, "Look at the marks of the Master on my body! They are the proof of my love to my Lord, and of my apostleship." In substance, he said to his critics, "I have proved by claims by my conduct, my preaching, and my sacrifices. Behold the scars on my body. I have earned them in His service. They are the marks of my Master." "Henceforth let no man cause me trouble," by gainsaying my doctrine, impugning my apostleship, or imposing upon me the labor of a defense. He made this plea on the grounds that he bore in his body the marks of the Master.

The word "marks" in the text comes from the Greek word *stigmata*. We get our word *stigma* from it. *Stigma* is a word of bad repute. But in the Greek *stigmata* there is nothing of shame. It simply meant marks or brands, alluding to the practice of flesh marking, which was well known to the Galatians.

It seems that there were five classes of people who were branded. It was a common thing to brand slaves, the brand being a mark of ownership, or a means of precaution against running away, or even a mode of punishment. Branding was also common among

soldiers. Soldiers had the names or initials of their favorite generals tattooed on their arms or hands. The main idea in the branding of the soldier was that of allegiance. Also, religious devotees were often branded. Their dedication to a god was frequently signalized by brands. Brands were also inflicted upon criminals, so that their identity might be open to immediate detection, and their infamy become patent to all. God Himself branded Cain when he murdered Abel. Branding marks were sometimes inflicted upon the abhorred, as a mark of opprobrium and insult.

These, then, were the five classes subject to branding -- the slave, the soldier, the devotee, the criminal, and the abhorred; and these are the five meanings of the brandings -- on the slave, a mark of ownership, on the soldier, a mark of allegiance, on the devotee, a mark of dedication, on the criminal, a mark of exposure, and on the abhorred, a mark of reproach.

The marks of which Paul spoke were the permanent brands which he bore on his body as a result of the persecution and suffering he had endured in the service of Christ. These marks, which were actually embedded in the flesh, causing present disfigurement and pointing to a past suffering of an acute nature, plainly marked Paul as belonging exclusively to Christ. Here is an uncompromising assertion of the most absolute authority on the one hand and the claim of unconditional subjection and obedience on the other. Paul acknowledged that Christ had bought him, that he had accepted Him as his Saviour and Lord, and beheld here are the marks of Christ's ownership and his subjection. Each scar on his body bore mute but eloquent testimony to his devotion to Christ and the furtherance of the gospel. Others might look with pity at the evidence of the cruel lash and rod in Paul's flesh, but he was proud of them. They were part of his credentials as Christ's messenger among men, and they testified to his loyalty to the Master. Here is the declaration, in no uncertain terms, that unconditional surrender has been made to the Lord Jesus, and complete submission to His will is acknowledged.

The scars on Paul's body were received in the line of duty for his Master. And we are reminded, as we look back across the centuries of Christian history, that he is but one among a noble multitude who endured hardships and persecutions, and who suffered both physical and mental anguish for their faith in Christ. Paul endured all kinds of physical pain and hardships, but he also had to face misunderstanding, lack of sympathy where he had a right to expect it, and the heavy responsibilities that fell upon him as a leader in the work of the Lord.

Today Christians are not often subjected to such stripes and scourgings as Paul endured. But all of us should have some marks of our attachment to the Lord Jesus. Those marks upon Paul were indicative of ownership by Christ. Such marks we should bear. It was the custom in those days to prick or brand upon the body of a slave some distinctive letter or other mark of ownership, by which the slave might be deterred from attempting flight, or quickly be traced and reclaimed in the event of his escape.

These marks upon Paul were also the brands of a willing dedication, and such marks we should bear. Remember, too, that this yielding of himself to Christ was not through force, but was brought about by affection. These marks on him were positive proof of faithful and loyal service. They were honorable scars gained in the conflict. People sometimes declare that they would die for their faith; and many have laid down their lives rather than turn away from God. We would do well to consider the question: "Am I willing to live for my faith?" We prove our inconsistency by

priding ourselves on being willing to die for our faith, and then refusing to attend prayer services at God's house. The question for most of us is not whether we will be crucified for the Lord Jesus, but whether or not we will be inconvenienced for Him. In this easy-going, undisciplined age, the cult of softness rules the life of our nation, and the vast majority of professing Christians are at ease in Zion.

There are two main messages that are preached very effectively by those gaping wounds in the body of Paul:

I. The Mastery That Paul Gladly Conceded to Christ.

Those marks which were branded on his body were the telling tokens of the divine ownership of Paul and his bond-slavery to the Lord Jesus. Every solitary mark on his body and every corresponding wound upon his heart were the direct consequence of his obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The folk who inflicted those wounds in the body of Paul basically did not have any argument or quarrel with him. Their argument was with the Lord, and not His apostle. Their hatred was not against Paul as such, but against the Lord Jesus Christ and His teachings. Paul received those wounds and marks because he represented Christ. The darts were aimed at the Master, and, had he abandoned his Lord, Paul might well have avoided them. But such was his concept of Christian discipleship and of the Christian life that he could not do that. He had voluntarily become the bond-slave of Christ, and therefore he submitted to every humiliation, and every pain of body, and every anguish of soul that was involved in being loyal to Him. We must not think of Paul's obedience as being merely passive. It was very active as well. In obeying the expressed will of God, Paul was actively giving his life away. Now this is something which is quite challenging. To him, obedience meant nothing short of actual life-giving; the pouring out of his life as a libation. He was daily spending his life, regardless of the cost. He was dying daily. As long as he could breathe, there was life to be given away for Christ, and that was Paul's sole intention and purpose. It was to be given and sacrificed for his Lord, and in his service, regardless of how soon the apostle might be put to death.

II. The Ministry That Paul Gallantly Pursued For Christ.

To Ananias the Lord said: "Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts 9:15-16). Notice the ministry which the Lord committed to Paul. It is expressed in the delightful words, "to bear my name." Paul's ministry was one of exploring and expounding the wonders of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Notice the method whereby he was to perform his ministry. The Lord said: "I am going to tell him, not yet, but in due course, what great things he must suffer for my name's sake." If he is to be a bearer of the Name, he must suffer.

Paul had received enough scars to place his loyalty to Christ beyond doubt. His brand marks suggest that we should bear the marks of the Lord Jesus in our character. We may not all be called upon to bear marks of cruelty upon our bodies, but we are called to bear the marks of the indwelling Christ upon our character. The marks of the Lord Jesus, such as holiness, love, grace, meekness, and self-

sacrificing willingness for service, should be reproduced in us, His followers. Christians should differentiate themselves from the world by the spiritual marks or inward graces which shine out so serenely and beautifully as to compel all observers to know that they belong to God, and are walking and talking with the Lord Jesus.