

THE MARKS OF THE MASTER

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

This text is a very tender and touching passage. It has about it a plaintiveness, a tenderness, a sweetness, all its own. Galatians were a fickle and spasmodic people. At first they obeyed Paul heartily and loved him devotedly. At one time they wanted to worship him as a god. But later they were removed from him. They questioned his authority and apostleship. They set aside his apostleship, and repudiated his doctrine of salvation by grace apart from works. Judaizers had taught Galatians salvation was impossible without circumcision. Disgusted with them he said, "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He was weary of controversy.

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 beat him at Philippi, 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 beauty which he had when he sat, as a boy, at the feet of old Gamaliel.

He 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.

He was familiar with grief, pain, sorrow, suffering and shame. He had been beaten, mobbed, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, hounded, and persecuted. He was scourged with 39 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 Cor. 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, he did not go whining around 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 my 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 defence. 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 means marks or brands.

It was the custom, in those days of darkness and cruelty, to brand upon the body of a slave some distinctive letter or other mark of ownership, by which he might be deterred from attempting flight, or quickly traced and reclaimed in the event of his escape. More especially was this brand used in cases of theft or crime; as a mark of disgrace, a perpetual badge of degradation and contempt.

A stigmata was a mark burnt in the flesh of a slave as a sign that the slave was not his own but belonged to a master. That mark on the slave's body kept any other but his own master from touching him or compelling his labor.

The brands of which Paul speaks were the permanent marks which he bore on his body as a result of the persecution and suffering he had endured in the service of Christ. These plainly marked him as Christ's. He was proud of his scars. He looked upon these marks as so many badges of honor.

While it is true that the primary reference of the text is to the scars of wounds which Paul had endured in the service of Christ, these were not the only "marks of Jesus" which he bore. After all, the true marks of the Master are not outward but inward, not physical but spiritual.

Paul said, "If any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His." The final proof that Paul belonged to Christ was that he had the spirit of Christ and that Christ lived over again in Him. So, I shall speak briefly about the marks that differentiate Christians from non-Christians. These marks are not physical marks, but spiritual marks. They are inward graces that shine out so serenely and beautifully that they compel the world to know that we have walked and talked with Jesus. What are a few of the marks of the Master in the life of Paul that ought to be reproduced in our lives?

I. A Life Of Obedience.

Obedience is one of the loveliest graces of the human heart, while upon disobedience rests the withering curse of God. By disobedience Adam lost fair Eden, Moses lost the Promised Land, Saul lost his crown, Uzziah lost his life, and Judas lost his soul. Jesus makes obedience a test of love, saying, "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." He makes obedience a test of friendship. "Ye are My friend if ye do whatsoever I command you." "To obey is better than sacrifice." The Lord Jesus sought to do His Father's will. From the manger to the Cross His life was a life of obedience. Paul lived a life of unhesitating, unfaltering, unquestioning obedience to the will of God. Such life ought to be ours. On the pathway of obedience Heaven's choicest blessings fall. He possessed a burning desire to please Christ.

II. A Passion For The Lost.

"The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." He broke through conventionalities to speak to and save the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. He allowed the woman who was a sinner to kiss his feet. He ate with publicans and sinners. Paul had this passion to win the lost in a great degree. He became all things to all men that he might win some. He said, "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren." Money, pleasure, honor, reputation ---all things laid on the altar for the salvation of other. This was clearly revealed in his great missionary journeys. He swept over a large part of the Roman Empire consumed by a passionate desire for the redemption of the world.

John Knox was being consumed with a passion for lost Scotland. He fell on his face and prayed, "Lord, give me Scotland or I die." And God laid Bonnie Scotland on the bosom of the Son of God. Our churches today need to have a vision of lost souls, and to realize that men out of Christ are without hope. Then we must realize that we have something that will save the lost. The Gospel of Christ has never failed. We have just failed to apply it. One of the striking marks of the Master in the life of the twentieth-century Christian is his profound concern for the salvation of the whole world.

III. A Spirit Of Sacrifice.

Paul was one of the most distinguished Jews of His day, a member of the Sanhedrin, thoroughly educated, a zealot for the Jewish religion. When he surrendered to Christ as Master he renounced all Jewish honors, all selfish ambitions, all worldly aspirations. He followed in the sacrificial steps of his Master and exclaimed, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ." These words reveal the depth and breadth and length of Paul's sacrifice. It was complete. He withheld nothing.

General Booth was once asked the secret of his success, and he replied: "I will tell you the secret---God has had all there was of me. If anything has been achieved, it is because God has had all the adoration of my heart, all the power of my will, and all the influence of my life." Both Booth and Paul bore this mark of the Master in a striking manner.

Today, the Master is summoning all His professed disciples to clearly reveal this mark of unselfish heroic sacrifice. Sacrificial service is the only service that Christ commends and it is the only service that really has the power to make us happy.

How about you? Do you acknowledge Christ as your Saviour and Master? If so, do you bear the marks of His mastery? Your Master is looking for these marks in YOU.