

KNOWING CHRIST

“... becoming like Him in His death.” – Phil.3:10

(Part 5 of 5 Messages)

Introduction:

Imagine yourself in a communist prison – in solitary confinement – awaiting the final verdict (whether condemned to die or released) – you are there because you disobeyed the law by telling others about Jesus – you know that some other believers before you have experienced a similar suffering – some have died for their faith.

What would you be thinking about?

Think now of Paul being in prison – held by a totalitarian gov’t (Roman empire) opposed to any religious activity that threatens their peace – he has no idea what will happen to him – but he is at peace.

See Phil.1:18c – 21; 3:17,18.

Paul knew from the very beginning that SUFFERINGS were a definite part of his calling to be an apostle – Acts 9:15,16. He probably knew that one day he would face a martyr’s death (the final “witness”, cf. Greek “martyr”) to Christ – also the ultimate identification with Christ.

It was just a question of when???? So as he spent hours and days in this prison reflecting on the future as well as the present – he thought about his own death. How would he die? What would his final witness be like? He wasn’t afraid of dying – but he longed that he might both live and die in such a way that he would share in the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.

This then is today’s theme: PAUL DESIRED DEEPLY THAT HE MIGHT BECOME LIKE JESUS IN HIS DEATH.

What did He mean? How are we to understand the phrase “to become like him...?”

- * This particular verb translated “to be conformed to” or “to share the likeness of”, “to take on the same form as” is used only in Christian writings, and only here in the NT – possibly a Pauline word, ie made up by the apostle to express a truth – combining two parts: *morphe*: “shape” or “form” and *sun*: a common preposition denoting “union”, by implication “companionship”, “resemblance” or “process”.
- * Fundamental meaning: “to come to be like him in his death”; or “to die in a manner similar to his death.”
- * It is important also to note that the verb “to come to be like” is a PRESENT, PASSIVE participle: “present” tense means that Paul’s desire isn’t just thinking about the future but about the present – how can I TODAY act in a way like Jesus did as He faced His death?; and secondly, the “passive” voice means that God is the One who doing the work of conforming, Paul allowing God to shape him – but with a wholehearted surrender or giving up of his will to God.

So what does all this mean? Paul’s deep longing was ...

- * to know Christ intimately, spiritually, experientially
- * to know and personally experience the same power that raised Jesus from the dead
- * to have the privilege to share with Christ in His sufferings – not “for” sin, but “for the sake of the advance of the gospel”
- * to come to be like Christ in the way He died – that “I might live NOW with the same attitude and way that Jesus died, and whenever I die, that I might give the ultimate “witness” to Christ at that moment of death”

Could it be that in Paul’s mind, he also thought of Stephen’s death that he witnessed – that this impacted him so powerfully that he could never erase Stephen’s dying moments from his mind???

APPLICATION:

This is God’s WORD for each of us today, on the eve of our departing for our fields. It also fits perfectly with the focus of this week on DISCIPLESHIP. See Luke 9:23.

So God is challenging us to understand two biblical facts:

1. The “real” realities of being disciples of Jesus – to follow Jesus all the way in living and in dying.
2. The real responsibilities of sharing the Good News with others = that we are to invite them to walk the same path with us.

Illustration: David’s experience with OM working among Muslims in Cairo.

What about us??? There is no guarantee that the political and economic and religious environment in Europe will just keep improving – heading towards a day when Europe will be prosperous and peaceful. Nor can we imagine that to be the situation in any western country. That’s the dream of the world – nothing other than a dream or **WORLDLY OPTIMISM**. There are evil forces at work in the world – **DO NOT THINK OR IMAGINE** that God’s people including yourselves will be safe from powers that are diametrically opposed to Christ and His Gospel.

As **DISCIPLES** or followers of Jesus, we are called to live for Christ, and to prepare ourselves to die for Him. But in both, **HE** will be with us – and nothing including hardship or persecution will be able to separate us from God’s love. (See Rom.8:35-39.)

The fundamental questions then are: How did Jesus approach His death? In what ways did Jesus die? What are the ways we can become like Jesus in His death?

1) Jesus wholeheartedly accepted and embraced the spiritual principle of dying for others. He lived with this attitude; He died with this attitude.

See John 12:24,25.

Application: Gal.5:24 – dying to self & purifying ourselves for the sake of God’s work through us to those we minister to; 2 Cor.4:10 – dying as God’s servants in order that God’s life might come to others.

2) Jesus wholeheartedly submitted His own will to the will of His Father – to glorify God in life and in death.

See His prayer in the Garden: Luke 22; Matt.26; John 12:27,28. No bitterness against God – like a lamb led to the slaughter.

Application: 1 Peter 2:13, 21.

3) Jesus did not defend Himself against His accusers, nor threaten any who were persecuting Him – as if they were the ones responsible for it – but rather allowed the Father to vindicate Him at the right time.

See 1 Peter 2:21-23.

Application: Rom.12:19-21.

Illustration: Giving a cup of cold water – John & Betty Stam in China who prepared tea for their captors who came to take them away to behead them.

4) Jesus was without fear, totally at peace in His heart because He was trusting in His Father's power and love to rescue Him from the grave – full of quietness and calm – which gave Him a strong sense of confidence.

See Ps.16:9-11

Application: Isaiah 26:3-4

5) Jesus was thoughtful of those around Him – concerned at the cross for His mother.

Application: Not focused on our own sufferings, or troubles, but through the power and love of Christ within, giving ourselves to the needs of others.

6) Jesus was forgiving those who were causing Him so much pain – cf. Stephen

Application: Praying for your persecutors – for any who inflict sufferings that they might believe as they WITNESS or SEE the Gospel lived out in life.

Conclusion:

Put on the attitude of Christ ... Phil.2:5; 3:17:

* Ready to suffer for Christ's sake. Certain. Difficult but fruitful.

- * Ready to endure the pain of being persecuted for Christ if He wills.
- * Live the full life of a DISCIPLE or follower of Jesus – in life and in death.
- * Submit to God – don't fix your eyes on your persecutors or anyone who inflicts suffering upon you – rather fix your eyes upon Jesus. See Heb.12:1-3.

And so you will bear fruit from all your labours for Christ, fruit that will last for eternity. See John 15:16.