

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

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CHAPTER NINE

"HE SHOWED THEM HIS HANDS"

"Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God" (John 20:19-29).

"Lord, when I am weary with toiling,
And burdensome seems Thy commands,
If my load should lead to complaining,
 Lord, show me Thy Hands, --
Thy nail-pierced Hands, Thy cross-torn Hands,
 My Saviour, show me Thy Hands.

CHRIST, if ever my footsteps should falter,
 And I be prepared for retreat,
If desert or thorn cause lamenting,
 Lord, show me Thy Feet, --
Thy bleeding Feet, Thy nail-scarred Feet, --
 My JESUS, show me Thy Feet.

O GOD, dare I show Thee
 MY hands and MY feet."

-- Brenton Thoburn Badley

In his Epistle to the Philippians Paul refers to three stages in the growth of his friendship with JESUS.

A knowledge of CHRIST came first, and came through many troubled sources from friend and foe.

Then he saw CHRIST on the road to Damascus and experienced "*the power of His resurrection,*" for him to live was CHRIST.

Lastly he speaks of the "*fellowship of His suffering*" as the final goal of his friendship -- to become identified with Him in a life of sacrifice and drinking the cup of His passion and death for others.

So the lover of CHRIST finds the shadow of the Cross the longest shadow in the world. It stretches across the ages and all lands, and falls even on the Resurrection morning.

"And as they thus spake, Jesus himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:36-39).

JESUS CHRIST never hid His scars to win disciples. He bears in His glorified body the marks of His passion. They prove His identity, proclaim His victory and are the badge of His authority as Saviour and King. "And when he had so said, he showed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John 20:20-21).

Thorwaldsen, the great Danish sculptor, portrayed this scene in marble. In the "Vor Fruhe-Kirce" at Copenhagen stands his statue of the Risen CHRIST with outstretched hands bearing the print of the nails and sending His disciples on their errand of peace. On each side of the church are six figures representing the twelve apostles, in which group Paul takes the place of Judas. To see the group as here presented makes a deep impression on the mind and heart. CHRIST, not on the Cross but ready for the throne and yet scarred. The twofold message from his lips according to John's Gospel is caught by the artist's skill. **"Peace be unto you"; and "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."**

The Cross is not only expiatory but exemplary.
It whispers peace within but calls for struggle without.
It has a motive as well as a message for the sinner.

Those who have once had a vision of the Cross in the scars of JESUS can never be quite the same again. **"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again"** (II Corinthians 5:15). We have peace through His blood, and apostleship through His example.

It is remarkable that His scars were the only thing JESUS showed His disciples after His resurrection.

By His scars they knew Him in the breaking of the bread at Emmaus even when they failed to recognize His form and face and speech.

By His scars He convinced the ten disciples of His identity and His resurrection life.

By His scars Thomas was convicted of his unbelief a week later and cried, "**My Lord and my God.**" His scarred hands and side are the token and seal of our peace with GOD and an irresistible call to service and sacrifice.

The German poet, Heine, pictures the gods of the ancient world sitting in their banqueting-hall, throned and triumphant over a subject-world. To them enters one poor peasant staggering beneath a Cross. He casts it thundering on the table, and all the gods of lust and wrong despair and die.

The gods of the ancient world are the false values of the new. And when CHRIST casts His Cross into a man's life, all the old false values die, and a wonderful new life based on eternal values sprints into being.

In the Gospel records we have a fourfold world-commission from CHRIST's own lips.

St. Matthew gives the reason "why" we are to disciple all nations. "**All authority is given unto me in heaven and on earth, Go ye.**"

St. Mark tells "where", "**Preach the gospel to every creature.**"

St. Luke emphasizes the "order" of procedure: "**And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.**"

But John touches a deeper note, and reveals the "spirit" that is to dominate and control us: "**As my Father hath sent me, so sent I you.**"

The servant is not greater than his Lord. We are to share the same task, under the same authority, with the same message, and endure similar suffering. "**Because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren**" (I John 3:16).

The Cross is the supreme dynamic for devotion. JESUS only needs to show His scars to win martyrs for His cause. GOD pours upon all the spirit of sacrifice when "**they shall look upon me whom they have pierced**" (Zechariah 12:10) "**And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends**" (Zechariah 13:6).

When JESUS CHRIST appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus he, too, must have seen the print of the nails and the mark of the spear in CHRIST's body by the celestial light that streamed

from Heaven. "**Why persecutest thou me?**" -- "**Jesus whom thou persecutest**" . . . "**For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my names sake**" (Acts 9:16).

No wonder that Paul uses a strange word when he speaks of his apostolic ministry and of CHRIST's suffering. It is used only once again in the New Testament. In Luke's Gospel we are told of the widow who cast into the treasury all she had out of her "penury" (Luke 21:2). Paul uses the same Greek word. "**Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church**" (Colossians 1:24). The penury of Calvary!

To the Jew suffering was a problem to be solved. So the Christian it became a privilege to be shared.

Saul, the Jew, faced the problem of suffering in the spirit of Job and his three friends, and it was an insoluble problem.

Paul, the Christian, saw the scars of CHRIST and realized that the SERVANT of JEHOVAH was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities. Therefore he writes:

"Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christs sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (II Corinthians 12:10).

The glory of the Risen CHRIST for us is to recognize the scars; to put our hands with Thomas on the print of the nails and say: "**It is enough . . . Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace . . . For mine eyes have seen thy salvation.**" -- "**My Lord and my God.**" Will this not be the supreme delight and the deepest experience of the saints in glory, to kneel and see the scars? Even Mary, when she anointed His feet has no scars to kiss. These things the angels desire to look into, but they veil their faces when they behold this mystery of redeeming love.

"Crown Him the Lord of Love:
Behold His hands and side,
Rich wounds, yet visible above
 In beauty glorified.
 No angel in the sky
 Can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends his burning eye
 At mysteries so bright."

"He showed them his hands." Did He ever show them to you? Francis of Assisi, who, it is said, spent such long hours of contemplation on the scars of JESUS that he finally bore in his body the marks of the Saviour. But far more significant than the stigmata on his hands were the evidences of CHRIST's Cross-bearing in his daily life.

He and his mendicant brothers devoted themselves to rigid asceticism, living in a deserted lazarus house, visiting the abodes of sickness and poverty, preaching the Gospel to an ever widening circle which finally included heretics and Mohammedans. In Egypt before Sultan Kamil, Francis gave fearless proof of his readiness to suffer for his faith. His freedom from worldly care, his joy in service, his humility and child-like confidence, his love of nature and his

intense passion for men -- these, too, were the stigmata, the marks of the Lord JESUS.

"Touch with Thy pierced hand
Each common day,
Making this earthly life
Full of Thy grace,
Till in the home of Heaven
We find our place."

I once met a Moslem Francis.

He belonged to one of the Sufi orders of mystics, lived in poverty, and as I entered, was earnestly counting his ninety-nine rosary-beads, each one representing of the names of Allah.

When we spoke together of these attributes and their significance to the seeker after GOD and how Al Ghazali and other mystics taught that we were to meditate on GOD's character in order to imitate His mercy, compassion and kindness, he turned to me and said: "After all, one does not need a rosary to count the ninety-nine names; they are graven on our hands."

Then he spread his palms and pointed to the Arabic numerals ^I (eighty-one) and I^ (eighteen) the deep marks in every left and every right hand -- the two making a total of ninety-nine. And, said he, "that is why we spread our hands open in supplication, reminding Allah of all His merciful attributes, as we plead His grace."

Then I told him of the scars of JESUS and how He bore our sins on the tree. "**Yet will I not forget thee. behold I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands**" (Isaiah 49:15-16).

They pierced His hands and His feet. The scars remain in His glorified body. They are the call to discipleship and the test of apostleship to each of those who profess to call themselves Christians.

It is hard to be a follower of CHRIST.
His demands are inexorable.

Except a man forsake all that he hath he cannot be JESUS' disciple.

No cross, no crown.

JESUS did not say He was the true oak or olive or cedar, but the "**true vine**." It is the only tree that is tied to a stake and that bleeds to bless. Every branch needs the pruning-knife, and only where it cuts deep is there promise of a cluster of fruit.

We are called to CHRIST's fellowship, but it is a fellowship of suffering.

Earth is the chosen battleground, from all eternity, for the final conflict between the powers of light and darkness.

"For when GOD formed in the hollow of His hand
This Ball of earth among His other balls
And set it in His shining firmament,
Between the greater and the lesser lights,
He chose it for the STAR of Suffering."

The fellowship of His suffering is the real apostolic succession. The blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church in every land and every age. "**From henceforth**, " said Paul, "**let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.**"

"CHRIST the Son of GOD hath sent me
To the midnight lands;
Mine the mighty ordination
Of the pierced hands."

The life story of David Livingstone, Henry Martyn, Mary Slessor, James Gilmour, and Keith Falconer, all bear the print of the nails.

When our plans are frustrated,
our hopes disappointed,
our visions melt away,
our decisions cost blood,
our pleasures become pain and we are in the agony of a Gethsemane or a Golgotha, what is it but the bearing of our Cross after JESUS?

The patience of unanswered prayer,
the hidden self-sacrifice,
the loneliness of leadership,
all these are part of the chastisement whereof all are partakers who are not bastards but sons.
"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings" (II Corinthians 4:10; 6.4-5).

"He who ne'er broke his bread with blinding tears,
Nor crushed upon his pillow in the night,
Wrung out his soul and fought his bitter fight,
He knows not truly joy that conquers fears."

Heaven has twelve gates and the twelve whose names appear on the foundations of the Holy City all bear the scars of the MASTER. Every gate is a pearl -- a pearl of sacrifice.

It was a missionary in Kashmir who wrote this collect on the human body wholly surrendered to CHRIST. Can we make the prayer our own?

"MASTER, here for Thy service we render to Thee, flesh, bone, and sinew, the physical frame Thou hast given; teach us to treat it for Thee as a good machine which we hold in trust to be

tended and kept for Thy purpose. Teach us to use it remorselessly, sternly, yet never misuse, and as it slowly or swiftly wears out, grant us the joy of the knowledge that it wears out for Thee. Amen!"

~ end of chapter 9 ~
