

“If Any Man Serve Me, Let Him Follow Me”

John 12:24-26,

Easter Sunday III April 26, 2015

Sermon Text, John 12:24-26 (KJV):

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

Beloved of the Lord.....In our Epistle reading today, we hear about the troubles and trials the Apostle Paul endured as a Christian. “We are troubled on every side”, he says “yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” You could say the world was constantly beating Paul up, not only physically but also spiritually by way of vexation. Yet no matter how many times Paul was knocked down, he continued to rise and stand up, time and time again. Yet this was not by Paul’s strength, but the Lord’s. Whatever Paul endured, he knew God had been gracious to him, forgiven him all sins for Jesus sake, and Paul knew it was the earnest desire of Jesus to save all. Relying upon God, Christ being the Rock in his life, Paul finished his course and crossed the finish line. Now Paul is in heaven with all the other saints who did the same. So Jesus said, “if any man serve me, him will my Father honour.”

In like manner, none of us here know the path the Lord has laid out before us, but we well know the path Jesus followed to the cross. What our Lord Jesus then wants us to do is simply follow Him as good disciples, trusting He will be with us every step of the way. Therefore we must RELY upon Him, and TRUST Him with all our heart. For if God could deliver the Israelites out of the slavery of Egypt, and pass them through the path of the Red Sea on dry ground while their enemies perished behind, doesn’t God have power to do all things in your life, and isn’t He gracious and caring enough to do so? Therefore put away all your fears and worries and do not think God doesn’t care about you or notice. If you struggle, go outside on a clear night and look up at the stars. Consider what your Lord says in Isaiah 40. “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things”. He brings out the stars “by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one” fails or falls. Do not say “My way is hid from the Lord” for don’t you know or haven’t you heard “that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding” therefore you must TRUST HIM and walk by faith and not by sight, for “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength..... they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”

I. Jesus had to die if we were to be given new life. Our text today is only three verses long. As with most Bible readings, it is always beneficial to step back a bit and get the bigger picture. In verses 20 to 23 we see there were some Greeks who had come “up to worship at the feast”, namely the Passover. This is after Palm Sunday, yet before the crucifixion. Certain Greeks had heard of Jesus, and through the Jews or others, they learned some of the words of Christ. No doubt they heard the great miracle Jesus performed by raising Lazarus from the dead. In any case they personally knew Philip, for they came to Philip and verse 21 says, they “desired him saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.” Simply put, there were drawn to Jesus, drawn to His words.

After Jesus heard the Greeks wanted to see Him, Jesus said, “The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.” This coming of the Greeks to Christ thus foreshadowed the Gentiles coming into the Holy Christian Church, and the good fruit which would result from His death and resurrection. Jesus then was deeply moved to hear this request of the Greeks, for it reminded Him how He would soon be glorified before the Gentiles whom He also came to save. His heart longed for their salvation, just as much as the Jews. In like manner wherever the Gospel of Jesus is preached in our world today, there God is calling the children of men to become children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Jesus is just as happy if someone from China is converted, as when an American is converted. God is not a respecter of persons, for no race, country, or people are superior in God’s sight for all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. “But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” When any soul is thus converted to Christ it is never that men have sought after God, but rather God the Father has sought them out. So our Lord says the same in Isaiah 65:1. “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name. Paul says similar in Romans 9:6 “And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.” Paul’s confession is our confession also, for “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in JESUS CHRIST my Lord or come to Him, but that the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts.”

Our own conversion then would not have been possible if Jesus Himself had not died and risen again. Again, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” Jesus now uses a very simple earthly picture to teach both the necessity of His death, and also the fruit of His resurrection. For even a little seed must die in the ground before it can come back to life. There is no seedling that can spring forth from the ground, unless the seed itself dies first. This green Spring we now enjoy comes first from a dead seed.

Thus speaking now of the death and resurrection of Christ, when Jesus said from the cross “It is finished”, at that point all the sins of the world had been paid for, atoned for with His blood. Also Jesus suffered and died alone, like a lonely seed which falls to the ground and is buried. The only difference is a seed decays in the ground, but the body of Jesus saw no corruption. But why was His death necessary if the atonement of all sins

took place upon the cross? His death was necessary because death itself was the last enemy to be conquered. You can't rise from the dead except you die first. Thus it is written in Hebrews 2:14-15, "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." This means that since all mankind was subject to the fruits of their sins, namely death, Jesus made Himself of flesh and blood so that He Himself could die in our stead and place, and thus conquer death by the resurrection. Regarding this conquering of death and the devil's power, Edward Koehler writes, "Christ has "destroyed [the devil] that hath the power of death", and thereby delivered us from this "fear of death." To a believer, therefore, temporal death is but a dark passageway, which leads us into the beautiful mansions of heaven. Knowing this, we do not fear death, for it has lost its sting, and we have a desire to depart [and be with Christ which is far better]." [endquote....Annotated Catechism, pg. 159] Thus regarding this most precious resurrection, understand it is God's solemn proof to you all sins are forgiven, and you also have a new life through Jesus. It is a blessed and fruitful and green life, filled with grace and forgiveness of sins, and living waters to quench your thirsty soul. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ" 2 Cor. 5.

II. We should love nothing more than Christ and His Word. This is why it should be so easy for us to see how foolish it is to love the vanities of this life. Jesus said "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal." This means we should not value our own life, or the things of this life, as greater than that life and salvation Christ gave us by the cross. Life with Christ here and now by faith, as well as that eternal life to come, should be much more dear to us than anything this world or the people of this world can offer. Also when Jesus said we should hate our life in this world in order to keep our eternal life, this means daily we must be willing to lose or sacrifice all if God requires it, even our life. This is what Luther said in his hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God"....even if they take our life, "goods, fame, child, and wife, let these all be gone, they yet have nothing won; the Kingdom ours remaineth."

There is then a distinct warning in this verse, not to love this present life nor the world. God does not want you to fall away by loving this world or the things of this world. "Remember Lot's wife". She lost her salvation at the very end of her life, because she turned and looked back with love upon Sodom and Gomorrah. God may destroy this country in like manner for all her sins, but we must hold nothing of greater value than our dear Jesus and His blood shed to deliver us from death and hell. Jesus does not intend for us to live here always, but He promises to be with us always, even unto the end of the world. Jesus has promised "Rejoice because your names are written in heaven." If we trust in His justification by blood, what can the devil or this world really take away from us? They can trash our name and good reputation. They can and will lie and say evil of us. They will call us intolerant and narrow minded, even hateful, yet we are the ones who

don't hurt or persecute anybody, and we love them enough to warn them of hell saying "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Is it wrong for us to teach "the wages of sin is death" when Jesus taught the same? Is it wrong for us to teach Jesus is the Bread of Life and the only door to heaven? Are we evil to quote the good words of Jesus who said, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." So it is written and we have God's good warning, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

III. The Father will honor those who serve and follow Jesus. Finally beloved, in our final verse Jesus said, "If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour." Wherever Jesus then is, God's children will be, namely we will be busy doing good to our neighbor and not evil. If there is a job, a chore, a duty which must be done, there will we be, busy in the work Jesus has called us to do. If He calls us to condemn the sins of this generation, there will we be. If He calls us to suffer a martyr's death, or die alone on an island in prayer there will we be. If He calls us to suffer sickness, poverty or hardship, there will we be knowing Jesus suffered first for us. Every step we take of every day, even the day of our death, there Jesus will be, and we will follow, for we walk by faith and not by sight. And just as the children of Israel must have been a little fearful as they stepped down on that path into the bottom of the Red Sea, the walls of water towering above them, we know for the glory of God there were brought safely to the other side, though their enemies perished behind. So Jesus says and Jesus promises, "if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor", so in this present life, "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." Then "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." Amen.