

"MARKED BY THE MASTER"

Gal. 6:17

We often wonder what we are made out of. There are people who tell us that we are made out of our dreams. What we dream - we will probably become tomorrow.

What are your dreams, today. What is the chief obsession. What are your ideals. Your goals. What do you think about today. It will probably mark what you will accomplish tomorrow.

From experience, Paul gives us in this text, (a remarkable statement.) "From now on, please don't argue with me about these things. For I carry on my body, scars of the whippings and wounds that marked me as Jesus' slave."

Think about this situation - Paul was a missionary - and he had journeyed through Galatia. And he established many churches, perhaps on these journeys. But there always followed him enemies. Who sought to disrupt the work and to hurt the work of the church. Now Paul was writing a message back to them, in trying to solve their problems. There were at least three charges that were made against Paul.

First, they charged Paul - that he was not a true Apostle! They challenged him on his credentials. He answers that in this letter.

Second, they charged - you are not preaching the true Gospel! And Paul has

an answer to that.

Third, they charge him that the Christian faith is really not a spiritual religion. That it is a legal, mechanical religion. And they were comparing it with Judiasm. You have a set or rules that you follow, a set of ceremonies, as they referred to circumcision.

They continued to tell Paul that you must first become a Jew. Observe the law and the ritual, and all of the requirements, and then you can come into Christianity. Then you observe the Sabbath, you be circumcised - become a Jew, and then you become a Christian.

Paul stated the nature of the Christian faith - it is not rules or regulations. It is a spiritual experience - you have to become a new creation. You have to be born spiritually - just as you were born physically. You have to be transformed into a new nature. He answers these charges and he closes his book in this one verse. "Henceforth, let no man trouble me he says."

I don't want to hear anymore about what you have to say. Paul is very strong in this. He has heard enough about the trouble - and so he wants no more of this kind of false teaching.

I think there comes a time, in Paul's life - when he said, I must deal with these critics. These who oppose me by saying, I am not going to discuss this with you anymore. That is behind me - so let us not keep pecking away at this thing.

And Paul cements this together by saying - I bare in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. There is his final evidence - you can look at me, you can look at my life, and see me. And you can see the proof about my Gospel and my life - I bear in my body, the marks of Jesus.

Now many people have wondered through the years and some have debated and discussed - what did Paul mean, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

Sometimes (today) in Christian circles, we hear individuals teaching or proclaiming, that now the mark of the Lord Jesus is - is that you have your hair cut a certain way. You wear your clothes a certain way. You refrain from putting on jewelry is another mark. Or you refrain from putting on make-up. And we hear these man-made regulations and other suggestions that they say are the marks of a Christian.

Let us see what Paul is talking about here - when he says, I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. The word he used here is this - I bear in my body the (stigmata) - now this is a Greek word. But we have a perfectly good English word that has the same spelling. And we call it (stigma.) We would say, if we were saying what Paul said in his day - we have been stigmatized. We have been marked and usually, if we say this - it is a discredit. But when Paul says, I have been stigmatized then I have the marks of the Lord Jesus. This old word for stick or prick, a slave had the name or stamp of his owner, on their bodies. It was sometimes done for soldiers also. There were many who were devoted to pagan Gods who would stamp the name of this God on their bodies. Like today, in the West, they round up the sattle and give the owner's mark. Paul gloried in being the slave of Jesus Christ. This is probably the image which Paul had in mind since his body bore the brand marks of the suffering for Jesus Christ that he had received in many places.

Read I Cor. 6:4-6 - and verse 11. Chapter 11:23, and following. Probably these scars were from the 39 lashes at a time. And if for no other reason, you need to listen, he says, to me - by reason of these scars for Christ. Let no one keep on furnishing trouble to me. For I bear these marks.

Now people have discussed this idea under many many different ways.

I. SOME HAVE SAID THEY WERE MARKS OF THE (CRUCIFIXION)

So first, there was a belief that actually these physical markings of the crucifixion of Christ - both his hands, both feet, and his side - made up five of the stigmata. Now, this first belief came about 800 years ago with Francis of Assisi. Who was sick because the church was not living up to her name. Was also sick because the clergy who were supposed to lead the people were not. And he became a simple humble servant who went about helping people. Of course, he changed the whole direction of the Catholic Church and a reformation was brought about the Franciscan Order.

Now Francis had an experience - one night he had a dream. He saw the crucifixion of Christ. That he agonized in prayer, because it was so real to him. Over the sufferings of Christ dying for his sins. When he awakened out of that experience, he discovered that the marks that were on the hands and the feet of Christ appeared in his own body. There were the blood wounds in each hand and in each foot.

Now the record, as a matter of history, says that Francis of Assisi bore these marks for the rest of his life. And upon his death, it was certified not only

by the church officials but by doubting secular witnesses who observed these marks. Now whether these were self-induced, or whether they appeared in a miraculous way, I do not know. But I have no way to say that they were true or false.

However, this same thing took place again, and again. About 200 years later there was one called St. Katherine, who had the same marks in her body. A very devoted sacrificial, crucified type of person - she was so absorbed of giving herself that she was marked this way.

There are more than 200 such incidents which have been documented by the church - the Catholic Church. Even in this day in which we live, there is a woman which lives in the Bavarian Alps and at the same time, periods before the crucifixion of Christ each year. These strange marks seem to appear in her body, and she sits in a window in a trance as people come by. I do not know how you can explain this. I do not know whether this is something that controls the mind over body. It may be like a hypnotist. Now he could perhaps put a spell on someone. And you might be led to touch a red hot stove and scream in pain. But if you were told that it will blister your fingers, something will appear. And it was certainly possible that something might have happened in some of these experiences. Now this is the thing some of these people say this is what happened to Paul. That he literally held out his hand to these people and say - see here. Here are the marks of Christ. I bear these marks in my body. Five marks of the crucifixion of Christ. Now some people would say - that is what Paul meant.

II. (PHYSICAL MARKS)

Now there are other people who think that Paul meant that he did not literally

bear these marks. But you can see how I have been suffering and marked by suffering. You will remember that when he was in Galatia, they stoned him, and left him for dead. You remember that he had to flea for his life. He could tell them that I have been in jail. They had beaten him with whips. And the scar on my back - so he could hold up maybe a twisted arm that had been broken by a stone. He could pull his shirt, and show them his shoulder. I have been marked by the Master - for the sake of Christ.

Dr. H. C. Goerner on a mission tour in Spain 1955, visited a church in Barcelona and when the pastor stood up to preach, he said, I saw that his hands were drawn like arthritis. But they told him later, that he had been pastor of a church about 30 miles away at the time of the persecutuion of Christians. And non-church state groups in Spain. The pastor had been baptizing some people when a crowd stoned him. He put his hands over his face for protection from these stones. Those stones broke his fingers and left him with grusome, claw-like hands. He could preach a sermon without saying a word. People would say - look, at what he has suffered for the sake of preaching the Gospel. So Paul could say, here are my scars - I have been marked. I bear in my body the marks of the Gospel.

III. THE MARK OF OWNERSHIP

Now there are others who say, that when Paul said, I bear in my body the marks of ownership here. Knowing that it was customary to brand slaves. You remember how you had seen or read about - how cattle. They take coals of fire and stick a branding iron in it - and then put it to the hide of a calf. And brand it. A mark of its owner is left there for the rest of the calf's life. And it will bear the mark of it's owner.

In Paul's day, they put marks on a forehead of a slave. And anywhere that slave

went, they would say - I know who owns you! Paul often referred to himself as a slave of Jesus Christ. Not as just a servant but a slave. And we can translate it into English as a servant. But Paul said, I am a slave of Christ. I am sold out to Christ. I belong to him. I am mastered by him. I bear in my body the marks of his ownership. Now certainly that would be true. Now regardless of how you try to interpret this word stigma - whether it was the five marks of the crucifixion - or whether it was the physical marks put upon men from the physical beatings that left scars. Or whether he was talking about the symbolic marks of ownership. That he spoke of. We do know that there is one more mark that was very true of Paul.

IV. MARKS OF OBSESSION

Now Paul had one great obsession in his life. And that was the thing that marked him. The thing that shaped his life. Now, I do not know whatever the obsession may be in your life today. But I know this, whatever it is - it will be there tomorrow. And it is going to be there the next tomorrow, etc.

Paul's obsession was Jesus Christ. I look to him, I see him, not as a great teacher, not as a miracle worker. I see him as Christ crucified. He said this again and again, I am determined to know nothing among you, save Christ Jesus crucified. And crucified daily for the sake of Christ. He says that in this passage. I will not glory, save anything - except the cross in V 14.

Now Paul is talking about Christ of the cross, who dies, and gives himself for your salvation and mine. And for this lost world. As Christ poured out himself.

A sacrifice, and Paul looked at that saying - that is the thing I want.

You know, each person here, has some obsession. Something takes command in your life. Some people are so obsessed with their physical demands of life, that is all they live for. They are obsessed with food, or having a good time, or the comforts of life. They live on an animal level. And that is an obsession with them. I can tell you what you are going to be. I can tell you what you are going to be 10 years from now. You will still be living as you are today. You'll just be an older animal - that will be the only difference, because you will still be living on an animal level.

There are other people who have an obsession with things - they want to accumulate, and they grasp everything within reach. Everything they can acquire. They want a sense of security. And they're not quite sure how they are going to get it. But somehow there is the stigma of the dollar sign on their forehead. And every decision that they make is a decision in self-interest that they might gain something for themselves.

Yes, we are all marked by many things in this life. But Paul had an obsession - and he said he was marked by the Master. I read a story of a Prince - it was a children's story - but it was good listening for Adults. The little prince was drawn, and bent, and crooked. And all of the people said, isn't that tragic. But the Prince gave an order to the great artist. I want you to make a statue of me - make it exactly as I am, my face, my features - except, make it straight. Make a statue standing tall with my head high. So the artist completed the statue. And where do you want it placed - in front of your home. Oh, no, tell no one. I do not want it on display. Put it in the back of the garden against the wall - in a

little secret corner. Every day the Prince slipped out to the secret nook, and there stood the statue - he saw himself as he would like to be. He would stretch himself and stand a little taller. People began to say, have you noticed, the Prince is a little taller. His back is straighter. And then one day, everyone said - isn't he handsome. So tall and so erect.

Now I know that is true. The obsession we have today will shape our tomorrow. What do you want to be like. What are the feelings of your heart today. Your daydreams.

I read about, about some business people who used the word gigo. A computer term - garbage in, garbage out. What you put in, you get out. If you put false information in - you get false information out. The computer is no better than what is put into it.

Now if we listen to what Paul has to say, do not do this in some mechanical way. That is what the enemies were saying. Go through this ritual - don't do this. Don't do that. And there is the law. Be circumcised. You give this, don't do the other. It is not legalism.

Now what Paul was saying here is - that grace is not cheap. Bonhoffer once wrote - there is a difference between costly grace and cheap grace. He said cheap grace is grace without discipleship. Grace without the cross. Grace without Jesus Christ. He said also, that cheap grace is the bitterest foe of all true discipleship. There really is no cheap grace. We have tried to make it cheap. We have seen the agony, the shame, the pain - and the death on the cross. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only grace there is. But the cost of the blood of Christ, and notice that it is

the grace of our Lord.

And Paul said, we are marked. And changed, and transformed. A different and a new person. We have been stigmatized, we have been marked.

Isa. 44:5 says, there are some that will call themselves Jacob. Others will call themselves something else. But he says another will write upon his hand - I am God's. "I have been marked by God. And what are these authentic marks."

Do they come in an automatic way to us. Is there a certain life-style that the Christian must follow. The new man ought to be committed, the new life is different. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away - behold, the new has come. 2 Cor. 5:17. This is a reality in Christian experience. Something new has come. What is new should express itself in a new pattern of living. A new sense of values.

The darkness of sin cannot reign now but there is new light in that life. This will be observed - the difference is that the Christian depends now upon his Lord. Which is a sign that there is a difference. And that he is a Christian.

Listen, being a Christian, you are making a mistake if you are trying just to be different, to impress other people. If you are trying to impress yourself. If you are trying to establish your conversion and show somehow a major devotion. Now this is not a call to false piety.

The mark here is a distinctive characteristic that your life is controlled by Christ. And this will bring you a measure of victory. The power of sin - the acts of sin will be less and less. And you will be inclined toward obedience, to Jesus Christ.

Your life will be marked by the agonies of commitment to the purposes of God in Christ. You will be active, involved, in the life and the work of the church. And this will come first because Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. Eph. 5:25.

There will be concern for the salvation of lost people, persons. And there will be your taking part in the work in the kingdom of God in reaching people. There will be joy in the worship of God. In the fellowship with God.

And there will be something in your life that will make an impact upon other persons for good. Jesus Christ said, you are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world. Matt. 5:13-14. And salt and light mean a quality that helps to season and to save. It helps to drive back the darkness and point to the right way. This is the mark that counts. And this is something that will definitely set you apart as a true believer and disciple of Jesus Christ.

You are marked, and changed, and transformed. The old life has been buried. You have been resurrected to a new life. And if you are trusting today in some other marks, then you have missed the point. I read the story of two brothers, who were caught - convicted of sheep stealing. The community gave them justice in this way. They brought them to a blacksmith and then branded on the forehead

-S-T. Sheep Thief. They would be marked for the rest of their lives. Wherever they went, people would say, why, he is a sheep thief. S. T. One brother was so ashamed, so bitter and resentful about the punishment - he sank lower and lower, and continued in his crime of stealing sheep. And finally he died in bitterness.

The other brother said, I believe that God can make a better person of me. I can be something else. And he repented of his sins, he asked God's forgiveness, and oh God, everyday I am going to try and be different with your help and power. He moved to a new community and he was different. He was different in every way. He was generous, a hard worker. Giving more than was expected of him or even required. In time, people began to love him and appreciate him.

One day of him, we think so much of him - I wonder what those hearts on his forehead are. Someone else said S. T. - what does it stand for. I don't know, there was some kind of story. I used to hear it he says, but I believe that is the abbreviation for St. (Saint) and that is what it must be - for that is what he is.

Now that is what you can become under the power of Christ Jesus! So we ask you - have you had that kind of experience. Has your life really been transformed - spiritual rebirth. What are you thinking of today. What are you marked by this very hour. You can begin bearing - and be marked by the Master. No one should be happy going through life with the stigma of a pagan branded upon you. When Paul calls the attention to the marks of Jesus. My marks and scars I carry with me to be thy witness. Who will now, someday, be my rewarder.