

"Bearing About in the Body the Dying of the Lord Jesus"

by H. A. Ironside

"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. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." (2 Cor. 4:10,11)



This fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians is the Apostle Paul's statement of power for ministry. He shows us in these stirring verses that God is not looking for brilliant men, is not depending upon eloquent men, is not shut up to the use of talented men in sending His gospel out in the world. God is looking for broken men, for men who have judged themselves in the light of the cross of Christ. When He wants anything done, He takes up men who have come to an end of themselves, and whose trust and confidence is not in themselves but in God.

There were those who were calling in question the apostleship of Paul himself, for he did not seem to them to be what an apostle, according to their estimation of the office, ought to be. There was not the pomp nor the dignity they would expect; he did not come to them with great swelling words, there was no making anything of what he was after the flesh, no drawing attention to his natural ability or education; and in this the method of the Apostle Paul was in very vivid contrast to the method pursued by many today who pose as servants of our Lord Jesus Christ. This man went through the world a broken man, a lowly man, a man seeking only the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ and the blessing of souls, a man who might have occupied a very high place among the great and distinguished of earth. But he was a man who for Jesus' sake had turned his back upon all that, and could say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the

world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

That cross spoke of the deepest shame and ignominy, and Paul gloried in it because through the work that took place upon it his soul had been saved, and he had learned that the preaching of the cross, while it is "to them that perish foolishness," is "unto us which are saved ... the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18). And so he went forth content to be broken in order that the light of the grace of God might shine out.

You will notice in verse 6 that "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us" (2 Cor. 4:6,7). It is easy to see what he has in mind. He is thinking undoubtedly of that very striking incident of which we read in Judges, when Gideon and his three hundred men took their lives in their hands, were delivered unto death, as it were, and went forth against the vast armies of the Midianites. Surely no other army was accoutred as this one. They carried in one hand a trumpet, and in the other a pitcher, and in this pitcher was a lamp. The light of the lamp was not seen though it was already lit. It was not seen as long as it was in the earthen jar. They surrounded the army of the Midianites in the middle of the night, and suddenly at the command of their leader the jars were crashed to earth, and the light shone out, and the Midianites sprang up startled. They heard the crash and saw the light, and thought that they were surrounded by a tremendous army, and they turned their swords upon one another. It was God through Gideon that led the army to victory. A broken pitcher in order that light might shine out! The apostle says, as it were, "That is it! If you want to be a light for God in a world like this, be content to be broken, to have your hopes, your ambitions, all dashed to pieces, and then God can take you up and use you in order to carry the light of Christ to darkened hearts."

How are we broken? By affliction, by trouble, by the discipline of the Lord, sometimes by sickness, by pain and anguish. All these are the divine methods for breaking God's pitchers in order that the light may shine out to His praise and glory. Men may misjudge us, misrepresent us, persecute us bitterly; we may not have enough food to eat or water to drink; we may be cast down; we may suffer all kinds of sorrows; but it is all right if it breaks us in order that God may be able the better to use us. And so he says, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8,9); for in all these experiences we are simply "bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be made manifest in our body." He "came from Godhead's fullest glory down to Calvary's depth of woe."

We sometimes sing a little hymn that always stirs the heart. I remember hearing Dr. Torrey say that he believed of all the hymns that were used in his great meetings around the world, it was the one that seemed to be most blessed of God to the people. It is:

"I surrender all,
I surrender all,
All to Thee, my blessed Saviour,
I surrender all."

But that hymn never had the appeal it ought to have for my own heart until one day I found myself changing that chorus. I was thinking of Him who though He was "in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Phil. 2:6-8).

He surrendered all,
He surrendered all,

All for me, my blessed Saviour,
He surrendered all.

And then my heart said, "O Lord, it will be easy to sing it the other way now, for what have I to give up, to surrender, in comparison with what Thou didst give up in order to redeem my guilty soul from going down to the pit?" It is as you and I realize from day to day what it all meant to Him that we can bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. Dying day by day to our own hopes and ambitions, dying to the good opinion of people, dying to human praise and adulation, to everything that the natural heart grasps, dying in the death of Jesus to it all, because He died for us in order that "the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our body."

You will notice that verses 10 and 11 are very much alike, and yet the great difference is this: verse 10 suggests something that we do deliberately, consciously, whereas verse 11 is something that God does for us. What is it we are called upon to do? "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" — reminding ourselves every day that Jesus died for us, and because He died for us we are gladly to put ourselves in the place of death for Him.

Looking back to the cross the Apostle Paul could say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). But this has to be put into practice daily by putting my tastes and ambitions in the place of death. That is my part. But here is God's part: "We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:11). You tell God that you are willing to take the place of death with Christ, and He will see that it is made good; you tell God you are going to trust Him, and He will test your faith and show you what it means to trust Him; you tell Him that you are ready to surrender everything to Him, and He will put you in the place where you will begin

to find out what full surrender really means. I do not know of anything that it seems should have such an appeal to the Christian heart along this line as the frequent remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ in His death, and I think it is because He realized that it is so easy for us to forget, that He said to His disciples when He gave them this memorial feast, "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). And the Holy Spirit said, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. 11:26). Every time we are called upon thus to remember the Lord it is a new challenge to ask ourselves, "Am I simply remembering Him in a cold, formal, intellectual way because it is customary, or am I truly in heart remembering the One who went down beneath the dark waters of death for me, and am I truly ready now to always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus?"

What a poor thing it is to come together in assemblies to participate in the communion of the Lord's Supper and then go out from the building and forget what it all really means, forget that our Saviour died, that we are linked up with the One who died, and that He has left us an example that we should follow His steps — that is, we should always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus. This seems to me to be linked very intimately with several Old Testament references to which our attention is drawn in Hebrews 11. We read, "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones" (Heb. 11:22). Did you ever stop and ask why the Holy Spirit selected that particular incident to dwell upon? He has instanced something that you and I would probably have passed over altogether. What did Joseph do? "Gave commandment concerning his bones." In Genesis 50:25 we read where Joseph, talking to the children of Israel, says, "God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt." That is the close of Genesis. What an odd way to close the

book! But God wants us to think about the bones of Joseph. They are there in a coffin in Egypt, but they are to be carried to Canaan.

In Exodus 13 we find that the children of Israel who have been sheltered by the blood of the passover lamb are starting out for Canaan, and we read, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you" (Exod. 13:19). Who was Joseph? He was the saviour of Israel. If it had not been for him they had all been destroyed in the famine, but he was their saviour, and now he says, "When you leave Egypt to go to Canaan, you carry my bones with you." When they left, they were very careful to do as they were told, and all the way across the sands of the desert wherever that great caravan went, they were always bearing about in the body the dying of Joseph.

I think I see that great procession winding its way up over the hills; and the Amalekites and the Midianites looking at them in wonder say, "What is that strange dark casket?" Presently they call an Israelite and ask him, and he says, "We were once in greatest distress; if God had not had mercy upon us we would have been left to die, but He raised up a saviour for us, one of our own people; his name was Joseph and he delivered us; Joseph saved us. But *our saviour died*, and we are marching on to the land that our God has given us, and until we get there, we carry with us the memorial of death, the bones of Joseph. We can never forget him; he died, but we have the memorials still." And by-and-by when they reached the land, when they arrived at the place that God Himself had selected for them, we are told that after everything else was properly attended to, "The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph" (Josh. 24:32). There was no need to carry

the bones of Joseph through the wilderness any more, for they were at home now. And, beloved, you and I are passing on through the wilderness of this world, we will soon be at Home, but until we reach there we are called upon to bear about in the body the dying of Jesus, and as we remember Him in the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup, we should challenge our own hearts: Are we simply looking objectively toward that cross and saying, "There our Saviour died," or are we seeking day by day to practically make it manifest that His death means more to us than all that this world glories in?