

A Voice — A Mirror — And a Step of Faith



David Wilkerson June 15, 1984

There are three great truths I would like to bring to your attention. Each is a definition of what a true Christian ought to be.

Three anointed men of God best exemplify these truths and they are John the Baptist, Stephen, and Peter. John was the voice, Stephen mirrored the glory, and Peter took the daring step of faith. Their examples should be the goal of every true believer who is devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

What marvelous lessons can be learned from their lives and ministry. We can learn what God desires for us in the way of service, how we can reflect His glory, and the kind of daily walk most pleasing to Him.

1. John shows us the kind of service most pleasing to the Lord!

John's definition of his ministry was blunt and simple. He said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (John 1:23). Here is a servant of the Most High, who according to the Scripture was the greatest "among them that are born of women" He was the greatest, most blessed of all the prophets and a revered preacher of righteousness.

The crowds flocked to hear his scorching messages. Many were baptized and became his disciples. Even royalty came under his mighty influence. Some thought he was Christ; others considered him to be Elijah raised from the dead.

John refused to be exalted or promoted. He was emptied of self-serving and he continually withdrew from center stage. The greatest of all prophets was in his own eyes not even worthy to be called a man of God - but only a voice. A wilderness voice, modest, retiring, and unconcerned about honor or usefulness. He cared not about having a ministry or about being "mightily used of God" He considered himself unworthy to even touch his master's shoes. His entire life was devoted to "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

What a powerful rebuke to us, in this age of self occupation, promotion of personalities, influence-grabbing, ego-tripping, and seeking of honors. John could have had it all, but he cried out, "I must decrease - He must increase" (John 3:30). And to reach that goal, John kept reminding all who heard him, "I am just a voice."

Who among us today are willing to own up to their nothingness and be satisfied to be "just a voice" crying in the wilderness? How many who are in the limelight today are prepared to lose their following - to be set aside and out of sight - to no longer be the center of things - to be placed on a path of decreasing popularity and usefulness?

All around me I hear Christians saying, "I want God to use me. I want my life to count for the Lord. I want to serve Him in a full-time capacity. Preferably, some kind of ministry."

That's all very commendable, but are you willing to be "just a voice"? Are you willing to find your joy and fulfillment, not in service, but in devoted communion with the blessed Lord? The greatest rewards will probably go to those who were hidden and unknown, but who glorified the Lord mightily by their simple witness to His faithfulness in their struggles.

The secret of John's happiness was that his joy was not in his ministry or in his work, not in his personal usefulness or widespread influence. His pure joy was to stand in the presence of the Bridegroom, hear His voice, and rejoice in it. His joy was in seeing others, his own disciples included, flocking to Jesus, the Lamb of God.

The greatest fulfillment a child of God can know is to lose self and all desire to be somebody, and simply rejoice in being a son or daughter who lives in the very presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Being totally occupied with Christ is what satisfies the heart. John could stand there, in the Jordan, with his eyes fixed on Jesus, and be delighted by His presence. He fed his soul on Christ - his heart was always going out to Him in adoration and awe.

Such a person, so given over to the glory of Jesus, is elevated above all need to be seen or heard. What can be added to one who is fully occupied with the glory and presence of Christ? With John, that one can say, "My joy is full; I have found all I want or will ever need in Him"

The passing currents of restlessness and despair cannot touch the child of God who is obsessed with the presence of the Lord. By faith he can find a place above it all. The world, the church, does not need more "name" evangelists or miracle workers or great orators. The real need is not for more pastors or teachers. Nor is there a need for more founders of great charitable works. As important as these may be, the real need is for humble, unknown, unheralded VOICES! Voices that will testify to a doubting world that Christ is enough to see everyone through any crisis - that He is a tower of strength.

God needs voices - those who will stand up - in the midst of all the raging trials and temptations and cry out, "God is faithful". The Lord is seeing me through triumphantly. In sorrow, He is comfort. In trouble, He is a strong arm."

There is a need for voices who can look sickness and death in the face, and proclaim, "He is all He said He is! He has proven His love to me in my darkest hour. He has been strength to me in my time of weakness. He has been a friend, a hiding place. Serving Him does make a difference."

There are enough good preachers declaring doctrine, preaching prophecy and morality. Many, many are going about doing exploits, casting out devils and healing the sick. Praise God for it all. But I think John has something to say to this generation. And that is there is a desperate need for some who will forsake all thoughts about doing some great or important work for God, and instead fasten their eyes only on Him and become a voice proclaiming His overcoming love. To simply be a daily witness to all around that Christ fills all things and is worthy of our love and devotion.

Sadly, most of what I hear today is about power, usefulness, a need to be needed, doing something important, getting involved in a cause, being a part of a thriving ministry, the need to no longer feel unworthy or useless. Yet so few are willing to be out of sight, quietly testifying to the Lord's faithfulness to neighbors and friends. We want to be incorporated for Christ with an office, a budget, an assigned ministry. There are some called to that, but the high calling of God in Christ includes faithfulness in telling the gospel to everyone in our circle of friends.

Maybe we should think more about this - "That which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God" (Luke 16:15). Christ was telling the highly regarded religious Pharisees that popularity and human esteem would not hold up in the Judgment. God is looking for humility, sacrifice, self-emptying, and an abhorrence of all that is of self -- less of gathering people around ourselves, and more of pointing them to the Lamb of God.

Oh, God - give us more voices and less promoters. More voices and fewer self-seekers. More voices and less of greatness and bigness. Give us more who seek only Him, and not just His gifts, His blessings, and His promotion.
2. Stephen shows us what we should be to His glory.

Stephen saw an open heaven and a glorified Man on the throne whose glory was mirrored in him to all who stood nearby.

"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God" (Acts 7:55-56).

Stephen represents what a true Christian is supposed to be: one who is full of the Holy Ghost with eyes fixed on the Man in glory. He is one who mirrors that glory in such a way that all who see it will be amazed and filled with

wonder. He is one with a steady gaze fixed on Christ, always looking up to Him, fully occupied with a glorified Saviour.

Look at the hopeless condition Stephen found himself in. He was surrounded by religious madness, superstition, prejudice, and jealousy. The angry crowd pressed in on him, wild-eyed and bloodthirsty. Death loomed just ahead of him. What impossible circumstances. But looking up into heaven he beheld his Lord in glory, and suddenly his rejection here on earth meant nothing to him. Now he was above it all, as seeing Him who was invisible.

One glimpse of the Lord's glory one vision of His precious holiness and Stephen could no longer be hurt. The stones, the angry cursing, all was harmless to him now because of the joy set before him. One glimpse of Christ's glory places you above all your circumstances. Keeping your eyes on Christ, consciously reaching out to Him every waking hour, provides peace and serenity as nothing else can.

Stephen caught the rays of the glorified Man in heaven and reflected them to a Christ-rejecting society. He, "with open face beheld as in a glass the glory of the Lord, and was changed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Lord the Spirit.." (2 Cor. 3:18).

How true that we become what we behold. The proper translation should read, "We all, with open face mirroring the glory, are changed! The idea is that the Christian reflects, like a mirror, the glory on which he gazes continually. It is we who are "in the glass" - a mirror - looking on Christ, the object of our affection and becoming like Him in the process of beholding.

Is it possible to catch such a vision of the glorified Man in heaven that it will place us above all our circumstances and troubles? Stephen proved it possible - so much so that while being above it all, he prayed for those who were killing him. His murderers had to look on a face that truly reflected what Stephen had seen of Christ.

We all have the privilege of claiming the fullness of the Holy Spirit and becoming so riveted on Christ that we can live above everything thrown in our pathway by the enemy. The direct result of being totally occupied with Christ is a practical outworking of His nature in us. We are not just to talk about His glory, but we are to reflect it.

There is nothing in our lives worthy of the attention and respect of others. Only in reflecting the life of Christ can we influence the world for Him. Flesh, when reflected to the world, ministers death. Christ reflected through us ministers life.

J.N. Darby wrote, "A Christian is a person upon whose heart the Spirit of God has engraved Christ, just as truly as God wrote and engraved the Law upon the tables of stone; so that the world may read Christ in the man, as an Israelite might read the Law on the stones.

"It is the Holy Ghost taking of the things of Christ, and revealing them to the soul, that is the power of present practical conformity to Christ. I delight in Christ, I feast upon Christ, I love Christ. It is the very model and forming of my soul according to Christ, by the Holy Ghost - this His revelation of Christ. I not only get to love the glory, it is Christ Himself that I love; Christ, that I admire; Christ, that I care for; Christ, whose flesh I eat, and whose blood I drink - what wonder if I am like Christ? The Christian thus becomes the epistle of Christ; he speaks for Christ, confesses Christ, acts for Christ. He does not want to be rich, he has riches in Christ - unsearchable riches. He does not want the pleasures of this world, he has pleasures at God's right hand forevermore.

"It is not my looking at myself, but it is my looking at Christ, that is God's appointed means for my growing in the likeness of Christ"

Stephen became a living mirror in which men could see the glory of Christ reflected. So should we. When the enemy comes in like a flood and troubling circumstances get us down, we need to both amaze and condemn the world around us by our sweet, restful repose in Christ. Since we see by our spiritual mind, this is accomplished by keeping our minds stayed on Christ.

You won't see Jesus until you start looking for Him, and you won't find Him until you go to where He is revealed. He is fully, totally revealed in His glory in the Holy Scriptures. It is the happy work of the Holy Spirit within us to show us from the Word who He is. "He [the Spirit] will take of mine and show it unto you" (John 16:14). Do you daily call upon the Holy Spirit to give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? You should.

It is an awesome thing to consider reflecting Christ to a lost world in all His holiness and perfection. None of us have ever yet given forth a true and perfect reflection. What a great relief to know that we can neither mar nor improve the One whose image is reflected. He is changelessly perfect, holy and beautiful. We do not change the image - the image changes us. Each time we look into the Word and see a new ray of truth about His life, death, resurrection, and ascension - we are changed by it. We become more and more like the One who is the center of our attraction. We don't change ourselves - the revelation of Christ changes us.

When the pangs of trial seize us,
When the waves of sorrow roll,
I will lay my head on Jesus —
Pillow of the troubled soul:
Surely none can feel like thee,
Weeping one of Bethany!

"Jesus wept!" — that tear of sorrow
Is a legacy of love.
Yesterday, today, tomorrow,
He the same doth ever prove.
Thou art all in all to me,
Living one of Bethany!

3. Peter shows us the importance of taking a bold step of faith.

It is one thing to have the Lord come to us in our trials and circumstances to calm our troubled souls and hush our fears - but it is something altogether different to step out in the midst of turmoil and go after Him. The disciples who stayed in the boat were no doubt thinking, "It is enough to have Him nearby and to know He cares for us in this storm. Let's just sit still and wait till He comes to us." But Peter left the ship, a very bold step of faith. One glimpse of his Savior was enough. He cried out, "If it be thou... bid me come to thee ... on the water..!" (Matt. 14:28).

The key to this important lesson is, "unto thee... on the water..." Jesus said "Come." So keeping his eyes firmly fixed on Jesus, Peter took that great step of faith and for a while walked on the water. It was devotion that drew Peter out of that storm-tossed boat. He was not showing off his faith. He was not trying to belittle those left in the boat. He simply wanted to be nearer his Lord. He prized his Lord for who He was, and not because of the gifts and blessings He bestowed.

It's true that Peter sank when he took his eyes off the Lord - but so do we all. The truth is that Peter did walk on the water. By faith he had discovered a place in Christ above the stormy, raging sea. He was walking over what threatened him. The storm kept the waters boiling - Peter did not walk on a sea of glass. Yet he did walk on or above the turmoil; that is the real lesson.

"When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me'.. " (14:30). The faith that had kept him above it all for a while could have kept him indefinitely. But he took his eyes off Christ, and permitted the turmoil around him to cast down his confidence.

Aren't we all a bit afraid when strong, - dark winds gather round us. Haven't there been times in your life you thought you were sinking - for good? In a way I'm glad Peter failed, because that relates best to my condition. Often I've had that sinking feeling - wondering how I could ever stay above it all. Then I remember something my grandfather told me years ago: "Keep your eyes on Jesus. Get as close to Him as you can. That is the secret to victory, to holiness, and to peace."

In recent dealings in my life, I have been prompted by the Holy Spirit to "make a move toward Him when the storm hits." Rather than sit down in pity, questioning why God allows such deep trials - I now seek to rise up in diligent prayer and steadfast faith, and go after Him. You and I do have that same invitation to "Come." Come, rise above all your hurts and grief; Come, by faith you can walk above your circumstances. Come, appropriate by faith the same resources that kept your Lord above it all.

What kept our Lord above all the circumstances in His life? Jesus wept, He hungered, He hurt, the sun burned Him, He grew weary, He was like any other man in the natural who is affected by conditions. Yet He was always above it all - because He was never doing His own work or fulfilling His own will. He did God's will perfectly - He was totally dependent on His Father - His eye was fixed only on the glory of His Father. It was that focused "single eye" that was His secret of victory in every crisis.

Why was this story about Peter recorded in Holy Scripture? I believe it shows us how a Christian needs to pursue Christ the most diligently during the worst crisis. How often I used to sit back and wait for the Lord to show me how to be delivered from difficulties. I thought it was rest. But instead too often it was a passive fatalism. I didn't realize that trouble or difficulties could be the strong wind to drive me into my desired haven - rest in Christ.

God's way of escape is to put us above all our circumstances by the energy of a faith focused on Him. When the enemy comes in like a flood, we are to consciously reach out to the Lord draw nearer to Him. The purpose should not be to experience the miracle of walking above the waves, but to get to Christ in ever more loving and intimate ways. All who pursue Christ, all who keep their eyes fixed on Him, all who by faith step out to go after Him - will soon be unaffected by their circumstances. They will become so enraptured with their vision of Him that they will discover they are in reality walking above it all. Walking on the water is the by-product of looking unto Jesus.

Isn't it sad that so many Christians today, including some ministers, think of a bold step of faith as taking on some great earthly challenge or a plunge into debt to reach a goal. To me, a bold step of faith is to plunge right into my stormy trials and circumstances and learn to rise above it all in His presence.

I want to learn more about Jesus in the midst of what I am going through. I am building up a history with my Saviour, and each new revelation of Himself is sweeter and more soothing than the one before. I don't want to ask my Lord "Why?" anymore. I don't want to harbor any subtle thoughts that my Lord is punishing me, or has forgotten me, or is behind schedule in helping me. NO! I want to look into the face of all my grief, my sorrows, my difficulties -- and say -- "Closer, Lord draw me closer to You! Let everything in my life drive me to You!"

Perhaps when the enemy realizes that all he is doing is driving you closer to the Lord, he will have to let up - lest he drive you right into the full glory of Christ.
Suffering and the Cross cannot be separated!

Suffering and the Cross are inseparable - you cannot have one without the other. When Christ warned His disciples that He would suffer and die, Peter protested. The very notion of suffering was rejected by many of the early church fathers.

Any attempt to separate suffering from the Cross is a work of the enemy. It is said in the Scriptures that Christ "learned obedience by the things he suffered" (Heb. 5:8-9).

"We see Jesus... for the suffering of death... tasting death for every man... to make the captain of our salvation perfect (complete) through sufferings..." (Heb. 2:9-10).

Any child of God who tells you there is no suffering for believers who walk in Spirit and faith, does not know the Word of God. I don't think any Christian can be "made conformable to his death" without suffering. There is a fellowship of His suffering. Paul said, "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ..." (2 Cor. 1:5).

"Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you - and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for the body's sake, which is the church..." (Col. 1:24).

"If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together..." (Rom. 8:17).

"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us..." (Rom. 8:18).

"...as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation..." (2 Cor. 1:7).

Peter preached the same message. It was only after his own identification with Christ and the Cross that he could say, "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may

be glad also with exceeding joy..." (1 Pet. 4:13).

After that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect [complete], establish, strengthen, settle you..." (1 Pet. 5:10).

"...because Christ also suffered for us, leaving an example, that we should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21).

There are many other convincing Bible verses that verify the sufferings of those who take up the Cross and follow Christ. Suffering is offensive to those who believe power renders it useless. This was what made Christ's suffering so very reproachful to Peter. He wondered - why the Son of God needed to suffer, in view of His abilities to call down legions of angels and destroy all His enemies. Peter saw no value in suffering, like so many today who consider it offensive to a believer "filled with Holy power."

How can we face this Scripture without wincing, if we don't accept the truth that godly people suffer:

"For as much then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin. (1 Pet. 4:1).

I am amazed by the reaction of some Christians when I speak about the sufferings of the Lord's people. One dear soul wrote: "Why so much talk about suffering? It gets me down. I don't like to think those kinds of thoughts. Suffering is not for me. I think only those thoughts that are positive and creative. You probably suffer so much because you have no revelation of God's promises. I'll pray for you..."

I've had ministers look at me pitifully and with condescending voices say, "Poor Brother Dave a modern-day Job. He sure needs our prayers." I can tell by the way they look at me they are asking themselves, "What terrible sin is hidden in his life? Or what weak faith he must have - if any! Why do his wife and family suffer so?" But, oh, hallelujah! I and my family know the sweet taste of victory because we've been in the battle and have come forth every time with purged lives and strengthened faith and courage. The fire of affliction purifies; it filters out all dross and leaves but the gold.

If Paul gloried in the Cross he also gloried in its sufferings. Was Paul mad when he said "...we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience..." (Rom. 5:3-4)?

How many congregations or preachers today would permit Paul to stand in their pulpit and cry out, "If I must needs glory, I will glory in mine infirmities..." (2 Cor. 11:30).

Compare the Cross-less preaching heard from many pulpits today with Paul's message. He preached "...the Lord said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong..." (2 Cor. 12:9-10).

Need attracts grace; suffering attracts mercy; weakness attracts His strength. The strongest believer is one who has been thoroughly tested and put through the fire - and who has been strengthened and matured in the process.

At the risk of sounding really negative, I believe there is too little preaching of the Cross in churches today. I've actually had Christians walk out on my preaching when I've tried to show them from the Word that the Cross includes physical and spiritual suffering.

The Cross represents reproach, rejection, denial of self, mortification of the flesh, surrender of the will and that is offensive to those Christians addicted to ease, pleasure, and prosperity.

Almost everybody is hurting in one way or another. But believers who are enduring severe trial and affliction and who can see God in it all, supplying mercy, grace, and strength - are building up a history with the Lord.

Does your history with the Lord include grace in your worst hours of fear and pain; heaven-supplied strength when you were at the end of all hope; soft spiritual rain when you were parched and dry; supernatural peace when all was in turmoil - rest and assurance in the face of death? Those with such histories are more patient and understanding than those who have never been put to the test.

There really is only one Cross - His! He tasted death for us all; He suffered and bled once for sin; He drank the bitter cup. Our suffering and pain are not meritorious - they add nothing to grace - but they are the cost of discipleship. When we become a true reflection of a holy Christ, we will suffer. There will be persecution from sinners and rejection from carnal Christians. You will suffer when the Word tries you, as you appropriate the promises, and deliverance is delayed. You will suffer when you sin or grieve the Holy Spirit. You will suffer when excruciating physical pain comes on you or a dear loved one, and it seems no relief is in sight. You will suffer when a godly saint is suddenly taken, perhaps in an accident.

I strongly believe in divine healing. I believe God wants to bless and heal His children. I believe God gives us authority over demonic powers. But I also believe in taking up the Cross and following Christ - and that often includes suffering. It also means resurrection power through it all.

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