

More Than a Martyr

John 10:15-21

In 1563, John Foxe published one of the most influential books in history, popularly titled simply Foxe's Book of Martyrs. As that title indicates, the book is a collection of accounts of Christians who were put to death because of their faith. They became martyrs, dying for their cause.

Foxe himself had left the Roman Catholic church and become one of the reformers, and under the cruel reign of Queen Mary in England, he along with many other reformers was forced to flee the country for his own safety. He had already begun work on a history that would be a justification of the Reformation and would show history as a cosmic struggle between Christ and anti-Christ, good and evil, truth and error. When he was able to return to England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, his work was greatly expanded to include stories of the early church persecutions. Catholics had often criticized Protestants as being a new sect. Where, they asked, had the Protestant faith been before 1500? Foxe's history was written to show that the Protestant faith was the faith of the true Church, which had been persecuted from its earliest days of existence. His history book was his attempt to make know the working of God in history, as an encouragement to those who suffered for their faith. It was. There was a time when the Bible and Foxe's work were the only two books many Christians ever read.

Martyrs can be very influential. They can provide great encouragement and motivation for a cause. And often, the ongoing influence of a martyr greatly surpasses the influence he might have actually had during his lifetime. Perhaps there is no greater example of that than Martin Luther King.

Having said that, however, it is not appropriate to identify Jesus as a martyr, because a martyr, by definition, is dead. A martyr, by definition, dies for a cause and remains dead. The power and influence he might have is directly connected to the sacrifice of his life, but he remains merely an example. In himself, he has no power over death. In fact, of course, he is a victim of death. And Jesus was no such victim.

Jesus was a martyr, but he was so much more, because not only did he die, he rose from the dead. Not only did he offer the encouragement of the example of submitting to death, he also offered the power needed to conquer death. To overcome death. He laid down his life, to be sure. But he also raised it back up again. And that's our focus this morning. This sermon is all about Jesus, all about Jesus' death, but more than that, it is all about Jesus life. And so the central message of the gospel is not simply that Jesus died, but that he was raised from the dead. He died for our sins, but he was raised for our justification. He died as the propitiation to satisfy the justice and wrath of God which our sins earned, and he was raised from the dead so that we, too, could be made alive.

John 11:25 Jesus said to [Martha], "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

So that is the gospel that I preach to you. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Jesus is life, eternal life. To have Jesus, to know Jesus, is to have the gift of eternal life, and that begins by understanding the connection between,

I. JESUS AND HIS FATHER.

This is a repeated them of John that we've seen again and

again. The relationship between Jesus and his father.

v.15

So if you are to come to know God, you must come to know Jesus.

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Mat. 11:27 “All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.”

Then follows one of the most tender invitations of the gospel to be found anywhere in Scripture,

Mat. 11:28 “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Jesus and his father. The first person of the trinity, and the second person of the trinity. That’s where this gospel began, isn’t it?

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.”

So look again at this emphasis regarding the,

A. Knowledge between a father and a son.

v.15

Do you want to know God? Then you must know Jesus. As Peter puts it in,

Acts 4:11 “This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ 12 Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

There is this connection of purpose, and of work, related to the sheep. And Jesus’ death. Go back with me to,

John 6:35 And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. 40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

That’s why this knowledge between the father and the son is so important, because our salvation is wrapped up in that relationship. There are this group of people whom John identifies as the sheep. And Jesus says that those sheep are the ones whom the father has given him. And it is for those sheep that he lays down his life. “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.”

Your salvation, as a Christian, is rooted in this relationship between the father and the son, this mutual knowledge between God the father and God the son. It is a mutual knowledge that is directly connected to the,

B. Love between a father and a son.

v.17

The father loves the son, because the son obeys his father's will. He lays down his life for the sheep, just as his father wishes. And was an of love by the son, love for his father.

God the father loves his son, and identifies him with that love, going back to,

Is. 42:1 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him."

There we see all three persons of the Trinity, don't we? The father, the son, and the holy spirit. And that verse is quoted when Jesus is presented at the Transfiguration,

Mat. 17:5 "While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!"

John's gospel has such a profound and robust presentation of what we simply call the trinity. And that is how God is presented and revealed to us, as a father and a son, in a relationship of perfect knowledge and love. With the purpose to which I have already referred, that we understand the relationship between,

II. JESUS AND HIS SHEEP.

This isn't a theological lecture on the doctrine of the trinity. Rather, this is a presentation of the trinity such that you can understand the work of God for your salvation. In other words, as we studied last time, your salvation is presented in terms of a shepherd and his sheep.

v.11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. 12 But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd,

one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. 13 The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."

I am the good shepherd! But even more than that, "I know my sheep."

Beloved, this emphasis is for your encouragement.

A. Jesus knows his sheep.

That's a personal knowledge, an intimate knowledge. A saving knowledge. To say that Jesus knows his sheep is to say that the sheep are protected from danger, they are provided food and shelter, they are given life! So it is we read in that most familiar of all Psalms,

Ps. 23:1 "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake."

In the language and context of the Old Testament, your salvation is presented this way,

Ezek. 34:11 "For thus says the Lord God: "Indeed I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day. 13 And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them to their own land; I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, in the valleys and in all the inhabited places of the country. 14 I will feed them in good pasture, and their fold shall be on the high mountains of Israel. There they shall lie down in a good fold and feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel.

15 I will feed My flock, and I will make them lie down,” says the Lord God. 16 “I will seek what was lost and bring back what was driven away, bind up the broken and strengthen what was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong, and feed them in judgment.”

Therefore, the apostle Peter says this,

1 Peter 2:25 “For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”

Jesus knows his sheep. And that is the determining factor in our salvation, not even that you know Jesus, but that he knows you. It is a precious comfort for your soul. And then in our text Jesus adds something else quite astounding,
v.16

In other words, Gentiles. No longer is God working salvation only through the single nation of Israel. The gospel is for all the nations, in all the world. And they will all be made one.

B. Jesus calls his sheep into one fold.

Clearly that refers to Jews and Gentiles. That’s the church, Jew and Gentile together.

Eph. 2:11 “Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— 12 that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in

Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.”

And that is for our encouragement as Christians, we who were not Jews,

Eph. 2:19 “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

So you are no longer an alien in the kingdom of God, you who believe in Jesus. You are no longer a foreigner, but you are a citizen, you who believe in Jesus, a citizen of the kingdom of God. You have “peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Gal. 3:26 “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

Col. 3:1 “...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

Finally, as my third point this morning, we see the connection between,

III. JESUS AND HIS LIFE.

In other words, Jesus and his own power and authority over his life. And over his death.

Jesus is not merely a martyr, a victim of death. He doesn't die merely as an example for others. He doesn't die as a martyr to inspire others. He actually accomplishes the work of our salvation. He lays down his life, on purpose. Intentionally. Willingly, willfully. That's the climax and focus of the point he is seeking to make.

A. Jesus willingly lays down his life.

And he does so for his sheep.

v.15

v.17

And he does it according to the will and purpose of his father.

v.18

Let me emphasize the reason why. Why Jesus willingly lay down his life. The purpose. The big word is propitiation. Perhaps that can be defined as atoning sacrifice. Or even more clearly, he paid the penalty for your sins, the sins of his sheep for whom he died.

If you go to court and find yourself guilty, the judge will impose a sentence upon you. Maybe it's a certain amount of money, a fine. You were speeding, and the penalty is a fine. That's the judgment of the court, the sentence imposed on you.

Maybe it's community service. Or more seriously, jail time. Ten days, or ten years. Or maybe the whole of your life, a life sentence.

For the most serious crimes, that sentence could be death itself. And you know, don't you, that the appropriate, corresponding sentence that God imposes upon all sinners is the sentence of death.

That goes back to the Garden of Eden,

Gen. 2:16 "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

Even more simply,

Rom. 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death."

Spiritual death. Condemnation. The eternal punishment of hell.

The reason Jesus laid down his life was to pay that penalty, to satisfy the demands of God's justice. Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice, a propitiation.

Heb. 9:16 "For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17 For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives. 18 Therefore not even the first covenant was dedicated without blood. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which God has commanded you." 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. 23 Therefore it was necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the

heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another— 26 He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, 28 so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

Jesus willingly lays down his life, as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of his sheep, so that our sins could be forgiven. “I lay down my life for the sheep.”

And,

B. Jesus has power to raise himself from the dead.

Again, to emphasize, he is so much more than a martyr. He died, and on the third day, he was raised from the dead. That was his purpose. That was his own accomplishment, by his own power.

v.17-18

That, of course, really irritated the unbelieving Jews who heard him. To them, that was blasphemy. And they respond accordingly.

v.19-20

But some realized the truth,

v.21

So what about you? That really is the question. That is

always the question. I proclaim to you the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and I declare to you that only by faith in him will you be saved. This is the message of the gospel,

Rom. 10:9 “...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Dear friends, believe these things with all of your heart. Believe in the power of God over death, believe in Jesus’ own power to be raised from the dead, so that you, too, can have eternal life.

And take great comfort in all these words, that the good shepherd knows his sheep, and has laid down his life for them. Take comfort, and find your security in this, that Jesus is the good shepherd.