

MATTHEW 26:36-46

GETHSEMANE

“Jesus went with [his disciples] to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to [them], ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray.’ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.’ And going a little farther he fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’ And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.’ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’”¹

If Jesus called on you to stand with Him in the hard place, would you do so? Would you hasten to stand with Him, though you knew the cost would be terrible? I suspect that most of us who are Christians flatter ourselves that we would move with alacrity and are confident that we would never desert the Master regardless of how difficult the place we occupy. However, I fear that we flatter ourselves with courage that does not exist.

I don’t mean to disparage believers who want to be courageous; I only mean to caution that the faithful face a powerful and determined enemy. In general, we pastors give the impression that we are prepared to encourage a rather casual approach to living out the Faith. We are engaged in a vicious war that demands full reliance upon our great Protector and Commander. He does call us to stand with Him and when we do so, we will engage in battle. Consider a sampling of the calls that we have received from the Master Himself.

“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” [JOHN 12:26]. Following the Master is not a recommendation—it is a command! Standing with Jesus is evidence that one is a disciple.

“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” [JOHN 14:23].

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” [JOHN 17:24].

The Apostle has given a strong call to stand firm in the day of conflict when he writes, “Be strengthened in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Clothe yourselves with the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens. For this reason, take up the full armor of God so that you may be able to stand your ground on the evil day, and having done everything, to stand. Stand firm therefore” [EPHESIANS 6:10-14 NET BIBLE].

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Most Christians who have stood with Christ in the heat of spiritual conflict likely will not be especially pleased when reviewing their performance. They may have shrunk from the conflict, drew back rather than engage the enemy at close range and trembled at the potential cost of the warfare. Spiritual combat is costly, and the most experienced understand the high cost of standing firm. However, these precious souls will stand because they trust their Great Commander and know that they have no one else to whom they can turn.

In these days preceding Easter, the Day set aside to permit us especially to remember the Resurrection of the Master, we do well to recall an incident that occurred in the final hours of His earthly ministry when the Master had taken three disciples with Him as He faced the cross. The account provides great encouragement for each believer as we review that singular incident immediately before Jesus was seized by His enemies.

HONOUR — “Jesus went with [his disciples] to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to [them], ‘Sit here, while I go over there and pray.’ And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, ‘My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and watch with me.’”

Even a casual reading of the text makes it apparent that Jesus honoured Peter, John and James when He asked the, to remain nearby, keeping watch, as He prayed. In inviting them to share His trial, He effectively indicated His approval of their spiritual maturity. In a general sense, we are honoured whenever another individual asks us to be with them as they face a particular struggle. To be asked by a respected leader to share as he faces particular struggles is a rare honour, indeed. When Jesus asked these three disciples to watch with Him, He honoured them in enviable fashion.

The very fact that Jesus spoke of His inner turmoil is indicative of a rich privilege extended to these Apostles. Would you not consider it a rare and rich privilege to be asked to spend time with the Master—to enjoy such intimacy with Him that He would tell you of His struggles? In fact, each of us as Christians are so honoured, just as the disciples were honoured.

Moments ago we witnessed several passages in which the Master has spoken of those who follow Him sharing His life. Review those instances so that they are fixed in your mind. “If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” [JOHN 12:26]. Those who serve Jesus will follow Him. Those who follow Him are assured that the Father will honour them.

Again, take note of Jesus’ assertion. “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” [JOHN 14:23]. Disciples—those who love the Master—keep His Word. Those who keep His Word will enjoy the presence of the Father and of the Son. God dwells with those who obey Jesus.

“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world” [JOHN 17:24]. Those who are given to the Master will be with Him that they may witness His glory. Let me say quite candidly, if we have not seen His glory, it may well be that we have willingly shut our eyes to His glorious presence.

What is humbling about Jesus’ request that the disciples be near as He faced the cross is the knowledge that He knew they would desert Him in the hour of trial. You will remember that it was immediately after instituting the Lord’s Supper that Jesus had warned the disciples, “Jesus [warned the disciples], ‘You will all fall away, for it is written, “I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered””’ [MARK 14:27].

When Jesus warned the disciples of the crisis of courage—the total failure of courage—that they would shortly face because of Him, Peter brashly asserted that his courage would not fail. “Even though they all fall away, I will not” [MARK 14:29]. It is easy to see an expansive wave of his hand as he asserted his courage. Lest you should imagine that I am somehow picking on Peter, I remind you of Matthew’s comment: “And all the disciples said the same” [MATTHEW 26:35]. The Apostles were confident in their courage, their ability to stand.

Before offering up His High Priestly prayer, Jesus reflected on what was coming. “Behold, the hour is coming,” He cautioned, “indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me.” It is the same message we saw moments ago, though John does not note the rash confidence of any of the disciples. I believe the statement was part of the rushed preparation the disciples were receiving. This statement from the lips of the Master is followed by a verse that is frequently quoted by followers of the Master in times of trial. One reason the words are so comforting is that they were spoken at a time when the Apostles were being cautioned that their faith would fail. Jesus comforted them, “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” [JOHN 16:32, 33].

Jesus would face the cross alone; but it was not because He did not invite the disciples to stand with Him. The divine work of providing salvation would rest on His shoulders alone. Jesus, and no other, must provide salvation. The sacrifice is His alone, just as the victory must be His alone. Today, no man can say, “I have stood with Jesus and gained a great victory in the contest of life.” The principle established by the Master in His final hours stands for disciples to this day, “Apart from Me you can do nothing” [see JOHN 15:5]. Likewise, the principle applies to each follower of the Master, “So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty’” [LUKE 17:10].

To be certain, John, the Beloved Disciple, would draw near the cross as the Master hung there. Jesus would commend Mary into John’s safe keeping [see JOHN 19:26, 27]. However, John’s presence wasn’t because of some particular courage on his part; he appears to have sought out his own mother, drawing courage from her. For though Jesus was deserted by His disciples at the first, His mother and aunt—John’s mother, and Mary Magdalene were at the foot of the cross. In the hour of death, a mother will not desert her child; and Mary’s courage encouraged the other two women. Women often draw strength from one another in the face of danger. Perhaps it is because men see other men as a threat and will quickly slay the threat. Women, however, are not seen as a threat. Thus, the Apostles, fearing for their lives, fled—all, that is, except for John. Love for his own mother compelled him to seek her out and to stand with her.

HORROR — “He fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.’”

I cannot imagine the horror of the cross. Death is not so terrible; one need only be in the wrong place at the wrong time and death will happen. Sir Walter Scott has written appropriately,

“And come he slow, or come he fast,
It is but death who comes at last.”²

And terrible as death may be, we must never imagine that Jesus shrank from death because it would extinguish His life; there was something greater at play in His shrinking back.

² Sir Walter Scott, “Marmion,” <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext04/marmn10ah.htm>, accessed 23 March 2013

We gain insight into what was taking place as we consider a commentary on His Passion. An unknown author has written, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence” [HEBREWS 5:7]. Hanging on a cross, suspended between heaven and earth, the Son of God echoed the twenty-second Psalm, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani” [MATTHEW 27:46]? The Psalmist has written a Psalm that reads more like history than poetry.

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?”
[PSALM 22:1]

The words anticipate the sacrifice of the Son of God because of man’s sinful, helpless condition.

The reason I cannot imagine the horror of the cross, just as you cannot imagine the horror of the cross, is because we are not pure. We cannot enter into the transaction that took place as the sinless Son of God was separated from the Father. This is mystery, and no man can ever penetrate into the darkness of that hour. I should suppose that as close as we shall ever get to understanding what happened in that dark hour is to read again the familiar words of Isaiah. Recall the dark words Isaiah has penned as he describes the suffering of the innocent for the sins of the wicked; for he writes of the death of Jesus, the Messiah.

“Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?
And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.”

“Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

[ISAIAH 53:4-10]

How dark is the description Isaiah has penned! How dreadful the sense of injustice, the righteous suffering for the unrighteous. We cannot truly understand the anguish He experienced. In his first letter, Peter writes something that can only be said to be enigmatic, strange, even incomprehensible. The Apostle writes, “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look” [1 PETER 1:10-12].

If we cannot understand what the Master experienced in providing salvation, how much less do the angels in glory understand! This statement raises a point that causes us to wonder. Angels cannot be redeemed. When angels fell from their exalted position, they were cast out of heaven; those fallen angels can never be redeemed. For them to be saved, it would be necessary for the Christ to become an angel and taste death in their place. However, He did become a man, thereby offering His life as a sacrifice in the place of His fallen creature. No wonder, then, that it is said that the angels long to look into these matters of salvation. They see the Son of God presenting His life as an offering because of man, and they can only wonder, marvel, question.

What a dark picture is presented in the Word of God, as the Son of God who was eternally bound to the Father allowed Himself to be separated by sin that was not His own. When Scripture informs us that, “We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone” [HEBREWS 2:9], we can only bow in wonder.

Join me in standing before the cross; there, we gaze upon “the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” [GALATIANS 2:20]. The sight humbles us, embarrasses us, causes us to stare in silence. We see Him hanging naked, His wrists pinioned to the cross member with spikes driven behind His palms, His legs folded beneath Him until His heel nearly touches his buttock and a crude nail driven through His heel. Listen, as He speaks for the first time. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” [LUKE 23:34]. He says this as the soldiers gamble for His clothing.

We hear the two criminals who were hung with Him as they curse and rage in their own pain. One, filled with His own anger yells defiantly at the Master, “Are You the Christ? Save Yourself and us” [LUKE 23:39]! We hear the other criminal caution the former, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” [LUKE 23:40, 41]. Then, turning to Jesus, this criminal implores, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” [LUKE 23:42]. For a second time, the Master speaks, His words gentle and comforting, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise” [LUKE 23:43]. Thus, He exemplified His mission as He had stated, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” [LUKE 19:10].

With deep compassion, concerned for the welfare of His mother, Jesus sees His cousin, John, standing nearby; and He speaks yet again. Looking at His mother, perhaps with a movement of His head toward John, the Master said “Woman, behold, your son!” Then, fixing His gaze on John, the Master said, “Behold, your mother” [JOHN 19:26, 27]!

As the agonising torture neared the end, He we see Him as He lifts His head to heaven and cries out in Aramaic, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” In our tongue, the cry is translated, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” [MARK 15:34]? How tragic! The Jews no longer understood their own language, for when they heard His cry, they thought He was calling Elijah. They no longer understood their own tongue!

He was the Son of God, and He was the Son of Man. He revealed His humanity; He truly was one of us. He had truly emptied Himself, taking upon Himself the very form of a man. He was just like us—frail, mortal, fragile, susceptible, vulnerable. As death nears, we hear Him plead for relief from the raging thirst. In this, He betrayed His humanity as He gasped, “I thirst” [JOHN 19:28]. Even then, there would be no relief from the torment of cruel men, for they lifted a sponge soaked in sour wine so that He might suck the moisture.

Knowing that the end was nearing, we witness Jesus calling out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” [LUKE 23:46]!

Then, the Master seems to rally. Pushing up against the spikes, He lifts His head to the heavens and shouts—a shout so powerful that it seems to pierce our souls. Breaking over our heads like a great wave is one final word— *Tetélestai*. “It is finished” [JOHN 19:30]! It was not a cry of resignation; it was a cry of victory. No one who heard that cry would ever forget it, though no one who heard it could fully understand what it meant.

With that mighty cry, He bowed His head and died, and all who were near the cross trembled. The blood poured down His face from the cruel thorns that had pierced His brow. And the blood flowed from down from His back where the beating had torn His flesh, leaving as it were ribbons of white floating in a sea of blood. And the blood dropped from His pierced hands and the nail that was driven through his feet. And the blood dropped to the ground, whispering to the grass, “It is finished.” And the grass echoed the message to the birds winging through leaden skies, “It is finished.” And the birds trilled the message to the heavens, “It is finished.” And the heavens echoed to the earth, “It is finished!” And the angels in heaven repeated the word until all heaven rang with the message, “It is finished!”

With that word, Jesus announced that God’s great work of salvation was ended. Now, at last, those reading the ancient text are able to comprehend the meaning of Isaiah’s final words in the fifty-third chapter.

“Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the transgressors.”

[ISAIAH 53:11, 12]

The high priest on the Day of Atonement would enter the Most Holy Place to sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat. Robed in linen garments, he would enter into the darkness of that awful place to make atonement for the people. For about three hours he was hidden from the view of those who waited. After that time he would come out from the Most Holy Place, and lifting his hands to the heavens he would cry, “It is finished!” Atonement is made.

Well might the Son of God draw back in horror at what He faced. Though we cannot comprehend the horror of what He would experience, we know enough to know that the cost of our salvation is greater than any of us could ever provide. For three hours, hidden from view of the people, the Son of God presented His life as a sacrifice for sin. And when it was accomplished, He would cry out in victory, “It is finished!” Salvation is purchased. Atonement is made.

HUMILIATION — “He came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’ Again, for the second time, he went away and prayed, ‘My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done.’ And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words again. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, ‘Sleep and take your rest later on. See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’”

The disciples were honoured by Jesus’ request that they watch while He prayed. We have perhaps some understanding, however imperfect, of why the Master would draw back in horror at the prospect of the cross. However, the disciples repeatedly were humiliated by their lack of strength. Repeatedly, Jesus came to them; and repeatedly, He found them asleep.

Jesus had said to the disciples, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay alert” [MARK 14:34 NET BIBLE]. Wrestling with the terror of what He would shortly face, He pleaded with the Father, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” [MARK 14:36]. This was not quiet acceptance of what was coming! He did not face the cross with composure, tranquility, acceptance—He faced the cross with deep distress, wrestling to grasp the meaning of what was to happen. And His disciples could not share in His struggle.

We must be careful not to condemn these men overly much, for when we are honest with ourselves we are forced to admit that we struggle to fulfil the call of the Master in our own lives. We mean well, and we want to serve Him. However, we learn too quickly the reality of His Word, “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” [MATTHEW 26:41].

We excuse ourselves, and people about us die without the life that is offered in the Master. I remember with horror how I failed the Master on one occasion. Jerry was attending services at the church I was pastoring. He enjoyed the preaching, and he came every Sunday. He was a businessman in the community, well-liked by all who knew him. However, I learned that Jerry was lost—he was not saved. And so I spoke with him about his soul after each service. He continued to come each Sunday, and at the conclusion of each service I would speak with him, reminding him that in Christ the Lord is the forgiveness of sin and life—real life! He was never put off by me urging him to believe the message of life. In fact, Jerry seemed eager to hear the message I presented; but somehow, he just wasn’t prepared to submit to Jesus as Master over his life.

Then, one Sunday, Jerry told me that he would be making a business trip to the Okanogan. “I have decided that when I get back,” he confided, “I will accept Christ.” I cannot tell you how thrilled I was at this assertion. It seemed as if the Spirit spoke to my heart, saying, “Now is the day of salvation.” However, I calmed my fear, consoling myself that Jerry would receive Christ as Master the following week.

Sunday came that following week, and as the people assembled, I noted that Jerry was absent. His friend, the man who had introduced us and first brought Jerry to the services, asked to speak to me. “Jerry died this week; while in the Okanogan he had a massive heart attack and died almost immediately,” he said.

I was stunned. So close to life, and so far as I know he turned away. I understand that God calls whom He wills and I know that those who are called respond; but I also know that I had not fulfilled the appointment I had received. I knew that the Spirit had prompted me the previous Sunday, urging me in unmistakable terms that I should press Jerry to believe. I had failed the Master. He had honoured me, and I had failed him.

I wish I could tell you that this was the only time I failed to fulfil the call of the Master. Alas, I am a sinful man, and I fail Him more often than I care to admit. He does not condemn me, but I know that I have not done what I should. I cannot excuse myself; I cannot blame anyone other than myself. I am sinful. I confess that the Apostle spoke for me when he wrote, “I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death” [ROMANS 7:22-24]?

HONOUR — “When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Feed my lambs.’ He said to him a second time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ He said to him, ‘Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.’ He said to him, ‘Tend my sheep.’ He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, ‘Do you love me?’ and he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go.’ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, ‘Follow me’” [JOHN 21:15-19].

The story is not complete, however. The Master does not treat us as we deserve. We received mercy and grace when He saved us, and we continue to receive mercy and grace to this day. Until the day we are transformed into His image, we will receive mercy and grace. Thus it was that Peter, John and James had greater days before them than they could have ever imagined. Jesus had promised, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father” [JOHN 14:12].

Nevertheless, Peter was quite certain that his service was over. He was assured in his heart that there is no place in service to the Master for a failure. He quit the ministry and returned to what he had done before. I suppose if it were this day, he would plan to go into some occupation that required no extensive training, just so he would make a living. He hadn’t counted on the intervention of the Risen Lord of Glory, however. Jesus wasn’t finished with Peter, just as He isn’t finished with me, or with you. The Risen Son of God is in the business of making success stories out of failures like us. Christ is in the business of honouring His people.

Do you remember the opening words of Peter's first letter to the Diaspora? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" [1 PETER 1:3-7].

Of course, you know that the Body is composed of failures—just like Peter, and John, and James. These failures have learned through painful experience that they have no strength, that they are not courageous, that they have no ability. These have learned with the Apostle the reality of the Master's words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." And, just as Paul has stated, so they testify, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong" [2 CORINTHIANS 12:9, 10].

Paul wrote a church that was hurting. They had been battered and beaten; I suppose you might have said it was a church made up of losers—people who had failed. However, Paul looked beyond the immediate to see the eternal. Listen to what he wrote that hurting church. "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.

"This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed" [2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-10].

So it is that we are honoured by the Master as He asks us to stand with Him. He bears the horror of the cross, and we are humiliated by our weakness. However, He is turning weakness into strength. He does this through conquering death through the sacrifice of His own life for us. Therefore, the Apostle pleads with us through his letter to the Colossian Christians, "In [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross" [COLOSSIANS 2:9-14]. Amen.