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The Marks of Jesus

by T. Austin-Sparks

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A Message to Younger Christians

"I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus" (Galatians 6:17.)

The marks of Jesus; whether these were actually marks on his body, scars of his sufferings, or whether he was using a figure, a well-known figure of speech, we may not be quite sure. It is possible that Paul meant both; that is that there were marks on his body, marks of the rod with which he had been beaten, marks of stones with which he had been stoned, marks of the hardships through which he had passed, and then, looking at them, he thought of them in the light of the brand. You know what the brand is. Animals are branded, branded with hot irons. And he looked at those scars and thought of them as brands. But it does not matter very much which it was. It was quite true that Paul bore branded in his very being the marks of Jesus. It is that that matters - that *there* shall be the marks of Jesus.

I want to suggest to you that these marks, these scars to which the Apostle referred as branded on his body, were marks which represent three things. In the first place, they were

1. The Marks of Ownership.

They declared that he belonged to the Lord Jesus, and everybody could see it. I think that that was very much in the mind of the apostle because of the figure of speech, or the well-known custom to which he referred.

The brand - "I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus". Every owner has his own branding mark, branding iron, and all who see that mark can know to whom that one so branded belongs. I think further that the Apostle had in his mind not the branding of animals, but, what in the Greek world in his day was a well-known custom, the branding of slaves. Now you know, in those days and in that world slaves were purchased at a price, became the property of the master, and there was no getting their liberty unless in some way they could pay the price which had been paid for them, and this was very doubtful. If they earned any wages at all, it would be a whole lifetime before they could save enough to buy themselves free. But there was a way out, there was a custom. They could go to the temple of their god and see the priest and they could sell themselves to the god to become the property of the god or the gods - heathen gods, of course, which were no gods. If they did that, the priest took a branding iron which had the mark of the god, the particular god or deity, and he pulled up the sleeve of the slave and branded on his arm the mark of the god, and from that time he was regarded as the slave of the gods, which meant that he was free from all other slavery. He could go out. Now, should his old master, or the successor of his old master, or any of his relatives, try to bring him back again into bondage - as they might; they might pursue him, overtake him, seek to bring him back again into slavery - when they sought so to do, all that he had to do was to draw up his sleeve and show the brand mark of the god, and they dare not touch him. If they did, they became the enemy of the god - the god was against them, and no one would dare that. Because he was a slave of the god, he was a free man in the world.

Paul knew all about that, and I think it was to that he referred when he said "Let no man trouble me". Let no one try to bring me into bondage! Let no one lay any hand upon me to make me their property! I belong to the Lord Jesus, and "I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus". A little way before he had said - "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". He was saying, in effect, "O world, to whom I was once a slave, to whom I was once in bondage, who once claimed me and held me and used me; O world, I am freed from you because I have been made the captive slave of Jesus Christ by His Cross. He has set me free from your bondage and captivity. My bondage to Him spells my liberty from the world. O world, do not seek to get me back again. Lay no hands of yours upon me. Old life, which I once had, do not seek to capture me again. I belong to the Lord Jesus. I bear branded in my body His marks". I think the message there is a perfectly clear one. The marks of Jesus, for all to see, to be shown to all, speak of our belonging to Him, of His being our Master, and this means faithfulness and loyalty in our allegiance to Him as our Master. Faithfulness and loyalty to HIM.

We all know the test of loyalty to the Lord in this world. The world is reaching out a hand, as it were, to come and interfere with our loyalty to the Lord Jesus; - just not to let it be known that we belong to Him. Such are the standards today, the mental standards of life, that it is so widely thought to be an unmanly, unwomanly thing to be a Christian. It is not robust, it is not strong, you must be of an inferior kind if you are a Christian. That is how it is, we know it quite well. This world despises Christians, and the temptation to all Christians is in some way to be Christians without "giving it away", without letting it be too obvious, and so we hide behind quite a lot of things. "We do not want to make a show of religion"; "we do not want to thrust religion down people's throats"; "we do not want to offend people and upset our chances of influencing them by giving it away too soon". All

sorts of things like that, hiding round corners, thinking we are going to get a better advantage, we are really going to serve the Lord's interests much better by going carefully, going slowly, and all the time taking cover and camouflaging.

Well, "henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus" and all can see it. I am quite sure that is what is here, that is what is meant; the manifest marks and signs of His ownership, that we belong to Him. And I really believe, after all, that the world far more highly respects and esteems the Christian who lets it be known "straight from the shoulder" than the one who covers it up.

I remember one day many years ago, when I was only a lad, a deep impression that was made upon me. I was in a shop; it was commercial travellers' day in that shop and two commercial travellers came in. One came in, looked all round to see who was in the shop, saw some people there, so stepped over into the corner and waited. Then he proceeded to his business in a sort of way that suggested to my youthful mind that he was ashamed to be doing business; that he did not want people to know what he was. It was all so under cover. Perhaps I should not have noticed it so much had it not been for the next episode. The door opened, and in came a fine, big fellow, a strapping young man. He saw the manager - "Good-morning, Mr. So-and-so. I have a splendid line for you today", and started right away. Everybody in the shop heard all about it. He went straight at it and captured the business, he got it forthwith. He was bent on business. It made a tremendous impression on me. As we came out of the shop, someone who was with me said, "That is the way to do business". Forgive me if that seems to be coming on to a very low level. I do feel that there is a great deal in being open and letting it be known where you stand. No hiding the brand.

We belong to the Lord; we are glad that we belong to the Lord; we are very glad to call Him "Master"; we have no compromise over that. We belong to the Lord and we tell Him that, and we will tell every other Christian that, but is it only in the realm where we are accepted, where we know we are accepted, where we know it is quite safe and quite comfortable to let it be known? What about this world? The marks of His ownership. Remember Paul and that shipwreck. How outstanding he was! He warned them, and then the time came when they were at their wit's end, and he came up to the Master of the ship and he said, "Be of good cheer. The Lord, Whose I am, and Whom I serve..." That's it - no covering there. He let it be known. I do not think I need try to drive that home. That lies here, right at the beginning - the marks of faithfulness and loyalty in our allegiance to Him, Whom we are glad to call Master and Lord; to Whom we really do owe everything. Is it not just a little unfair, to say the least of it, when we are prepared in secret with Him to acknowledge that we owe Him everything, to be ashamed to let it be known out in the world Whose we are?

"Ashamed of Jesus, that dear Friend
On Whom my hopes of heaven depend?"

These were also

2. The Marks of Devotion in Service.

Marks, not only of ownership, but of devotion in service. Paul had gained many a scar in his devoted service to the Lord. The service of the Lord for him meant suffering, and the marks were the marks of faithfulness unto sacrifice. It may not be that all of us will be called into that form of service

known as "missionary service" to which Paul was called, and many others. But that does not matter in this connection.

We are not going to get very far in our devotion to the interests of the Lord Jesus in this world without discovering that it is going to mean sacrifice, suffering unto sacrifice. It is going to cost. It may cost something in the matter of position, recognition; the best things may not be allowed to come our way. We may not be given an open door into certain circles, those circles may be closed to us. There may be many whose friendship we would like to have, but which friendship will be withheld from us. In many ways we may have to suffer loss, suffer unto sacrifice if the interests of the Lord Jesus are going to be pursued and furthered through us. I doubt whether it is possible for the real interests of the Lord Jesus to be served without sacrifice on our part. I do not think it is possible, and it may be that you and I at the close of our course here will look back and see many things that might have been ours, positions, and acceptances, and rewards, but which we have never come into, never possessed. We have to let them go for Jesus' sake, and we may at that time bear the brand of the Lord Jesus in this connection. Why? Why this? Why that? Why has it meant this? Why has it cost that? Why have I never got where some have got? That is the brand of the Lord Jesus, the mark of Jesus.

There are gains hidden from view which will more than compensate for that. This man, who wrote these words, wrote in another place, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal: but the things which are not seen are eternal". But the things seen do hold us so much, don't they? It is so difficult to get our eyes away from things seen; that is, the things that are manifest, things that can be taken account of, they are so present to view. The losses, the sufferings, the trials, the difficulties, the adversities, these are things seen. Things not seen - what are they, after all? Well, so far as we are concerned, the things that are not seen are promises. That is what it amounts to. They are real in God, but to us they are nothing more than promises. We have not got them, they are not seen. For present practical purposes they are only promises, yet far more exceeding and eternal, far more excellent, a weight of glory exceeding and eternal - a *weight* of glory. That is there unseen, while we bear the marks of loss here, loss of what we might have had, could have had. It was there for us, but, because of the interests of the Lord Jesus, it had to be let go. The marks of the Lord Jesus - faithfulness unto sacrifice, the unpopular way with all that it costs.

Then lastly, these marks on the Apostle were

3. The Marks of the Likeness of Jesus.

The brand, if it has any object at all, is something for others to see, to take note of, something which makes clear to all who are in any way interested that that particular one is defined and designated the property of another. It is something to show. And the marks of the Lord Jesus are not only marks of ownership and marks of devotion in service, but they are marks of likeness. I have always thought that exhortations to Christlikeness are not enjoyable things. I must confess that, whenever I hear people exhorting us to be Christlike, I have not found very much response. It is no use me telling you to be Christlike, so I am not going to do it, and yet I am saying that for you and for me there has got to be Christlikeness as the mark of His ownership of our lives. How does Christlikeness come about? Well, the marks of devotion in service come about by the measure in which we are prepared to suffer for Him, make sacrifices for Him. The marks of Christlikeness come about by the measure in

which we have communion with Him, so that the marks of Christlikeness are the result of faithfulness in communion.

You see, the marks of ownership are the results of faithfulness in loyalty; the marks of devotion in service are the marks of faithfulness in suffering and sacrifice; the marks of Christlikeness come out of faithfulness in communion with the Lord. How shall I be like Christ? How will you be like Christ? How will others see the marks of Jesus in us? Just in so far as we are faithful in our communion. You know that in everyday life. Start the day without your quiet time, without your prayer, and it will not be long before there are other marks in your life than the marks of Jesus. Neglect prayer, neglect communion with your Lord, and the traces of the Lord will soon disappear from view. On the other hand, look after the matter of communion, preserve that quiet time, those quiet times, look after your times of prayer, see to it that He has a place in your heart, a large place in your heart everyday and you need not worry about being like the Lord Jesus. All the worry to be like the Lord Jesus will not make any difference. People who walk closely with Him, keep in touch with Him, look after the prayer life, do carry those marks of His restfulness, His peacefulness, His patience, His gentleness, His kindness, His love; - the marks of Jesus. That is how it comes about. I do not tell you to strive and I do not tell you to strive and struggle to be like Jesus. I say, keep in touch with Jesus. Do believe me, for I have gone this way. I know, oh! I know, on the one hand the blessedness, and on the other hand the bitterness of suffering bound up with this very thing. The blessedness of looking after the quiet times, the prayer times, the communion life with the Lord! Oh yes! In business, in the world, what a difference it makes! On the other hand, things breaking in, adverse things that interfere with the life of communion with the Lord, and the result-! Oh, the miserable, wretched result! May I urge upon you to see to faithfulness in communion with your Lord, and, perhaps without knowing it (and it will be better so), you will be bearing the marks of the Lord Jesus, His likeness. I do not want you to be able to go about showing people how like Christ you are. We want it to be there and yet not to know it. It will be there if you look after the life of communion. So be faithful in this. And then? Well, what matters? "Henceforth let no man trouble me". It would all be in vain. They will come and try to draw away, to entice; the world will seek to allure. They will try to upset and annoy, but I belong to Jesus. I am satisfied with Jesus. I have all that I want in Him. "Let no man trouble me; I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus". May it be like that with all of us!

"His forever, only His, Who the Lord and me shall part?"

His, for His interests above my own and all others, His servant - Whose I am and Whom I serve. His, in blessed and unbroken communion, that through me His likeness may be seen. The marks of the Lord Jesus.