The Marks Of Jesus

By T. Austin-Sparks

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

"The marks of Jesus." Whether these were actually marks on the body of Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, scars of his sufferings, or whether he was using a well-known figure of speech, we may not be 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 the scars as brands, as 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.

The Marks of Ownership

The marks declared that he belonged to the Lord Jesus, and everybody could see it. I think 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. Paul said, *"I bear branded on my body the marks of Jesus."* We all know that animals are branded with hot irons. Every owner has his own branding mark and branding iron. 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 which in the Greek world in his day was a well-known custom, the branding of slaves. In those days and in that world, slaves were purchased at a price. They 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 custom that was a way out. They could go to the temple of their god and see the priest. They could sell themselves 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 particular god or deity, and he pulled up the sleeve of the slave and branded on his arm the mark of the god. From that time he was regarded as the slave of the gods, which meant that he was free from all other slavery. Should his old master, or the successor of his old master, or any of his relatives, seek to bring him back again into bondage – as they might – 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 – and no one would dare having a god against him. 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 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:

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"God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14). 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."

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.

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 – to just not let it be known that we belong to Him. It is widely thought today that it is an unmanly, unwomanly thing to be a Christian. It is thought that it is not robust, it is not strong, you must be inferior if you are a Christian. 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. 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 around 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.

Paul said, *"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 meant here: the manifest marks and signs of His ownership, that we belong to Him. I believe that the world more highly respects and esteems the Christian who lets it be known "straight from the shoulder" than the one who covers it up.

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 will tell every other Christian that, but only in the realm where we are accepted, where we know it is quite safe and quite comfortable to let it be known. What about the world? Remember Paul and that shipwreck. How outstanding he was! He warned them, and when the time came that they were at their wit's end, he came up to the master of the ship and he said, *"Be of good cheer…God, whose I am, and whom I serve…"* No covering there. He let it be known. Is it not unfair when in secret with our Master we acknowledge that we owe Him everything, but to then 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?"

The Marks 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. Not all of us will be called into that form of service known as missionary service to which Paul and many

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others were called. But 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 and recognition; the best things may not be allowed to come our way. We may not be given an open door into certain circles; they 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.

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 and possessed. We have to let them go for Jesus' sake. We may at that time bear the brand of the Lord Jesus.

There are gains hidden from view which will more than compensate for that. Paul, 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"* (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

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. They are real in God, but to us they are nothing more than promises. 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 what 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.

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. The marks of the Lord Jesus are not only marks of ownership and marks of devotion in service, but they are marks of likeness.

How does Christlikeness come about? The marks of ownership are the results of faithfulness in loyalty. The marks of devotion in service come about by the measure in which we are prepared to suffer for Him and make sacrifices for Him. The marks of Christlikeness come out of faithfulness in communion with the Lord. How shall you and I be like Christ? How will others see the marks of Jesus in us? It will be just insofar as we are faithful in our communion 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

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your Lord, and the traces of the Lord will soon disappear from view.

On the other hand, look after the matter of communion, preserve those quiet times, look after your times of prayer, see to it that He has 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 – carry these marks of His restfulness, His peacefulness, His patience, His gentleness, His kindness, His love – all marks of Jesus.

I do not tell you to strive and struggle to be like Jesus. I say, keep in touch with Jesus. I know on the one hand the blessedness, and on the other hand the bitterness of suffering bound up with this very thing. I know 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? *"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.

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