

*The following series of devotions were written by Bill Drake, worship leader for Operation Mobilisation and a dear friend of INcontext Ministries.*

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## **MOUNT MORIAH – A Study in Sacrifice**

### **PART 1: Place of ‘Worship’**

*Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.”*

*Genesis 22:5 (ESV)*

Wait a minute. What did he say? Abraham knew full well what he was going to do up there, and **yet he called it worship?** I thought worship was just the ‘sing bit’ before the ‘preach bit’ on Sunday morning, when we all raise our hands and close our eyes and get that real worshipful look... But that is not what was happening here.

I’m sure Abraham was thinking, “I thought we left human sacrifice behind in Babylon! Isn’t that the kind of barbaric stuff those pagans do to try to appease their bloodthirsty gods? And now this is the way the Almighty Creator God wants me to worship Him?”

And not just any human at that. This was Abraham’s precious, beloved son. The miracle child. Fulfillment of the promise of God, given to Abraham in his old age. And now God wants him back?

If God showed up one day and asked me to go sacrifice one of my daughters up on a mountaintop, you can bet that there would definitely be some querying going on, some checking to make sure I heard right, some seeking of Godly counsel... maybe even some psychiatric consultation.

But not with Abraham. He got up and went for it. Straight away. No argument, no negotiation, no sneakily trying to disguise Ishmael and take him instead. Abraham called to his son, saddled his donkey, and took the three-day journey to Mount Moriah...

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### **PART 2 – Where Your Treasure Is**

*Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.*

*Genesis 22:8 (NIV)*

In the book of Hebrews we see that Abraham believed that God was going to raise Isaac from the dead if needed (Hebrews 11:17-19), because by this time in his life, he had been groomed by God in deep, personal faith. He had seen

God do the impossible, time after time after time. God had shown Himself to be faithful and Abraham had learned that God can be trusted. With anything.

But what could God possibly have had to gain by having Abraham slaughter Isaac? Why would He want that? And what about us and the things we are called to 'sacrifice'? God doesn't want *things*, does He? Why does He want us to sacrifice things we value?

Why? Because God wants the heart. Your heart. More than anything else. His heart beats for your heart.

Why then does He go after your 'treasure'?

*"For where your treasure is, there will your **heart** be also. (Matthew 6:21, KJV)*

God is jealous. He does not want any idols in your life. He does not want anything to come between you and Him. Nothing. Not even the things He has given you. Not even His richest blessings. Abraham may have been tempted to be more in love with the blessings than with the blesser. It is easy to do. I love God's blessings too! But if I love them more than I love God, I have fallen into idolatry, and God can't stand sharing my life with such a mistress.

And so, God wanted to test Abraham. He wanted to know, for sure, with 100% certainty, that Abraham's heart belonged to Him and Him alone. And He wanted Abraham to know it. And He wanted the whole world to know it. So Abraham entered the classroom...

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

***Part 1 can be found below.***

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### ***PART 3 – A Living Sacrifice***

*When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood.*

*Genesis 22:9 (NIV)*

You know, people often miss the fact that Isaac was an active part of this story, too.

Abraham was an old man by this time, and Isaac was probably in his early teens. He lived an outdoors kind of existence, with much physical labour (he was no MTV-watching couch-potato!). When they finally reached the top of the mountain, and the full extent of the plan became horrifyingly clear, it would have been no trouble at all for Isaac to deliver a few quick jabs to Abraham's face, throw in a couple of body punches and a swift uppercut, lay his dad out and run back down the mountain to safety.

I know kids were more obedient and respectful in the 'good old days', but this really was pushing the limit.

“Now stop squirming, son, just sit nice and still while I tie your wrists together. OK, could you come and lay on this pile of sticks? Lovely. Now, where did we put the matches...?”

In my opinion, Isaac showed just as much faith as his father – maybe even more. Would you be willing to quietly lay back and allow yourself to be sacrificed as a burned offering? Isaac had been taught well. He had learned from his father that God can be trusted. He asks some strange things of us sometimes, but following His commands is always, always the best idea.

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, but Isaac was willing to sacrifice his very life if that was what God required to accomplish His plan...

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

***Parts 1 and 2 can be found below.***

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#### ***PART 4 – Already Dead***

*“For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”  
Matthew 16:25 (NASB)*

I keep coming back to Isaac, allowing himself to be laid out on the altar like that. And Abraham, willing to give up all his hopes and dreams and the person he loved the most. What would motivate a person to do something like that?

Recall the passengers of United Flight 93 on September 11, 2001. They were on the fourth plane to crash that day. 30,000 ft. above the ground, their plane was hijacked. They were terrified, and called down to the ground to try to get help and to alert people to what was going on. And that was when they discovered that they were part of something much bigger... they heard about the planes crashing into the Twin Towers, and the Pentagon...

My friends, in that moment the men and women on that flight became heroes. I’m sure the fear didn’t go away, but they suddenly gained the strength and the courage to stand and fight back. Why? What would make a bunch of normal, law-abiding citizens decide to crash an airplane, causing their own certain death?

It was easy. Why? Because they knew they were already dead. Their only decision then was **how to die**.

Meekly. Quietly. Buckled into their seats with their heads in their hands?

Or bravely. Boldly. Standing up for what was right. Saving thousands of others.

At that point, it becomes a ‘no-brainer’.

And I put it to you that this is why Isaac was able to submit himself to his father's knife, and why Abraham was able to submit himself to *his* Father's will. They saw the bigger picture. They knew they were dead already. They had died to self; died to the sin-nature; died to their own ambitions and desires. And chosen to live for God's ultimate purposes.

So what will you do? Will you sit in your nice, comfortable life, with your pension plan, your health insurance, your family and friends and possessions and reputation strapped securely around you, head in your hands, hoping that reality will not hurt too much when it hits?

Or will you stand up, grab the weapons available and storm the cockpit?

You are dead anyway, so why not make your remaining moments count? Why not do something of powerful, eternal significance?

"Let's roll!"

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

***Parts 1-3 can be found below.***

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## ***PART 5 – Eternal Weight of Glory***

*"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."*<sup>1</sup>

*- Jim Elliott*

Is this story on Mount Moriah really relevant to life today? It is always good to read about the faith of our spiritual fathers, but really, what is the application for today?

A secondary question aids the first – the question of how one defines sacrifice. A definition I have developed over the years goes like this:

***SACRIFICE: "To willingly give up something of great cost to yourself... in order to accomplish something of even greater value."***

Of course, we all make sacrifices for the things we value most highly. Our children's education, time with a sick relative, a more reliable car... Sure, we don't slaughter animals in their honour, but we do make choices and 'tighten our belts' for these things. Why? Because we trust that what we will gain outweighs what we will lose.

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We can assume that if Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, he must have had at least some idea that it was going to be worth it. By this point in his life, he had walked so long with the Lord that he had found Him to be faithful. If God was asking him to make a sacrifice, there *had* to be a divine purpose of even greater value – even more valuable than his son.

And this is what Abraham learned during his sojourn on Mount Moriah. On the way *up* the mountain, his most precious thing on earth was his son, but on the way *down* the mountain, he carried the far more precious and ‘usable’ treasure of having learnt radical, unconditional obedience to God regardless of the cost to himself.

***Parts 1-4 can be found below.***

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## **THE FRAGRANCE OF COSTLY WORSHIP**

### **PART 1 – Imagine the Scene**

*“Don't be afraid of failure; be afraid of being successful at things that don't matter.”*

- Seen in a ‘New Tribes Mission’ newsletter

*John 12: 1-7.*

*It starts with a simple meal. Jesus has traveled to Bethany and is sitting down to eat with his good friend Lazarus. The room is crowded with the great and the good from the town, all have come to rub shoulders with the Lord; honoured to be spending a few hours in the presence of this great teacher; anxious to hear first-hand what He has to say.*

*The women are buzzing around serving at the table, as usual; careful to stay in the background, piecing together what snatches of conversation they can catch as they duck in and out with dishes of food and pitchers of wine.*

*And among them is Mary. I can see her hovering by the door, getting in everyone's way, frustrating Martha as usual. She is desperate to be in that room. The Son of the Most High God is in there and it is just torturing her that she has to stay hidden. How her heart burns with love for Him. How she longs to sit at His feet, soaking up all He has to say. But this is a strictly men-only occasion. No women allowed, except those who are serving.*

*Mary's feet are twitching. She can't stand this a moment longer. She runs up to her room, pulls a stool over to the shelf and reaches up. Tucked in the corner, far from prying eyes, safe from accidental knocks, is what her fingers are seeking. Concealing it in the folds of her dress, she hurries back downstairs.*

*The meal is ending. The women have withdrawn and Jesus is about to speak to the assembled group. It is now or never...*

TO BE CONTINUED...

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## **PART 2 – ‘Trashing’ your Reputation**

*Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume...  
John 12:3a (NIV)*

**‘Faux pas’ number one: Mary walked into the room.**

I can almost hear the collective gasp of shock from the assembled men. “What is she doing?” they say to themselves. “Who does she think she is? Doesn’t this woman know her place?”

You see, in the Middle East at that time, only two types of woman would enter a room full of men eating dinner: those serving the meal, and those offering something quite different. By walking boldly into that setting, Mary completely ‘trashed her reputation’.

This threw into serious jeopardy her chances of ever making a good marriage, and from then on, would have been held in suspicion by almost everyone in town when she went to market, or to the well for water.

But Mary didn’t care. She was so in love with Jesus, she just didn’t have the time or the inclination to worry about what others might be thinking.

Are you held back from free, unconstrained, all-out worship of God because of fear of what others might think? Are you willing to put your reputation at risk for boldly demonstrating your devotion to Him?

TO BE CONTINUED...

**Part 1 can be found below.**

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## **PART 3 – ‘Wasting’ your Financial Security**

*... she poured it on Jesus' feet...  
John 12:3b (NIV)*

**‘Faux pas’ number two: Mary poured her life-savings on Jesus’ feet.**

Mary had a bottle of perfume (pure nard) with which she anointed Jesus. Obviously she hadn't been to that seminar on good stewardship down at the local synagogue, because this perfume was incredibly expensive, and most likely represented her dowry. It was the equivalent of more than a year's wages, and all intelligent counsel would have advised her to save it for a 'rainy day' – if not a 'rainy life'!

So not only was her reputation in ruins, now her life savings were running onto the floor, soaking into the dirt. Her chances of one day finding a husband after this incident became even slimmer... it was now entirely likely that she would remain single forever, dependent on the mercy of her family for support and a home.

And not only that, but she poured the oil on Jesus' feet. In the Middle Eastern culture, the most honoured part of the body is the head. That is where you anoint someone, pouring the oil on the head and letting it run down over the beard. The feet are regarded as the most disgusting part of the body. If you really want to offend someone in that culture, even today, just show them the soles of your feet. (In Western culture, we hold up certain fingers to communicate the same sentiments!)

Yes, Mary knew perfectly well what she was doing. She was proclaiming through this vivid cultural drama that her financial security was worth nothing to her. I think she had realized that if Jesus was the Creator-God of the universe, then all the gold, jewels, fine fabrics and expensive perfumes were, as the old hymn says, 'an offering far too small.'

Of all the honoured guests and wise teachers in that room, Mary was the only one who realised that all the things of this world were already under Jesus' feet, and she took a position of abject humility before Him, turning her back forever on trusting in the things of this world.

Are you held back from free, unconstrained, all-out worship of God because of fear that He will not be able to take care of your financial needs?

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

***Parts 1 and 2 can be found below.***

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#### ***PART 4 – 'Mopping the Floor with your Glory'***

*... and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

*John 12:3c (NIV)*

**'Faux pas' number three: Mary removed her head-covering.**

OK, that was it. Mary's fate was sealed; no-one would ever want anything to do with her now. How can I give you a cultural equivalent of the immensity of her actions? To create a similar impact today in our culture, Mary would have to remove the clothing from her upper body.

That is the cultural equivalent of what she did. She revealed to the Lord and all those men something that was reserved for *only* the husband to see.

The Bible calls the hair the '**glory**' of a woman (1 Corinthians 11:15). Mary just trashed her 'glory' before Jesus and everyone.

Then she took her glory and mopped the perfume from Jesus' feet.

Remember, the feet are the most dishonorable part of the human body. And the hair is the most honorable part.

Again, she was demonstrating by her every action that her glory was worth nothing to her, compared with the joy and honour of worshiping Jesus.

Are you held back from free, unconstrained, all-out worship of God because you are trying to retain your own glory?

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

***Parts 1-3 can be found below.***

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## ***PART 5 – Stealing from Jesus***

*But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected...*

*John 12:4 (NIV)*

Now Jesus' closest disciples were in the room, too. So how did they react?

"Wow, Mary, what a great expression of truly sacrificial worship!"

Hmm... not quite. In fact, completely the opposite: "*But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, 'Why this waste?'*" (Matthew 26:8, NASB)

My friends, if you start living a life of sacrificial worship, believe me, you will hear criticism.

And do you notice who was the first to criticize Mary? Judas – the man who was taking from the money purse. The loudest, harshest critics are very often those who are 'stealing from Jesus'.

Is that you? Are you holding back a part of what He has entrusted to you? Are you criticising others for their extravagant worship? Or are you afraid of the criticism you will receive if you start worshiping extravagantly? Don't let the words of men hold you back from doing what you know to be the will of God.



When Jesus spoke, I am absolutely certain that the very sound of His voice was enough to restore Mary's confidence:  
*"Leave her alone." (John 12:7, NIV)*

My friends, if you get criticism for doing the will of God, Jesus will stand up for you. What an honour to hear those words!

When Matthew and Mark related this incident of Mary's 'costly worship', they reported Jesus saying that wherever the Gospel is preached, this story will be told. He never said that about anything else anyone did for Him in the whole of His ministry.

Jesus wants followers who will surrender their own reputations, finances and glory, and live only for His.

Are you held back from free, unconstrained, all-out worship of God, or will you totally go for it?

***Parts 1-4 can be found below.***

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## ***THE PURPOSE OF LIFE***

### ***PART 1 – Laying Hold of 'It'***

*... I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.  
Philippians 3:12 (NKJV)*

#### ***Full passage: Philippians 3 v 7-21***

I submit that verse 12 of this passage points to one of the most noble and fulfilling of human pursuits – to set out on a life-or-death quest in order to discover the purpose for your life that God had in mind when He created you, and brought you into the Kingdom of Light.

So many people ask, "Why was I born?" So many children of the 1960s set out on a desperate search to 'find themselves'. So many people today wander aimlessly through life, not knowing who they are or what purpose their life serves. The more cynical we are, the more bitter we get. The more melancholic, the more depressed. Western civilization has never been more neurotic.

I know this from first-hand experience. It was an extreme revelation to me that LIFE is not some cosmic game of Russian roulette in which the lucky players try to grab as much pleasure as they can before the 'great kill-joy in the sky' finally blasts them into an empty eternity. Instead, it is all about the One who is its very source and sustainer.

And here in is the point: if the purpose of your life is not wrapped up in God's purposes for the world, you will miss the reason you are alive...

TO BE CONTINUED...

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## **PART 2 – The Ultimate Act of Worship**

“... and you will be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”  
Acts 1:8b (NIV)

### **Full passage: Acts 1 v 1-8**

It is a real revelation sometimes to look up Bible words in the original languages. In this case, I was in for an eye-opener when I looked up the word for “witness” there in Acts 1:8.

In the colloquial language of the New Testament, the Greek word for witness was the legal term describing someone who today would be willing to take the stand, put their hand on a Bible, and commit to tell ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.’

And that Greek word was the word “μαρτυρός” (in English: “*martyros*”)

Originally, this word did not have the connotation it does today, which is why we have it translated merely as ‘witnesses’. However, as the apostles and disciples took Jesus’ command seriously to go and be His witnesses in all the world, some of them were challenged to either deny their faith, or die. In the ancient Roman world, many Christians were thrown to lions because they would not renounce Jesus as Lord. As their last act on earth, they would face wild beasts and gladiators, many on their knees, praying and praising God, even as He allowed them to be publicly slaughtered.

Caesar, and other despots like him, didn’t like to play second fiddle to anyone’s allegiance, and many Christians paid for their loyalty to Jesus with their lives. They considered their sacrifice to be the ultimate act of worship – a willful act of unswerving devotion and allegiance to a God who was worthy of every drop of their blood. So the Greek word “*martyros*” came to mean “one who witnesses unto death”, and we carry that meaning through to today.

In their martyrdom they made the ultimate testimony; that there was nothing worth living for if it wasn’t worth dying for. This is how God wants us to invest the passions of our lives - being a witness, a “*martyros*”. And this is how God wants us to define ourselves. And I don’t think it’s any coincidence that the word “*martyros*” has come to mean what it means today.

TO BE CONTINUED...

**Part 1 can be found below.**

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### **PART 3 – The Fellowship of the Suffering**

*... that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings...  
Philippians 3:10a (NASB)*

In Tolkien's classic trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*, an unlikely group of allies – consisting of a dwarf, an elf, four hobbits, a wizard, and a couple of men – band together and risk everything for one cause: the battle for Middle Earth. Their alliance is called 'The Fellowship of the Ring'. Though masterfully executed, this was not a new concept born in a brilliant mind after the ravages of World War II. For in AD 30, Jesus Christ put together a similarly rag-tag group, built and poured into their lives, and then released them to engage in an epic battle for the entire planet.

Endowed with the power of the Holy Spirit, and with Paul added to their number, they collectively wrote or directed the writing of the entire New Testament, and planted the Church of Jesus Christ all over the known world. All but one of them were brutally martyred in an attempt to quash their message, yet even such drastic measures proved to be futile, for this 'Fellowship of the Suffering' left a mark on society and history that will never be erased.

In fact, contrary to many recent statements, Christianity is not only the world's faith system with the most adherents, it is also the fastest growing by conversion in the world today. And countries in which Christians face the greatest opposition and persecution are consistently the places where Christianity grows the fastest.



There is a cycle here, a pattern that has repeated itself since the day of Pentecost AD 33.

- It starts with passionate and devoted **WORSHIP**.
- This worship can't help but manifest itself in lifestyle-testimonial **WITNESS**.
- As the faithful witness, they are persecuted by the prince of this world, and made to **SUFFER**.
- But in their suffering, their faith and conviction is refined, their message is validated in their own lives, and they resolve to **PROCLAIM** Jesus Christ's sufferings, crucifixion, death, and resurrection regardless of the consequences to themselves.

- As a result, others come to **WORSHIP** Jesus, and begin their own life of **WITNESS**.

Do you see the cycle? Are you in that cycle? Are you in 'The Fellowship of the Suffering'?

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

**Parts 1 and 2 can be found below.**

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## **PART 4 – The Autograph of Christ**

*... you are a letter of Christ ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.  
2 Corinthians 3:3 (NASB)*

What is the only thing in heaven made by human hands? If you don't know, just wait, we will come back to it.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a love-letter? One of the most common ways in which God reveals His character to the world is through us. And how does He write His character into our lives? Well, it will be no surprise to you by now that I think one of His primary writing implements is the hardships He allows us to experience.

We have seen over the past few days that living in the center of God's will is not inconsistent with experiencing suffering, hardship or persecution. But why does God allow these things? Why does He let His precious, obedient children be fed to lions or burned as human torches or nailed to crosses?

Because in order for us to be a relevant letter to a ravaged, broken, lost and hurting world, He is going to have to make us more like Himself.

So what is the only thing in heaven made by human hands?

It is the nail prints left on Jesus' hands and feet and the long, jagged scar in His side.

Jesus was willing to be marked for all eternity with the authentication of His love for us. He is not ashamed of those scars. He carries them as trophies. The proof of His love. The evidence of our salvation.

The world out there is scarred and broken and bruised. Does it not make sense that the only way for us to have any kind of relevant testimony to our hurting neighbors is for us to also experience pain and suffering? How can we tell them that Jesus is sufficient for their pain if we have never experienced pain? How can we tell them that God can meet all their needs if we have never seen Him meet ours?

As Warren Wiersbe put it ***"We have too many people who have plenty of medals and no scars."*** \*

Did you know that the only way paper can absorb ink is if the tiny fibers get ripped and broken? Jesus wants to write His autograph on your life, but if you are afraid of the pen, if you shy away from the pain of having some of your fibers torn and broken, His autograph – the authentication of His ownership over and authorship of your life – will not be able to stick. It will be smudged and smeared beyond recognition.

Do you have the courage to let God start writing on your heart, so that He can send you as a love-letter to a creation which is literally dying to read it?

*TO BE CONTINUED...*

\* Warren Wiersbe, quoted in *The Body*, Charles W Colson with Ellen Santilli Vaughn (c) 1992 Word Publishing, pg 299

***Parts 1-3 can be found below.***

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## ***PART 5 – Resurrection Power***

*... Jesus ... who for the joy set before Him endured the cross...  
Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)*

It occurs to me that much of this series has been pretty heavy – sacrifice, scars, death... is this all there is? “Life’s tough and then you die”? Well, to be honest, sometimes it can feel like that, especially if you are a persecuted Christian in China, Indonesia, Iran, or even just in the American public school system! However, when you meet people from the persecuted church, they are full of life, hope, and power! It’s like they have been freed to live on a different plain.

In Romans 8:29-39, it is clear that the apostle Paul was no stranger to suffering, persecution or tribulation, yet in this great passage he reveals that none of that really matters. Because nothing man can do – nothing even anything the angels or the demons can do – can ever separate us from the love of God, and that is what it is all about!

Jesus told us that He is the resurrection and the life. Abundant life! And that is what the Jews were waiting for – the Messiah who would give them new life. But what they missed, what many of us miss, is that in order for there to be a resurrection, there has to be a death.

Jesus’ death took everyone but Himself completely by surprise! Jesus’ focus was not on this world. He was willing to endure a torturous execution and an agonizing separation from His Father, because He knew that was not the end. His body was battered and bruised, His flesh ripped to shreds by thorns and whips and nails; but His spirit was intact. He stormed the gates of hell and won a great and powerful victory, then returned, victorious, to His throne in heaven.

That could never have happened if He had not been willing to die for us. And He would not have been willing to die had He not known the power of His Father to raise Him to life again.

We talked earlier about the concept of understanding that we are ‘dead already’, but the reason that we can be dead already is the hope – the sure and certain anticipation – we have of being raised to life again in the last days (John 6:20).

The Lord is still powerful and active, and He has given us the privilege of a place in this epic battle in the heavenlies. And if we choose to take on the crown of self-sacrifice for His sake, I believe it too will be transformed in the light of eternity. This crown will not turn to worthless dust; it will be revealed for what it really is – a glorious crown of life. That’s what is waiting for you, for such is your destiny.

***Parts 1-4 can be found below.***