

How Much Do You Value The Kingdom Of God?

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Jesus Christ died for us so we might be children of His Kingdom. He was the epitome of the innocent martyr for peace and reconciliation. His convictions were based on truth, love, mercy, and sacrifice.

He not only died so we may have eternal life, but He also lived and died for His Kingdom! As a child of God, destined to be a king and/or priest in God's Kingdom, are *you* willing to die, if need be, for that same Kingdom—the Kingdom of which you are a citizen and an ambassador for Christ?

What would you die for? Hopefully, most parents would die for their children, if necessary. The loyal soldier is willing to die for his country. Many of them believe they are willing to die to free the enslaved people of a tyrannical leader. Millions of people have died for causes of one type or another—many times for national sovereignty and expansion; many times for religious reasons.

What does dying for something more than ourselves and martyrdom mean for us? Is it, as some would argue, a hopelessly idealistic or old-fashioned expectation for someone to give up his or her very life for a greater good? It is not unusual to think about sacrificing yourself for someone or something else, but what about real physical martyrdom—a true giving of one's own life, whether it be through someone's death, someone's life, or both?

There has been a definite shift in the average person's attitude toward dying for principles and causes. History and research show that the WWII generation was much more inclined to die for principles than the Baby-boomers, Generation Xers, or Millennials.

Today, most people do not see any value in dying for a cause. The typical attitude is somewhat disconnected and distant. The attitude is generally, “I’m not sure I would die for a belief; maybe to protect innocent people from oppression and death, but certainly not for a church, or religious belief.”

Martyrdom Imagery

The English word “martyr” is derived from the Greek *martyrs*, which carries the sense of “witness.” In the Christian tradition, those who are martyrs have died in witness to Christ. But the image of a martyr also takes in a broader scope of those who die for a noble cause (e.g., for their country or church), choosing death rather than renouncing their principles or commitments.

The idea of *martyr* is more prominent in secular church history than in the Bible. It is in the centuries since the formation of the Christian church that the admiration of the martyrs and the accounts of their lives have arisen.

Nevertheless, the idea of the martyr can be found in the Bible, and the broader background of Israelitish martyrdom is crucial for fully understanding certain aspects of the death of Jesus.

In the Old Testament writings we find occasional glimpses of the martyr in other contexts. Abel is the first martyr, slain by an evil brother simply because his own deeds were righteous (remember this as we investigate this topic; righteousness is a major part of this sermon); an example that prompts John to comment in I John 3, “Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.”

I John 3:10-15 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest [made apparent]: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He

who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer [or, hater] has eternal life abiding in him.

Like other martyrs, Abel's influence lives on as a model of faith. Hebrews 11:4 says, speaking of Abel, "he being dead still speaks." Abel's righteous works live on as an example of true selfless faith.

In the story of Saul's sons and grandsons in I Samuel 21 we see innocent victims who are slain because of Saul's failure to abide by an ancient agreement with the Gibeonites. They were guilty of no duplicity except through the family tie, and yet only their deaths could set the people free.

Jephthah's Daughter

The most touching Old Testament picture of a martyrdom-like event is in the book of Judges. Jephthah was one of the later judges of Israel. His daughter must carry out her father's wish because of her father's foolish oath to God. Her life is given as forfeit for the people's victory over the Ammonites. As in the case of Gideon, the Spirit of the Lord empowered Jephthah with courage and ingenuity in preparation for battle. Strengthened by this divine designation, he gathered troops from the tribes of Gad and Manasseh. These two tribes split Gilead between them, with Gad receiving the larger share.

(Side note: He was a very violent and cruel man, even though he was a judge of Israel.)

Jephthah's desire to defeat the Ammonites was so intense that he foolishly made a special vow to the Lord. Though intended as an act of devotion and faith, it showed a terrible lack of wisdom in his effort to please God.

Judges 11:30-31 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

Then Jephthah had faith in God and was given victory for it.

Judges 11:32-34 So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith—twenty cities—and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus, the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter.

Even in his desperation Jephthah did not have this ultimate price for victory in mind. Since he did not have a son or another daughter, her death would mean the end of his family line. She was his "only child," which is a term of special endearment. The same word is used three times concerning Isaac in Genesis 22.

Judges 11:35-36 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it." So she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon."

Jephthah's daughter sensed the implications of her father's vow but made no attempt to get him to break it. Her willingness to yield herself resembled that of another only child, Isaac. Even if victory over Ammon meant her life, to her it seemed worth it; so, she respectfully encouraged her father to perform his vow.

Judges 11:37-40 Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." So he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed.

She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Her inspiring sacrifice was kept alive in memorial by subsequent generations.

The Hebrew of Judges 11 indicates that Jephthah did indeed keep his vow and sacrifice his daughter. The death of this innocent girl came because of a rash and foolish vow. He further compounded his error by keeping his vow. That, no doubt was greatly displeasing to God.

Jephthah knew that it was a sin to break a vow, but in this case, it was a greater sin to fulfill it. He made this vow without considering all of the possible consequences. He only partially reasoned through his oath, without basing it on complete knowledge of the possibilities.

Jephthah was wholly wrong in his concept of the character of God that led to his making the rash vow. And he would have done right not to slay his child, though the guilt of making and of breaking such a vow would have remained. The sacrifice was neither sanctioned by God's law, nor acceptable to God.

Jephthah's daughter's heroic zeal for the honor of God and Israel, though allied with foolishness and indiscretion, is worth remembering. This rare instance of one that preferred the public interest before life itself is preserved in the pages of the Bible, so that it is never forgotten.

Stephen

In the New Testament Stephen stands out as one who exemplifies the meaning of Jesus' instruction of following Him. Acts 6 describes Stephen as a man of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, who the twelve apostles ordained a deacon with six other qualified men.

Acts 6:1-15 Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the

disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And the saying pleased the whole multitude. And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them. Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith.

And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the Spirit by which he spoke. Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God." And they stirred up the people, the elders, and the scribes; and they came upon him, seized him, and brought him to the council. They also set up false witnesses who said, "This man does not cease to speak blasphemous words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs which Moses delivered to us." And all who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel.

Now, in Acts 7:1-53, Luke records Stephen's address in which Stephen witnesses about: The call of Abraham; the patriarchs in Egypt; God's delivery of Israel by Moses; Israel's rebellion against God; God's true tabernacle; and Israel's resistance against the Holy Spirit.

Stephen's desire in his message to the high priest and the Sanhedrin was to raise a prophetic voice within Israel, pleading for a radical recasting of Jewish life to make Jesus and God the Father, rather than the traditional Jewish holy things, the center of worship and thought.

Stephen was committed to his belief in Jesus Christ as his Savior and King. He showed the logical consequences of commitment to Jesus and attributed Israel's rejection of its Messiah to a perpetual callousness of heart.

Stephen's message was flagrant apostasy to the ears of the Sanhedrin. His purpose was to denounce the status quo that had grown up around the land, the law, and the Temple, thereby clearing a path for a positive response to Jesus as Israel's Messiah. This was taken as a frontal attack against the Jewish religion in its official and popular forms.

Acts 7:54-56 When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"

While the content and tone of his address infuriated the council, Stephen's solemn pronouncement raised again the specter of blasphemy and brought his hearers to a frenzied pitch.

Only a few years before, Jesus stood before this same tribunal and was condemned for answering the high priest's question positively as to His being Israel's Messiah, and for saying of Himself—"you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." Stephen was saying, in effect, that his vision confirmed Jesus' claim and condemned the council for having rejected Him. Unless the council members were prepared to repent and admit their terrible mistake, they had no option but to find Stephen guilty also of blasphemy.

If he had been judged only as an impertinent apostate, the thirty-nine lashes of Jewish punishment would have been sufficient. To be openly blasphemous before the council as well was a matter in their minds that demanded death.

In verse 55, the bringing together of the glory of God and the name of Jesus, shows something about His person as the manifestation of the divine nature

and the divine mode of being. Just as God dwells in the highest heaven with Christ at God's right hand shows something about His work as providing access into the very presence of God.

In verse 56, Jesus' "standing" suggests the idea of witnessing as found throughout the Bible. Stephen was preaching Christ to these men; and then, he sees Christ acknowledging His servant before God.

The proper posture for a witness is the standing posture. While Stephen was being condemned by an earthly court, Jesus, who stands at God's right hand, was Stephen's advocate.

Acts 7:57-60 Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen's cries are reminiscent of Jesus' words from the stake in Luke 23:34, 46. Though the parallelism of sequence and wording is not exact, the parallelism here probably was included to show that the same spirit of commitment and forgiveness that characterized Jesus' life and death was true of His earlier followers.

The expression "fell asleep" in verse 60 is the Greek word *koimao*, which is a common biblical way of referring to the death of God's own. It is found at least nine times in the Bible.

Stephen shows us how very differently death is handled for the person who dies in Christ than by the ancient philosopher or unbelieving martyr. The true Christian martyr sees Christ as the conqueror of death. He has the faith that the death he must undergo is already conquered by Christ who has Himself endured it.

This may seem like a negative thing, or even depressing, but it is not, because the ideas of a martyr and witness—martyr means witness—is a positive as a Christian might define it. Witnesses are made martyrs by being given death or persecution or prosecution, or whatever it may be, because they are righteous. It is the righteousness that is the key to witnessing.

We have to be righteous. How can you witness to the world if you are not working to be righteous? And that is where many groups go wrong. They place the preaching of the gospel to the world as the main, primary purpose of the church. But how can we witness to the world if we do not have our own lives moving toward righteousness and have the righteousness of Christ within us? If we are witnessing to the world and yet we are not righteous, then we are hypocrites.

And so, first and foremost with the Church of the Great God, the goal has been to get the bride ready; to help one another working together to become more righteous. It is God who does the work, but we have to encourage one another to be righteous, and to resist, and keep the world at bay.

God had called Jesus' own disciples to the realization that suffering is not only His destiny, but theirs also. Jesus admonishes us not to desire to save the self. He means: to renounce self—to cease to make 'self' the object of our lives and actions. That requires being *selfless*, which requires service to others in love toward one another.

Mark 8:34-35 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."

This is a choice each and every one of us must make.

This statement relates to a situation in which Christians face the alternatives of faithfully confessing Christ or denying Him. Jesus warns that by denying Him, our physical life may be saved, but our eternal life will be lost. Conversely, to lose our physical life by remaining true to Christ—i.e., by

faithfully confessing Him under duress—is to gain the gift of salvation and eternal life.

The phrase “for My sake” stresses the absolute claim by Jesus for our obedience, loyalty, and allegiance. The phrase, “for the gospel’s sake” is a reference to the preaching of God’s way of life and the proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God, for which we are to give our lives as true witnesses.

Mark 8:36-38 “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

This renouncement of “self” involves fundamental reorientation of the principle of life. God, not self, must be at the center of life. Being willing to die for someone or some principle requires continuous commitment. Synonyms for “commitment” are promise, pledge, responsibility, resolution, duty, engagement, assurance, undertaking, and covenant.

Differences Types of Convictions

What is the difference between the convictions of people in the world and the convictions of members of God’s church? Let us examine this. How do we define conviction? One meaning of conviction as a law term is, “being found guilty.” In common language it means being persuaded or convinced. In theology it means being condemned at the base of one’s own conscience as a sinner in view of the law of God. It is the antecedent to repentance and is often accompanied by a painful sense of exposure to God’s wrath. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, showing the heinousness of sin and the person’s exposure to divine wrath.

The purpose of conviction is to lead a person to repent of his sins and to turn to God for salvation and eternal life. Conviction is the first stage of repentance—when a remorseful person is led to see the evil nature of sin and has been genuinely convinced that he is guilty of it. The agent of conviction

is the Holy Spirit, the power of Christ that enables us to overcome anything. The means of conviction is either the Word of God or God's general revelation of His demands through nature and person's inborn consciousness of a sense of right and wrong.

Conviction always implies the presentation of evidence and truth. That was the problem with Jephthah. His conviction did not have both evidence and truth. It is a decision presumed to be based upon a careful and discriminating consideration of all the proofs offered, and has a legal character, the verdict being rendered either in God's judgment, or to men by an appeal to their conscience in which God's law is written.

Spiritual conviction differs from legal conviction. Legal arises from a consideration of the divine law, God's justice, power, or omniscience; spiritual conviction arises from God's goodness and holiness as seen in the gospel of Christ, and from a separation from sin; legal desires freedom from penalty and pain; spiritual from sin and misery; legal hardens the heart; spiritual softens it.

Conviction vs. Corruption

The apostle Paul illustrated this by contrasting lists of the works of the flesh and of the fruit of the Spirit, that the Spirit and flesh are in conflict. By raising these specifics of conduct, he also provides a checklist for measuring the conduct of those who consider themselves spiritual.

If our conduct is characterized by the traits in the list of the works of the flesh, then we are not led by God's Spirit. The same holds true for churches.

Galatians 5:16-21 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you

beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Paul continued the contrast between the natural productions of the flesh and Spirit he had begun in verse 19. Next, he speaks of the “fruit” of the Spirit in contrast to the “works” of which the flesh is capable. The term “works” refers to what man can do.

The fruit of the Spirit, on the other hand, suggests that it is a natural product of the Spirit rather than of humans, made possible by the living relationship between the true Christian and God.

Galatians 5:22-26 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit [24/7]. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Verse 17 says there is in everyone a struggle between the flesh and the Spirit. The flesh—the corrupt and carnal part of us, lusts—strives and struggles with strength and vigor—against the Spirit: it opposes all the motions of the Spirit, and resists everything that is spiritual.

On the other hand, the Spirit—the renewed part of us—strives against the flesh and opposes the will and desire of it. And because of this, our character is developed in such a way that we cannot do the things of the world.

As the spirit of righteousness in us will not allow us to do all the evil that our corrupt nature wants us to do, so neither can we do all the good that we want to do because of the corrupt and carnal human nature.

Romans 7:14-20 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for

to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

There is not a person in this room who cannot identify with that! We try to do the right thing, but we slip from time to time. The key is not to let it become again a way of life for us.

The convictions of our conscience and the corruption of our own human nature strive with one another; our convictions overcome our corruptions, and our corruptions interfere with our convictions.

In a natural man there is something of this struggle; but in a renewed man, where there is good character, there is a struggle between the old nature and the new nature—the remainders of sin and the beginnings of righteousness. This is what we can expect as long as we continue as physical human beings in this world until the day we die.

It is our duty and in our best interest in this struggle, to side with Jesus in us, to side with our convictions based on faithfulness and truth against our corruptions, and with the righteous part of our character against our lusts. This the apostle Paul presents as our duty, we do not have a choice. If we are baptized members of God's church, and have God's Holy Spirit, we must do it. We have no choice. Of course, we have that option to do it, but I am saying that it is your responsibility to Christ and the Father, we have to do it. We should want to. It is in our best interest.

In Galatians 5:16 and 25, Paul gives us one general rule, that, if carefully kept, is the most effective deterrent against corruption; and that is to walk in the Spirit.

Jesus Christ, the Martyr

The New Testament is more reticent than the later church to dwell on martyrdom, maybe so as to not detract from the epitome of martyrdom. Revelation 1:5 calls Him: “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness” [or martyr].

In the crucified Messiah we see true Christian martyrdom in its purest form—the innocent slain for the guilty, and the hero for those who reject him. Isaiah's description of the Suffering Servant uses language that descriptive of the innocent martyr.

Isaiah 53:5-6 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes 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.

Jesus' willing and noble death must be read, in part, as a noble martyr's death. His death stands squarely within the context of the story of Israel. In the resolution of Israel's plight the New Testament sees the redemption of the world.

Jesus proclaiming the coming judgment upon unbelieving Israel calls to mind a whole line of martyrs.

Matthew 23:31-35 "Therefore you [Jewish leaders] are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar."

Jesus Christ, the King

Jesus Christ is the epitome of the true martyr. He was innocent of any wrong. He was peaceful and kind, honest and sincere. What happened to Jesus Christ on the last day of His earthly life on Passover, ^{AD} 31 highlighted the whole purpose of His coming. It called attention to a dimension of His gospel that most people overlook!

Pilate asked the Jewish mob, “What accusation do you bring against this Man?” Prompted by the angry mob, he then asked Christ, “Are You King of the Jews?” Pilate was personally sensitive to any wind of insurrection against the Roman government. Consequently, he did everything he could to keep any public uproar from getting out of hand.

When asked if He was a king, Jesus did not downplay what Pilate meant by king. Jesus simply told Pilate who He really was, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world.”

At His birth, Jesus was recognized as a king, when the wise men from the east [maybe twelve men, heads of the different tribes of Israel in Parthia] came to bring gifts to the infant Jesus. They came to pay homage to a king; when they reached Jerusalem they inquired, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” They were not looking for a religious leader or a reformer, but for a king.

The question created quite a stir in Jerusalem. King Herod, then ruler under the Romans, called on the chief priests and scribes for more information about the birth of Jesus and the whereabouts of this king. They quoted Micah 5:2. The account is recorded in the second chapter of Matthew.

Matthew 2:5-6 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you shall come a Ruler who will shepherd My people Israel.'"

These were not words about a man of religion, but about a literal ruler—a King! Herod felt threatened politically by this attention to a potential new king born in his territory. He reacted by massacring all male children age two and under in Bethlehem.

Christ was born to be a king, but what kind? Would He merely be a symbolic entity? A kind of spiritual figurehead for an emerging religion? Certainly not!

The angel who announced Jesus’ birth to Mary told her what kind of king He would be.

Luke 1:32-33 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

The prophet Isaiah spoke of Christ's coming.

Isaiah 9:6-7 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

At least five glorious things are stated in verse 7 about Christ's Kingdom:

1. It will be an increasing government. It will be multiplied; the bounds of His Kingdom will be increasingly enlarged, and many will be added to it. The luster of it shall increase, and it will shine increasingly brighter.
2. It will be a peaceable government, agreeable to His character as the Prince of Peace. He will rule by love, will rule in men's hearts; so that wherever His government is there will be peace.
3. It will be a rightful government. He that is the Son of David will reign upon the throne of David and over His Kingdom, which He is entitled to. God the Father will give him the throne of His father David.
4. It will be administered with prudence and equity. Everything will be well managed in the Kingdom of Christ, and none of His subjects will ever have a valid reason to complain.
5. It will be an everlasting Kingdom. There will be no end to the happiness of the subjects of this Kingdom. He will reign forever; not only throughout all generations of time; but even when the Kingdom will be delivered to God

the Father, the glory both of the Redeemer and the redeemed will continue eternally.

Are you willing to die, if need be, to have a part in the Kingdom of God? Jesus Christ was and did!

Daniel, speaking about Christ's future coronation, said:

Daniel 7:14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

Kingdom of God Announced

Christ openly made His role and coming Kingdom known. The biographies of Jesus clearly show that the main thrust of His work was teaching about the Kingdom of God—its way of life and its establishment on earth. In Mark 1, Christ inaugurated His ministry when He began preaching in Galilee. Mark says:

Mark 1:14-15 Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, [have conviction] and believe in the gospel."

Today, most mainstream Christians are generally ignorant about what the Kingdom of God really is because what Christ taught is not emphasized. People hear a gospel *about* Christ, but few hear about the gospel *of* Christ.

In the Sermon on the Mount Christ spoke about the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of Heaven—the kingdom coming *from* heaven, not in heaven. Those who become humble, teachable peacemakers will inherit the earth.

Matthew 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Matthew 5:5 “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

In the Parable of the Mustard Seed recorded in Matthew 13, Christ taught that the Kingdom would begin small and would grow large. Christ’s earthly ministry had the humblest beginning, but His return to earth with millions of angels will be a truly awesome event.

In the Parable of the Pounds recorded in Luke 19, Christ taught that our performance in this lifetime determines how we will be rewarded with a measure of rule in God’s Kingdom.

Luke 19:17 “And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’”

Mark recorded in Mark 10 Jesus’ teaching that the humble, obedient, and teachable disposition of a little child is a model for those who expect to inherit God’s Kingdom.

In Luke 17:21, while talking to a group of Pharisees, Jesus announced that, “The kingdom of God is within [among] you.” Christ was the embodiment of that Kingdom through His teaching and His works. He never missed an opportunity to talk about it.

A Kingdom Not of this World

When Pilate asked Jesus who and what He represented, John 18:36 records that Christ replied, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The English word, “world” comes from the Greek word *kosmos*, which means “society.” Jesus did not deny He had a kingdom, but that Kingdom was not part of this world’s system of government. In the same verse He also said that His Kingdom was not from here—it was not of, or for that time.

The chief priests used this situation to make it appear that Jesus wanted to usurp Caesar as ruler. John 19:15 records that they shouted, “We have no king but Caesar!” Christ could have saved His life simply by clearing up any

misunderstanding if there was a question about what He meant by the word king. But He did not because He was a king in the purest form.

To placate the mob, Pilate pronounced the death sentence on Jesus. The trumped-up charge was for claiming to be King of the coming Kingdom of God! It was inscribed over Christ's head as He was crucified: "JESUS OF NAZARETH, The KING OF THE JEWS." It was of the Jews because Christ came from Judah.

At His trial, Christ also addressed all Christians: "Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice" (John 18:37).

Jesus Christ is the King of the government that is coming to replace this world's governments. It will be a real government, not what is often portrayed as a church coexisting alongside civil authority. Neither is it a feeling within you. Nor is it some faraway place in heaven.

The Holy Spirit Promised

Christ lived and died for His Kingdom! He spent forty days on earth after His resurrection.

Acts 1:1-3 The former account I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments to the apostles whom He had chosen, to whom He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by many infallible proofs, being seen by them during forty days and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

This is the only place in the New Testament where the length of Jesus' post-resurrection ministry is mentioned. During this time, He taught His followers about things related to the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' teaching during the 40 days dealt in essence with three things. (1) The validation and nature of His messiahship and kingdom. (2) The interpretation

of the Old Testament from the perspective of His resurrection. (3) The responsibility of His disciples to bear witness to what had happened among them in fulfillment of Israel's hope.

This is what Luke 24:25-27, 44-49 reveals as the content of Jesus' post-resurrection teaching, and this is what Luke elaborates on in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:4 And being assembled together with them, He [Jesus] commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, "which," He said, "you have heard from Me."

The rendering of the phrase "being assembled together" is not what the original Greek implies. It says, "while eating together with someone." Luke 24:42-43 and Acts 10:41 speak of Jesus eating with His disciples during these forty days.

Acts 1:5 "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now."

Verses 6-8 serve as the theme, setting the stage for all that follows in the book of Acts.

Acts 1:6-7 Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

So, anyone who tries to calculate it, you are actually working in vain. It is interesting to try to guess it, to try to anticipate; to look at prophecy and see what is happening in our world today, and we should do that. But do not rely on your own calculations. Many have. And many are no longer with us. They were trying to save their own skin.

What is this Feast and God's way of life about? Getting rid of self and being righteous.

Jesus' answer here stresses to the disciples that they must leave to God the matters that are His concern and take up the things entrusted to them. This is a matter of faith.

Acts 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

All that follows in Acts is the result of Jesus' own intent and the fulfillment of His direct word. This commission directs all Christians and comes to us as a gift with a promise. It involves three things: (1) The person of Jesus, on whose authority the church acts and who is the object of its witness; (2) The power of the Holy Spirit that is the dynamism for the mission; (3) A plan that begins in Jerusalem, moves out to "all Judea and Samaria," and extends "to the ends of the earth."

The true Christian church, according to Acts, is a church that responds obediently to Jesus' commission, acts on Jesus' behalf in extension of His ministry, focuses its proclamation of the coming Kingdom of God in its witness of Jesus, is guided and empowered by the self-same Spirit that directed Jesus' ministry, follows a plan whose guidelines for witnessing have been set by Jesus Himself.

What is the difference between the worldly martyrs and true Christian martyrs?

I Corinthians 9:24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

So, it means, just do not trot along with everybody else like in a marathon, but rather run with all your might toward the finish line doing your best. And even when you are in pain, whether mental or physical, keep pushing because you are running a spiritual marathon that has an end, and we have to make sure that we make it. Yet, we are not the ones who do it—Jesus Christ does it in us through the Holy Spirit empowering us.

Then, verse 25, gives us the difference between the worldly martyrs and true Christian martyrs.

I Corinthians 9:25-27 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus, I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

As members of God's church we have the duty and responsibility to teach and witness about the coming Kingdom of God, and God's way of life. If we do not, how are we going to be prepared to follow through in the Kingdom and the Millennium teaching the world. So, we must be doing this now; know that we are in training for leadership in the Millennium.

We can be transformed by training like an athlete for the prize. Practice self-discipline, repent, fast, in humility prefer other saints, and pray often. But with no outside pressure to follow this rigorous path, we can find ourselves distracted by dozens of other things.

Conclusion

A major difference between worldly martyrs and true Christian martyrs is that Christian martyrs lose their lives for the sake of God's truth, i.e., for God's way of life: a way of life that glorifies God—a righteous way of life; a way of life that prepares us for the Kingdom of God. We die for righteousness sake.

Martyrs for Christ have a special place in Christ. Because it is the ultimate evidence of their love for Christ, these martyrs are highlighted in the book of Revelation, where their sacrificial witness receives special honor.

Revelation 12:10-11 Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast

down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

Verse 11 is both a statement and an appeal. It announces that the followers of the Lamb also become victors over the dragon because they participate in the blood of the Lamb—the weapon that defeated Satan—and because they have confirmed their loyalty to the Lamb by their witness even to death.

Rather than signaling the triumph of Satan, the blood of the martyrs shows, instead, that they have gained the victory over the dragon by their acceptance of Jesus and their obedient suffering with Him.

This hymn of victory also becomes an appeal to the rest of the saints—you and I—to do likewise and confirm our testimony to Christ even if doing so means death. This willingness is an attitude we must reach. It is the ultimate conviction.

Christian martyrdom is a positive experience for the true Christian. The faith required of the true Christian martyr is manifested in a very open way, unlike any other experience. What a wonderful example it is to others in God's church and to the world. It is not something we should worry about; because whatever comes our way, God will give us the strength to bear up under it!

What a fantastic witness to the world of the glory of God. The reason true Christian martyrs are actually blessed in their physical end is because they are spiritual conquerors and cannot be separated from their God!

Romans 8:31-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are

accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The apostle Paul encourages us with this assurance about God's everlasting love.

II Thessalonians 2:16-17 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.

May you have spiritually rewarding and encouraging days ahead!