

HAVE YOU TRULY SURRENDERED TO CHRIST?

Today's Text: Isaiah Chaps 41-42

Extracts:

- 1. For I the Lord your God will hold your right hand, saying to you, "Fear not, I will help you.... For I looked, and there was no man; I looked among them, but there was no counsellor who, when I asked of them, could answer a word. In deed they are all worthless." Their works are nothing; their moulded images are wind and confusion [Is. 41: 13, 28-29]**
- 2. "Behold My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. ... A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench...He will not fail nor be discouraged, till He has established justice in the earth" [Is. 42: 1, 3, 4]**

A desperate creditor (Tom) came to the home of his debtor-friend (John) to ask for the payment of a long-standing debt. John checked everywhere and could only raise about 40% of what he owed. He told Tom, "I am sorry, that is all I have." Just that moment, there was a gentle knock on the door. As John opened the door, a teenager put a gun to his head and said, "Your money or your life!" From nowhere, John brought out an amount even bigger than what he owed Tom. He turned to his creditor, and asked, "By the way, how much did you say that I was owing you?" Tom retorted, "We can talk about that next time!"

In that story, the debtor claimed to have paid the creditor ALL that he could afford. However, when he then faced a desperate situation, it became obvious that he had not surrendered all, that he had kept something back. That is how some of us relate to God and His Christ. We give the impression to those around us that we have completely given our lives to Christ, that we have surrendered ALL. Some others do not do so until they are forced by circumstances as in John's case above. Even so, he was still trying to cut corners! The thief, symbolic of Satan who comes to kill, steal or destroy, was going to take what John had kept back and he thought he could pay his debt while his creditor would bear the loss! Do we need to wait until such moments to surrender all? Can we not do so willingly and joyfully? These and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

1. What it means to surrender

Some Pharisees once came to Jesus and one of them, a lawyer, asked Him to tell them “the great commandment in the law.” He replied, “You shall *love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...* (and) you shall *love your neighbour as yourself*” [Matt. 22: 34-39].

The qualities of love are best described as follows [1 Cor. 13: 4-8]:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Interestingly, Jesus hinged the operation of love (whether of God or of the neighbour) on how you love yourself. Have you sat down to examine how much you love yourself? Let us take a few examples from one small part of your home, the washroom. When you use the toilet, do you rush out because you could not stand the “perfume”? Instead, you take your time and even read the morning newspaper there! But let your spouse or child or sibling do exactly what you have done in that same toilet. The whole house would know about it: “Shut that door!” “Don’t we have air fresheners there?” “Don’t take all day!”

When you go into the bathroom to wash, you may first spend some ten minutes simply looking at your naked body for signs of wear and tear. You take your time to brush your teeth and then wash yourself. You take much more time to rub on creams and make-ups. Your hairpieces may be scattered all over but you may not be angry with yourself or even notice anything. But let somebody else in that house get into the bathroom before you and do exactly what you have always done without blaming yourself. You may raise hell! All you may see are the toothpaste squeezed from the middle instead of from the end, the pieces of hair on the sink and floor, the towel not spread out, etc.

Let us extend our illustration to cover your daily activities in the home, office, business, school or church. Then, you will begin to appreciate that unless and until you completely surrender yourself to God, you may not be able to love others as you love yourself. That is the meat of our Lord’s response to that young lawyer.

Love for God and for our neighbour are two sides of the same *coin of faithfulness*. Unfaithfulness to God is idolatry, that is, ascribing to graven images and human beings the love, honour and obedience due only to God Himself. In several places in the Scriptures, God used the expression, “adultery” to describe such unfaithfulness, as symbolized in Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute [Hos. 1: 2; 3: 1-2]. The best illustration of unfaithfulness to our neighbour is adultery with its

derivatives; all best summarized as sexual immorality. In deed, you take away sex-related sins and most of us would have no problem surrendering to God!

2. Who then has surrendered all?

In determining what constitutes total surrender to God, two questions need to be answered. Did you surrender out of necessity or out of love? Is your surrender temporary or permanent? Let us examine a few examples of what believers present as surrender to God:

a) *The stray dog*

The dog has a strong sense of smell. That is why it is used for security duties at international ports of entry to sniff out drugs and dangerous substances. Ordinarily, a dog can find its way home by following scent leads. However, it may not be anxious to do so if there are bitches on heat in the neighbourhood where it finds itself! *A stray dog, therefore, is a believer who is keen on surrendering to God but thinks that s(he) can do so by own effort or in own time rather than through God's way.* Doing it God's way may mean losing temporary or long-term human advantages. Therefore, it is a *deliberate choice*. Such people draw near God with their lips and conduct but their hearts are far from Him and they teach "as doctrines the commandments of men" [Matt. 15: 9].

A good example can be seen in Jeroboam, king Solomon's servant who became the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, following the break up of Israel into the larger northern kingdom of Israel and the much smaller southern kingdom of Judah (with Solomon's son, Rehoboam, as king). Jeroboam was afraid that he could lose his kingdom and said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David." To prevent that from happening, he devised his own approach to worshipping God. He made two golden calves and said to his people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem (in Judah). Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" Then he built altars in Bethel and Gad "and made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi." He ordained feast days and made offerings to replace the ones ordered by God in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem. Clearly, he was into idolatry and God sent a prophet from Judah to let Jeroboam know that he was on his own [1 Kgs 12: 25-35; 13: 1-2].

b) *The commuter*

A commuter is a person who lives outside of the town where s(he) works. Commuters come to work or go back home each day by own or public transport. In the spiritual sense, commuters hover between surrendering to

God and keeping a strong foot in the world. They are double-minded and tend to be unstable in their ways [**Jam. 1: 8**].

You may remember the story of the rich young man who came to ask Jesus what he needed to do to gain eternal life. Jesus told him to obey the commandments and He went on to cite some of them. The young man replied that he had kept all the commandments from childhood. Jesus then asked him, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow Me.” The rich man could not stand that because his wealth was his god and “he went away sorrowful” [**Matt. 19: 13-22**]. If you cannot give up your earthly treasures for Christ’s sake, no matter how much you claim to love God, then you have not surrendered all!

c) *The caged bird*

Some of us have been driven by hardship or circumstances to turn to God. We give Him our all because we have no other choice *at that moment*. We are like a caged bird that cannot escape without external help. The woman with the issue of blood for twelve years “*had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any.*” The only option she had was to come to Jesus [**Lk 8: 43**]. After the prodigal son had wasted his share of his father’s inheritance on riotous living, “there arose a severe famine in that land and he began to be in want” and “*he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything*” [**Lk 15: 13-16**]. The only option left him was to return home. In such circumstances, the caged bird has no choice but to turn to God.

The caged bird will fly away once the cage is opened! In like manner, if our surrender has been brought about by hardship, what follows when it abates? Many of us may backslide and become commuters once again. For example, during the over thirteen years that David lived in the wilderness, he was totally surrendered to God. That was when he wrote most of the psalms credited to him. However, as soon as he became the king of all of Israel, his hardship abated. Instead of leading his troops to war as in the past, he began to sleep in the afternoons! It was soon after waking up one evening that he saw Bathsheba washing herself. Adultery and murder followed [**2 Sam. 11: 1-17**]. The caged bird had flown out! David later repented.

d) *The God lover*

Happily, some believers (like David) are able to transit from caged birds to God lovers. In other words, they have seen all that the other side (the world) can offer and they believe that they cannot afford to go back there again. *Of their own free will*, they decide that they will from now on be

totally dependent on God, *no matter what*. They now serve God not because of what they will get out of it but because it is the right thing to do.

Look at Mary Magdalene. Out of this woman, Jesus cast out seven demons [Lk 8: 2]. Thereafter, she became an unapologetic disciple of Christ. When Jesus was arrested, “all the disciples forsook Him and fled” [Matt. 26: 56], but Mary Magdalene did not. She followed Jesus and watched all the proceedings. She was one of the women (along with His mother) at the foot of the cross on which Christ was crucified [Jn 19: 25]. On Resurrection Sunday, she was the first to reach Christ’s tomb “early, while it was still dark” [Jn 20: 1]. She was the first person to see the risen Christ who told her, “Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascended to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God’” [v. 17].

From the forgoing analysis, only God lovers can be regarded as the ones who have truly surrendered to God. They love God with all their heart, soul and mind and their neighbours as themselves. Mary Magdalene was a God lover. That is the type of believer that God is addressing in today’s Bible text.

3. Why we should be truly surrendered to God

In Chapters 41 and 42 of the book of Isaiah, God has demonstrated why we can afford to completely trust Him:

a) *God is Alpha and Omega*

God said, “I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last I am He” [Is. 41: 4]. Therefore, as the Alpha and Omega, He has no equal and you cannot compare Him with man-made gods [vv. 5-7]. So, when He says, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” [v. 10], He is promising what He can deliver. Would you rather have human beings make you that kind of promise that they cannot keep?

b) *God is Abraham’s friend!*

God called the children of Israel “the descendants of Abraham My friend” [v. 8]. We know that “a friend loves at all times” [Prov. 17: 17]. Jesus told His disciples, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. *You are My friends if you do whatever I command you*” [Jn 15: 13-14]. Abraham was God’s friend because he obeyed what God commanded him to do, especially when he was ready to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. As a result of that obedience, God blessed Abraham and said, “In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you

have obeyed My voice” [Gen. 22: 1-18]. God accounted righteousness to Abraham because he believed. In like manner, the blessing has reached not only his descendants by law but “also those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” [Rom. 4: 16].

c) *God has sent His only begotten Son to die in our place*

God promised to send His Son as the Christ and Servant of the Lord [Is. 42: 1], and “a bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” [v. 3]. What a true friend in deed who sent His only begotten Son in due season to die in our place [Jn 3: 16]. Now, the blessing of Abraham is complete in us “who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” [Rom. 4: 24].

4. Conclusion

There is no human being who can by will power surrender all to God. Will power comes from human nature and “those who are in flesh cannot please God.” On the other hand, true and total surrender is the work of the Holy Spirit and “as many as are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God” [Rom. 8: 8,14]. For that to happen, you have to be ready to let go, “not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful giver” [2 Cor. 9: 7].

Christ is calling you today. He says you should fear not, that He will never leave you nor forsake you. He says that you should be of good cheer because He has overcome the world. You can afford to surrender all to Him because He Himself has surrendered all to His Father. Then, from now on, you can *truthfully* with the rest of your congregation sing:

*I surrender all
To Thee my blessed Saviour
I surrender ALL.*