

Behind the Parted Curtain

Author Erwin Lutzer wrote: “One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain, you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ or catching your first glimpse of gloom as you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable.”

Luke recorded a short yet powerful narrative about two men about to go behind the curtain of death. When Jesus was crucified, two thieves hung alongside Him. According to Mark, both men hurled insults at Jesus (15:32). One of the thieves, however, had a change of heart as he realized Jesus’ innocence, his own sin, and his destiny. He rebuked the other thief and asked Jesus to remember him when He came into His kingdom. These words were a sign of repentance and simple faith. Jesus responded, “I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Because the Lord had the power to forgive sins, salvation for the man was immediate; he knew that day where he would spend eternity.

Realizing that we are sinners and placing our trust and obedience in Jesus’ death and resurrection assures us that we can know where we will spend our eternal tomorrows when we slip behind the parted curtain. To prepare for tomorrow, trust Jesus and obey Jesus today.

Repeat Love

A sign in front of a church building seems to be great counsel for relationships: “Give love. Receive love. Repeat.” The greatest love that we receive is the love of God. He loved us so much that He gave His Son Jesus to live, die, and rise again to redeem us (1John 4:9). We receive His love when we trust and obey Jesus as our Savior and Lord. “As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). After we’ve experienced God’s love, we then can learn to give love. “Let us love one another, for love is of God” (1 John 4:7).

God’s love enables us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ. We teach, encourage, and rebuke. We weep and rejoice. The love we give is tender, tough, and supportive. We are taught by Jesus even to love our enemies: “Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). Giving love to others can be challenging in some situations, but it’s possible because of the love God has first given to us. A good plan for our lives today: Give love. Receive love. Repeat.

Succeeding Miserably

“In whatever a man does without God, he must fail miserably—or succeed more miserably,” wrote George MacDonald (1824–1905), a Scottish novelist, poet, and minister. This intriguing statement is often cited by modern speakers and writers and appears in MacDonald’s book *Unspoken Sermons*.

MacDonald was dealing with the difficult subject of a Christian’s self-denial and how we are to apply this teaching of Jesus: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it” (Luke 9:23-24). Rather than merely trying to suppress our natural desires, MacDonald said that true self-denial means “we must see things as [Christ] saw them, regard them as He regarded them; we must take the will of God as the very life of our being . We are no more to think, ‘What should I like to do?’ but ‘What would the Living One have me do?’”

Getting only what we want is succeeding miserably. True success is found in “losing” our lives for Jesus’ sake and finding them again full and free in His will. The spirit of humility and self-denial precedes a deeper and closer walk with God.

Real Persecution

We know very little about persecution. Our physical well-being has rarely if ever been threatened because of what we believe or what we say. What little we “know” about the subject comes from what we hear and read. But that is not true for many of our brothers and sisters around the world. Some of them live in danger every day simply because they love Jesus and want others to know Him too.

There is another form of persecution that may not be life-threatening, but it is heartbreaking. It’s the persecution that comes from non-Christian family members. When loved ones ridicule our faith and mock us for what we believe and how we express our love for God, we feel rejected and unloved.

Paul warned believers that following Jesus would result in persecution: “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2Tim. 3:12), and we know that sometimes rejection will come from those we love (Matt. 10:34-36). But when people we love reject the God we love, the rejection feels personal. Jesus told us to pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44), and that includes more than strangers who hate us. God is able to give us grace to persevere through persecution even when it comes from those we love. People may mock our message but they can’t stop our prayers.

A Hero’s Tragic Flaw

In literature, a tragic flaw is a character trait that causes the downfall of a story’s hero. That was true of Uzziah, who was crowned king of Judah at age 16. For many years, he sought the Lord; and while he did, God gave him great success (2Chron. 26:4-5). But things changed when “his fame spread far and wide, for he was marvelously helped till he became strong. But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction” (vv.15-16).

Uzziah entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar (v.16), openly defying God’s decree. Perhaps pride convinced him that God’s rules applied to everyone except him. When Uzziah raged against the priests who told him this was not right, the Lord struck him with leprosy (vv.18-20).

In literature and in life, how often we see a person of good reputation fall from honor into disgrace and suffering. “King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, cut off from the house of the Lord” (v.21). The only way we can prevent the nectar of praise from becoming the poison of pride is by following the Lord with a humble heart. “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but man is tested by the praise he receives” (Prov. 27:21).

A Moments Wisdom

- The nose can’t be a foot successfully; and if it tries to be a foot, it won’t be a good nose, either.
- Many can argue; not many can converse.
- Such as are thy habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of thy mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts.
- Adapt yourself to the life you have been given; and truly love the people with whom destiny has surrounded you.
- Don’t tell people how to do their jobs. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.
- To reach a port, we must sail. Sail, not tie up at anchor. Sail, not drift along.