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OUR "RATHERS"

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"I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness," Psalm 84:10.

I am using this text to pinpoint one word--the word rather. This word "rather" is found in the Bible a good many times and is used with much significance. Our "rathers" are a true revelation of what we are--they are a revelation of our judgment and affection. Our "rathers" tell of our preferences and choices. And the things we prefer and choose show the condition of our hearts.

During World War II a certain Italian said that he had rather be a garbage collector in America than to hold a big position under Mussolini in Europe. And today there are thousands of Cuban refugees in Miami who had rather be garbage collectors in America than to be lawyers and doctors under Castro in Cuba.

We all have our "rathers"--we are continually showing our preferences and making choices. Our rathers reveal our desires and our desires cannot be counterfeited. In Psalm 27:4, David says, *"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His temple."*

And in our text David says that he would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. The margin reads, "I would rather sit at the threshold of the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." This "rather"

shows David's love for God and hatred of evil. We have here a comparison of **places**: God's house and tents of wickedness. God's house was permanent; tents of wickedness were soon to be destroyed. Here was a comparison of **persons**. David had rather be the person who sits on the threshold of God's house than to be the person who dwells on the inside of the tents of wickedness. Here was a comparison of **position**. David had rather occupy the humble position in God's service than to be great in the eyes of the world. We are reminded of the last words of the late Alben Barkley when he said, "I would rather be a servant in the house of God than to sit in the seats of the mighty."

Moses had his "rather". In Hebrews 11:24-25, we read, *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."* There came a time when Moses had to make a choice. He had to take sides. He had to positionize himself with reference to the issues of his day. He had to show where his heart was. During his infancy and childhood he could not choose for himself; he had to stay where he was put. His childhood and youth had been spent in the house of Pharaoh, the enemy of his people, and the enemy of God. He had no choice during those days. But there came a time when he had to choose. Moses was in line for the throne of Egypt. He could choose that throne or he could choose a cross. He could choose ease and pleasure or he could choose suffering. He could choose

plenty or poverty. Yes, Moses had his "rather"--he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Moses took the long look by faith and saw that to bear reproach and suffering for the sake of Christ, the coming Messiah, was greater wealth than all the treasures of Egypt.

Now let us consider some of Paul's "rathers". In the early church at Corinth the gift of tongues--the Spirit given ability to speak in a language without having to learn it by study--was preferred by many. With this gift they could appear to be great and important. Those who sought this gift were selfish--they were putting self before the good of others. But Paul said, "Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." This raises the question for each of us: What kind of place do I want in my church? A position of honor or a place of service?

The truth as it is in Christ was precious to Paul. He had spent so many years in darkness and when the light of truth did finally shine in his heart, he wanted others to know it. Paul was a great teacher. He had rather be a teacher of God's word than to be an orator. He couldn't speak fluently, but he could speak plainly and truthfully the gospel of Christ. He would have been a flop as a 20th century after-dinner speaker, but he was tops in instructing men in the once delivered faith. And he exhorted Timothy to preach the word in season and out of season. He could say at the end of his eventful life,

that he had fought a good fight, and had guarded the faith, and was ready for his departure.

Paul had another "rather". He had a thorn in the flesh, whatever that was, and he wanted it removed. II Corinthians 12:7, *"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."* It might have been cataracts on his eyes; nobody knows for certain. He prayed three times for God to remove it. But God refused to do so and told him of something better: the sufficiency of His grace, and that His strength and power would be made perfect in Paul's weakness. Then Paul became beautifully reconciled to God's will, and said, *"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ might rest upon me."* And he continues by saying, *"There I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."* It is only when we consciously are weak in ourselves, that we can be strong in Christ. In a letter to Timothy, Paul said, *"be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."*

Paul was not a whiner and grumbler. He did not feel sorry for himself. He was glad to be weak and despised if only the power of Christ could work through Him.

Paul had still another "rather". In writing to Timothy he says that he is hard pressed between two choices. For his own sake he would rather depart and be with Christ, but for the sake of others, he was willing to remain on earth. And writing about the glorious portion of believers in the presence of Christ, he says, *"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord,"* II Corinthians 5:8. A certain poet has put it like this:

*"When all my labours and trials are o'er,
And I am safe on that beautiful shore,
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore,
Will thru the ages be glory for me."*

*"When by the gift of His infinite grace
I am accorded in heaven a place,
Just to be there and look on His face
Will through the ages be glory for me."*

"Friends will be there I have loved long ago:

*Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet just a smile from my Saviour, I know,*

Will thru the ages be glory for me."

Now the unregenerate of Christ's day had their "rather". When Pilate gave the people the opportunity to choose between the sinless Christ and the wicked Barabbas, the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them, and crucify Jesus. Their "rather" revealed their ignorance. Had they known who Jesus was they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. And their "rather" also revealed their hatred. How great was their hatred of Jesus to have chosen Barabbas for release rather than Jesus!

And the unregenerate of our day have their "rathers". They would rather reject Jesus than accept Him. They'd rather have their own way of salvation than God's way of salvation through faith in His Son. They'd rather have their own filthy rags of self-righteousness than the spotless robe of Christ's imputed righteousness. They'd rather have their own way of life than God's way. And there are many had rather God than confess their sins and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.

All of us have our "rathers". And these "rathers" show us up; they are a true revelation of our true selves. These "rathers" are like the index to a book. Just as the index shows what is in the book so do our "rathers" show what is in our hearts. What had we rather do on the Lord's Day? Obey Him in seeking and finding fellowship with His people in His House, or substitute our own plan and way for His command?

What had we rather do on prayer meeting night? Come to prayer meeting to pray with and for one another, or take it easy at home, or find fellowship with the world--with those who hate God? If I had rather be with the world than with God's people, then I must belong to the world, for the world loves its own. My friends, there is a vast difference between God's born again people and the world. And this difference has its seat in the desires. God's

people hunger and thirst after practical and personal righteousness and long to be perfectly whole. John 3:19, *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."* Matthew 10:28, *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

WHO KILLED THE LORD JESUS CHRIST?

BY: C. D. COLE

Text verses: Acts 2:23; Acts 4:27; Isaiah 53:4, 10; Galatians 4:4; John 10:18; Hebrews 6:6.

The answer to this question must come from the Bible, and when we read what it says on the subject, there seems to be contradiction and confusion. But when the word is rightly divided, there is harmony and consistency. There are Scriptures which tell us that men put Christ to death: Acts 2:23, *"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."* Acts 4:27, *"For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together."* There are other Scriptures that tell us plainly that God put Christ to death: Isaiah 53:4, 10, *"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted:....Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand."* See also John 10:18.

Now these passages are typical of three distinct groups of Scriptures. One group says that wicked men killed Christ; another group says that God put Him to death; and a third group that He lay down His life. All these Scriptures are true, but they view His death from different angles.

The Death of Christ as the Act of Men

What can we say about His death as a human deed?

1. It was a wicked deed. Paul says, *"With wicked hands have crucified and slain."* We have no difficulty in seeing that men did a wicked deed when they nailed the Son

of God to the cruel tree.

2. It was an ignorant deed. I Corinthians 2:8, *"Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."* *"On the cross Christ said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do'"; Luke 23:24.* See also Acts 7:52. There is a sense in which all sin is a matter of ignorance. Nobody knows much about the enormity and heinousness of sin apart from the convincing and convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

3. It was a providential deed. In putting Christ to death, men were doing only what God had determined to be done--and they were doing it the way He meant for it to be done. Galatians 3:13, *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."* Deuteronomy 21:23, *"His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God;) that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance."* This raises a question: How could it be sinful or wrong to do what God had purposed to be done? This leads to another question: What makes an act sinful? It is not the mere deed but the motive behind the deed. In other words sin is not in the hand but in the heart. Those who killed Christ did what was meant to be done, but their motive was sinful. Their deed was from a wicked heart.

This is why a perfectly good deed in itself may not be a good deed in the sight of God. One may give his goods to feed the poor to no profit because he does it from a selfish motive--to get the praise of men. Selfishness may express itself in a good deed as well as a wicked deed. The Pharisees did a lot of good things and yet they were censured by Christ because they did it to get the praise of men. Watch your motive, and

be careful about judging the motive of others. For a thing to be good in God's sight, it must be done for His glory.

The Death of Christ as the Act of God

1. It was an exhibition of justice. God's justice calls for the punishment of sin. Here is where many go astray in their thinking. The general feeling is that God ought to save everybody. He is to be just. No unregenerate man is sound in his thinking about religion. He may think straight about things in nature and science, and human courts. Nobody will ever argue that human courts ought to open prison doors and let all prisoners go free as a matter of justice. Everybody believes that a just judge must enforce the law and inflict the penalty on the offender. Well, God is a just Judge and as such He will enforce His law. And that is what He is doing at the cross. He is not punishing the sinner, but the sinner's Surety who is Jesus Christ. Luke 24:26, *"Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?"*

At Calvary God was acting as a just Judge. Christ took our guilt upon Himself and God is striking at sin. Sin deserves the wrath of God, and at Calvary all the wrath of God fell upon God's Son who was in the sinner's place. II Corinthians 5:21, *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."* God was so just that He spared not His own Son when He saw Him in the sinner's place. Romans 8:32, *"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"*

2. It was an exhibition of love. There was both justice and love exhibited at the cross--justice towards sin and love towards the sinner. God in love gave His Son to die in the sinner's place that He might in justice let the sinner go free. Romans 5:8-9, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in*

that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." Galatians 3:13, *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree."* Sin cannot be pardoned; it must be punished. Failure to punish sin is to put a premium on sin. God's love is not a lazy good nature, as many think, but it is rigidly righteous. God in love for sinners punished His own Son.

The Death of Christ as His Own Act

1. It was voluntary. God gave His Son but he did not force His Son to die. Men killed Jesus but not against His will. Had you every noticed how helpless His enemies were to take Him until He got ready to die? Seven times we are told in John's Gospel that they could not lay hands upon Him because His hour was not yet come.

2. It was a priestly act. The Old Testament priests offered the blood of bulls and goats that could not take away sin, but Jesus Christ as our High Priest offered Himself without spot to God. By one offering he perfected forever them that are sanctified or set apart by grace through faith.

Conclusion

Here stands a sinner--what is to be done with him? Justice says "Cut him down, he has no right to live." Truth says, "He or I, one of us, must perish for I have sinned, the wages of sin is death." Holiness says, "I hate the workers of iniquity, away with him." Mercy pleads, "Spare him." And wisdom says, "Deliver him from going down into the pit for I have found a ransom," and he offers the sinless Son of God as the ransom price of our redemption.