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Whatever It Takes

1316-A

Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Tension filled the air. Bombs were dropping in the valley below, and when they hit, it seemed that the whole earth was splitting in two. Inside a makeshift tent, the warriors responsible for directing the allied attack were huddled around a dimly lit table, examining a crumpled map that showed where the enemy had landed and where the next attack was likely to come from. Inside that tent were a general, a colonel, two captains, and a handful of enlisted men.

Each was being given an assignment for the coming campaign, a battle that would in all likelihood determine the outcome of the war. “Ben,” General Johnson began, “you take your troops down the hill to the edge of the river on the right.” “Yes, sir,” the Captain replied. “Bill, you lead the 38th battalion over that ridge and come around to the left.” “Yes, sir,” the Colonel replied. “I’ll take the rest of the men straight down into the valley. They’re looking for me. That will take the heat off the rest of you. When they begin to key on us, you attack. Got it?”

The rest of the men reeled in disbelief. “Sir,” they replied, almost in unison. “You could die.” The general turned and faced the men. His face was grim and taut. “What is our purpose here, men?” he asked. “To defeat the enemy,” one of the enlisted men replied. “Good,” replied the general. “Our plan is to do whatever it takes. If my dying defeats the enemy, that’s the best plan. I am ready to do whatever it takes,” he said one more time. “Are you?”

The battle proceeded as planned. When the enemy spotted the general leading his men across the hill into the valley, they anticipated that this was the main allied thrust. They focused all their firepower on him. He was killed almost instantly. As they moved into that ravine, however, thinking they had the army trapped, the other two units appeared from each side and completely decimated their troops. It led to ultimate surrender, and the war was over.

On his tombstone in Arlington Cemetery you can read those three incredible words, just below his name,

“General Whatever It Takes Johnson”.

In a garden called Gethsemane, many, many years ago, the bravest man who ever lived knelt by a rock and waited for His final orders, as well. This battle had been raging for more than two thousand years; and to the innocent bystander, it appeared that

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the enemy was gaining ground daily. The moment of truth was nearing. The battle raged on every side. Finally, word came. The only solution was for the Commander Himself to walk headlong into the enemy's fire and die. From His death would come certain victory. There was no other way.

You see Him now kneeling there, just before the final conflict. In agony, He is praying. Great drops of blood are falling from His brow as He views from His knees the battle of the ages taking place in the heavenlies.

"Father, if it be possible," He prays, "Let this cup pass from Me." There appears to be an eternal pause. "Nevertheless, whatever it takes." The Apostle Paul wrote of that fateful moment in the closing words of that famous "mind of Christ" passage in Philippians, chapter two. He said this:

He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:8b NKJV)

He said, "Father, whatever it takes." And Paul added, "Let this mind be in you."¹ Let this be the heart that beats within you. To win the battle is your only goal. You lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares you.² You become "not entangled" with the affairs of this life, so that you can concentrate on being a soldier. Nothing must come between you and your mission. You have been assigned to the battlefield of the spirit. The enemy will assault you from every side and taunt you in every way possible. He knows he has lost the battle. His only goal now is to injure as many as possible or take as many prisoners as possible. He wants to "entangle" you. He wants to encumber you with "weights" so that you cannot run the race or stay on the battlefield.

The victory has been assured. He cannot take your life. He can, however, cripple you and limit your effectiveness on the battlefield. He is not omniscient. So he will tease you and tempt you and test you until he finds a limit to your commitment to Christ. He tried this with the Master in the wilderness, only to find that here was one who was willing to be *obedient unto death*.

And so we wind the bend and approach the finish line in our study of the mind of Christ. We have examined the concept, the characteristics and the consequences. Now we come to the commitment. We have seen what God is looking for in His men

¹ Philippians 2:5a

² Hebrews 12:1 NKJV

and women. He wants them to be *immediately obedient* to the absolutes of Scripture, *immediately responsive* to the principles of Scripture, and *immediately submissive* to the “powers that be which are ordained of God.”³ We have looked into the life of Jesus as He walked through those first ten chapters of John and have seen what the mind of Christ looks like in a man. It looks *humble*. It looks *submissive*. It looks *holy*.

In our final glance at this subject, we look at the final two phrases of Paul’s capsulized description of the life of the Savior. In this study, we take up the issue of *ultimate obedience*. Ultimate obedience is the level to which God has called us to obey. It is a concept we love to read about as we study the martyrs of days gone by. It is a concept we find overwhelming in the lives of the Stephens of Bible history. Somehow, however, it is a concept we cannot seem to apply to our own lives in this affluent, comfortable, Bible-tolerated society in which we find ourselves.

Thus, we have redefined *ultimate obedience* to fit the age in which we live. Obedient unto death means missing a favorite TV show to come to church. Obedient unto death means getting up fifteen minutes earlier to read the kids a Bible story. Obedient unto death means skipping our third vacation of the year because there are people with needs and no one to meet them. We have deified other areas of our lives and focused our attention on the peripheral issues of Christianity, lest we be challenged to put our lives on the line for the things that are eternal in nature.

The ultimate in commitment in our generation is a three-year mission tour to a country of our choice, a one-year agreement to teach a class, provided we get the group we want; an occasional stint as a committee chairman, so long as there are no conflicts; a willingness to share Christ with someone you know, provided it doesn’t mean embarrassment or harassment or rejection. Obedience unto death in the ’90’s means a willingness to pray daily, not pray all day; a willingness to attend a weekly Bible study, not spend days on end in the Word for yourself; a willingness to give from our abundance, not give like the widow, until there’s nothing left to give. Our society is the “me” society, and the church in our age wants better facilities, shorter walks from the car to the church, air-conditioned play areas, comfortable sanctuaries, and enough staff members to do the work of the ministry so we won’t be expected to carry the load.

³ Romans 13:1

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And if it “isn’t convenient” we just stay home. Sore muscles, weak knees, cranky kids, or the lure of a day away are all we need to “beg off” our responsibilities that relate to the kingdom in order to satisfy our own needs instead. The portraits of missionaries of former days who charted unknown territories and left the comforts of home for a lifetime of ministering make good stories to read our children in Sunday school, but modern day parallels are few and far between.

Because the very concept of responsibility has been replaced with a concept of “rights”, the church is now plagued with a “gimme” syndrome that measures its effectiveness by what it “offers” its parishioners, rather than by how it challenges its parishioners to give their lives away in total abandonment to the God who gave His life away for them.

Jesus was *obedient unto death*. The word “death” denotes several things.

First of all, death indicates the end of life as we know it. For the person who dies, *nothing will ever be the same*. For the Christian, it means a better life; for the unbeliever, it means the eternal fires of hell; but for all, it means something totally different, a life that has to be grasped by faith, for no one has experienced it and returned to describe it.

Secondly, death indicates the cessation of all material privileges. You can accumulate riches, possessions, houses and lands. But the Scripture says when you go, *it all stays behind*. All. All means all. It means every scrap of real estate, every stock certificate, every antique, every car, every bank account; those things you gave your life for are no longer yours and you no longer have control over them. Others may inherit them, fight over them, even waste them foolishly. You can do nothing. You can’t take it with you, and you can’t control what happens to it after you’re gone. You have a new bank account now in heaven and it contains only those rewards given you for what Christ in you has done in the spirit realm. Everything else stays behind. Everything.

Thirdly, death indicates separation from all the people and things we called essential. “Till death do us part” is written into the marriage agreement because that’s what it means. At death, we part. Often we don’t want to. That’s not an issue. One of death’s claims is the right to separate the living from the dead.

Fourthly, death indicates the end of the quest for approval and

acceptance. It no longer will matter that you were the president of your fraternity in college. No one will ever again care that you were voted “most likely to succeed” or that you played quarterback for the Arizona Abercrombies. All that will matter now is what you have or have not done that is eternal in nature. Death flips the tables, and the physical, tangible things that were primary in nature before, now fall into oblivion. They don’t count at all.

So *obedient unto death* indicates the ultimate in obedience. It means He was obedient to the end. It means He was obedient to the point where it did not matter that the Son of man had no place to lay His head. He had an eternal home in the presence of His Father that superseded the need for one here. It means He was obedient to the point that if doing His Father’s will separated Him from the very people He came to save, so be it. “He came unto His own and His own received Him not.”⁴ So He went to a people who had not been His people. It means He was obedient to the point that He gave up all His rights to be successful and accepted and became “despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.”⁵

He gave up His Kingship to become a slave. He gave up His crown for a crown of thorns. He gave up the holiness He had possessed in eternity past and actually experienced the devastation of sin on our behalf. He died in every sense of the word: to His desires, to His acceptance, to His rights as God. He died. His Father asked Him to, and that’s all that mattered. He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.

The Cross was the most humiliating, the most dehumanizing kind of death known to man. He died as a criminal, not as the Christ; He died as a maniac, not as a martyr. While soldiers gambled for His clothes and a raging crowd mocked His Kingship, the eternal, creator God remained silent. Why? Because *that was His Father’s will*. And for Him to be obedient unto death, He had no other choice. He suffered abuse beyond description. This was not the death of a man who died leading His forces into battle and thus became an instant hero. This was the story of a man accused of a crime He did not commit, who was tried in a travesty of justice, and sentenced to be executed in a mockery of all that is righteous. Yet even in His hour of trial, the very people He had given His life to ran the other way, denied they knew Him, even cursed at the thought of defending Him.

⁴ John 1:11

⁵ Isaiah 53:3

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That's what it means to be obedient unto death. It means you give it *all* up. Everything. You become willing to become nothing, expect to be persecuted and ridiculed, and you make yourself so available to do the Father's will that the sneering, laughing rejection of the very people you came to save is counted a blessing.

Now...how would you like to follow Him? How would you like to be a disciple? How would you like to be...obedient unto death? Beloved, that is not an option for the super-spiritual Christian. That is the calling of every child of God who has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. It goes with the territory. It is part of the contract. It is one of the benefits you agreed to when you enlisted. And if the recruiter who led you into the Lord's service failed to mention that, he or she let you down. But that's history. Now you know. Now you are accountable.

At some point in our lives, and it ought to be the day of our conversion, we ought to surrender to the reality that God now owns our lives, and our very reason for existence has changed 180 degrees. At that point, we ought to say to God, "Dear Lord, whatever it takes, I'm yours." Granted, the "whatever it takes" takes on new shades of meaning as time goes by, but it ought to only grow richer as we begin to experience the joy of giving up that which belongs to the living in order to lay up treasures for the real life that is to come.

Instead, we settle into the surroundings, take on the level of commitment of the Christians around us and of the church in general in our day, and wonder why we are not experiencing the "blessed" life that the early Christians seemed to have. The reason, Beloved, is that we have not come to grips with what it means to be willing to be "obedient unto death."

How ready are you to die? How willing are you to die for the sake of the gospel? Die to life as you know it? Die to material privileges as you want them? Die to people and things you deem essential? Die to the acceptance and approval of men if it means the glory and grace of God? Better still, face physical death, premature physical death from the world's perspective, if your dying might bring another life?

Jesus made it clear what He expects of us:

And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

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Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.

What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?
(Luke 9:22-25 NIV)

Don't you love the "alls" in Scripture? He said to them *all*. He said to us: If *any* one wants to follow Me, here's what he has to do: (Anyone means *any* one.) He has to deny himself.

The New English Bible words it:

He must leave self behind.

Another translator writes:

He must disregard himself.

The literal meaning is "the desires and needs of his own life will be constantly made subordinate until counted insignificant."

Having counted himself nothing, which is, you remember, what Jesus did according to Philippians 2, the one who wants to follow Jesus now goes one step further. He dies. But here's something interesting: He dies daily. It isn't a once-for-all experience. It is a continual choice. The word "daily" means "each day without a day between". It means a lifestyle. Not only does he deny himself daily, but, having denied himself, he takes up his cross. Williams translates it: "Puts the cross on his shoulders." The Cross is the instrument of death. The Cross means that though you die, the risen Christ lives. You are not dying to life, you are dying to self, and the more continuously you die, the more victorious Christ is, because He died first, the propitiation for your sins.

It means that every single morning of your life you fall to your knees and acknowledge to God that you are nothing apart from him, and the only reason you have to live is to bring glory to His Name. Therefore, whatever it takes, you are His. You, at that point, die. You face the end of life as you know it. The things that were important to you the day before are not important anymore. All that matters now are the things of the Spirit. If you need to be humbled to be blessed and to be a blessing, that's what you want. You take up your Cross, acknowledge His Lordship, and die. If you need to be persecuted and suffer in order to be blessed and to be a blessing, you want that. You are dead, and your whole life is new in Christ Jesus. It must be done *daily* or each day you will rebuild your old life, little by little, without knowing it. Every day you fail

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to die, self gains more control and dying the next day is less likely.

Not only do you face the end of life each day as you know it, you also face the cessation of material privileges as you desire them. It means adding, “Dear Lord, here’s my car. Here’s my house. Here’s my job. Here’s my bank account. They aren’t mine anymore. I’m dead. You’re alive.” It’s what Jesus meant when He said:

So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has
cannot be My disciple. (Luke 14:33 NKJV)

Literally, He said, “Anyone who is not *willing* to make everything he has expendable for My sake, can’t follow Me.” There are a thousand ways in which we cling to what we have. We do it financially. We do it emotionally. We do it spiritually. Jesus literally expects us to transfer the title deed to every possession we have in exchange for what He did at Calvary. It’s quite an incredible trade. Everything we give up is going to burn anyway. Everything He gave up is eternal and will last forever. What a deal. But we chafe over it. We postpone it. We deceive ourselves into not being realistic. We trade our crosses for sofas and telephones and cars and appliances, as though those things have eternal value. Lives go unreached, homes go untouched, mission fields go untended because we unconsciously choose to invest our time and our money in things that are decaying and deteriorating, at the expense of things that cannot decay—those things laid up for us where moth and rust cannot corrupt and thieves cannot break through and steal.⁶

Every day we must give our possessions back to God. Then when the car gets bumped or the sofa gets soiled or the bank account gets small, *they are His problem, not ours*. And we are so engrossed in doing His will that losing that which cannot affect eternity means nothing to us. It doesn’t mean we’ll have nothing. It means we’ll have nothing worth keeping at the expense of His will. There’s a difference.

Dying daily also means giving up claim to people and relationships and making ourselves vulnerable to being hurt and misunderstood and even rejected or left alone. It’s why those who mourn are “blessed.” They are receiving a level of comfort unknown to those who have people to cling to. We don’t want that. We can tell God we don’t want that. But it must be accompanied by a “nevertheless, thy will be done”⁷ or we are not dying daily.

⁶ Matthew 6:19,20

⁷ Luke 22:42

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It also means daily giving up our quest for approval and acceptance as a means of self-worth. Jesus was despised and rejected of men. His very own received Him not. He added, speaking of us:

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.
(John 15:18 NKJV)

He said in Matthew:

And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake.
(Matthew 10:22a NKJV)

You cannot judge your effectiveness in life by what the world calls acceptance. If you did, Jesus failed. But Jesus didn’t come to be accepted, but to accept; He did not come to win favor, but to win souls. Unless you pray that prayer daily, and mean it, you will wear your feelings on your sleeve and constantly be resurrecting self from the grave so you can have a pity party over its hurts. How can the world hurt a dead man?

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
(Colossians 3:3 NKJV)

Daily, those four things have to die: your objectives, your possessions, your relationships, and your acceptance. But one more thing has to go. Every day we live we have to be willing to die, literally. Not just figuratively, literally. It doesn’t seem likely in our day that we will die for the sake of the gospel. Don’t count on it. The end of this age is near. But the issue isn’t whether or not we will be called on to do so, the issue is whether or not we are willing. Paul wrote these incredible words:

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there.

I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me.

However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace.

(Acts 20:21-24 NIV)

Being able to testify of the grace of God was far more important to Paul than life itself. You may ask, “But if in our day, I’m not likely to die for my testimony, why pray daily to be willing?” Because, Beloved, God knows your heart. In His mind, you are being called

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upon daily to die. The question is how dear is your life to you? Again, Paul asked the question in Acts 21 as he headed for certain death:

“Why are you weeping and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

When he would not be dissuaded, we gave up and said, “The Lord’s will be done.”
(Acts 21:13,14 NIV)

There is one more way we must be willing to die. That is a willingness to go home to be with the Lord at any time He calls. It may not be an act of martyrdom. It may only be your time. And it may be that by your going home, someone will come to Christ who never would find Him otherwise. Your homegoing will not only take you to glory, but perhaps others with you. Are you willing? Paul said this:

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death.

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know!

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith,

so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.

(Philippians 1:20-26 NIV)

There are times in life when we want to go home and be with the Lord. Circumstances engulf us, the body betrays us, and the problems of life overcome us. We cry out to God, “Lord take me home.” But He doesn’t. On other occasions, we see people who long to stay on this earth and suddenly, through sickness or accident, their tenure on earth comes seemingly prematurely to a halt. How are we to respond? Paul says we are to respond as dead men. It’s not our decision. It’s better to be with the Lord, that’s true. But sometimes we long to stay here, that’s true as well. And until God is finished with us here; we must stay here to stay in His will. So the answer is: “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

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That's the last thing we need to die to daily. Life itself. Not only dying for the gospel, but dying according to God's timing and living according to God's power in the meantime.

The bottom line is simple. We were created by God to be wholly His. We were re-created in Christ to be wholly His as well. Until and unless we *daily* renew that transfer of the reins of our lives to the living God, we are fools. Every day we must die to life as we know it, and live unto life in the spirit realm. Every day we must die to material possessions and live for eternal rewards. Every day we must give up our claim to people and relationships and cling to our relationship with Him. Every day we must die to our quest for approval and live only to be accepted in the beloved. Every day we must be willing to die for the faith, and even beyond that, be willing to die, period, if this is God's will for us, and to take it one step further, we must be willing to live as long as He wants us to, because He knows best, and He gives us grace day by day so long as He leaves us here.

In other words, every day without fail, we simply must die. We must go before our God and pray, "Lord, whatever it takes." That's a dangerous prayer to pray. It sets God free to mold you and shape you, if need be, break you and maybe even take you. But, oh, Beloved, anything less is less than God is asking for. So...

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Dearly, Beloved, daily we pray:
"Dear God, we give You this one more day.
Take my possessions; they are not mine,
Take my relationships; they must be Thine.

Take my acceptance, until life is o'er,
You, they rejected, do I deserve more?
Take my objectives, take all my goals,
Make my one love the salvation of souls.

And if in Thy pleasure, it's best that I die,
Dear, blessed Jesus, take me, I cry!
Here is my prayer, Lord, through glory or strife,
Whatever it takes, Lord, here is my life."

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