

Continually Surrender

'There was a pious old gentleman of an earlier generation who used to get up regularly at prayer meeting[s] in his church to pray: "Use me, O Lord, use me—in some advisory capacity!"'

How many of you have ever prayed like that? In your prayer, did you leave it open ended? In other words, did you let God do whatever He wanted to with you? Or maybe you never prayed for God to use you? People who never ask God to use them to be of service to His kingdom, in whatever way He sees fit, do such people even love God at all? Are they even saved? Have they ever met Lord Jesus Christ? Would they even recognize Him if He walked our streets in 2024?

In today's Gospel lesson from Mark 8, our Lord asks His disciples two questions. Now it's not like our Lord doesn't already know the answers. When God asks us questions, it's like a teacher asking students questions, so that they can learn. Here, it's obvious that the general public is quite confused about Who Lord Jesus is. Their conceptions were all over the place, but most thought that He was certainly Someone unique and special. The disciples didn't get around to answering because Peter, bless his soul, blurted out, at Holy Spirit's direction, that Lord Jesus is the very, actual Son of God and Savior of the World. Peter had

the words right, but beyond that, very little idea of what he was actually saying. For when the Lord begins preparing them for the tragic events soon to come, not only can they not wrap their heads around them, Peter jumps right in and voices what all were probably thinking, banking on his best friend and star pupil relationship with the Lord, boldly rebuking the Lord! Now, I personally will advise all people to never, did I say never?, openly rebuke the Lord. I mean, when we're truly on intimate terms with each other, when we truly know Him as a Person, we can say things in jest to Him, and He will get a proper kick out of them. Otherwise, to openly question His judgement and character, well, that qualifies as a direct assault on His character; it's an offense, an attack, and usually an unfriendly one to boot. And think, if you really know someone and truly love them, would you just up and attack their character and judgement, knowing that it will hurt their feelings?

A few thousand years before this, Abraham was "visiting" with the Lord God, the "Angel" of the Lord, Who was Lord Jesus before He became incarnated as a human being, before He became the Son of God, Son of Man. God-in-future Christ told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a son of their own, and that God's everlasting covenant would be him. He'd be called Isaac, Yitzak, meaning "laughter". This was *after* Abraham and Sarah both had laughed at the very idea that they would have a son of their own. For Ishmael, the son that Abraham had through Sarah's Egyptian handmaid, Hagar, was already now 13 years

old. If it had been late in the game for Abraham to have fathered Ishmael 13 years ago, well, it was just plumb impossible now. Which is why Abraham asked God to bless Ishmael as well, because he didn't fully believe that Isaac would ever actually exist. And so he laughed at the absurdity of the whole idea. And God turned it right around and told them to name the boy who'd make his appearance next year, "Isaac", meaning laughter. So there!

Note that God wasn't upset at the implied, "You don't really know what You're talking about" thoughts that were crossing both Abraham and Sarah's minds. Yet 2,000+ years later, when Zechariah's name was drawn in the regular drawing to offer the holy sacrifices in the Holy of Holies in the Jerusalem Temple, 2,000+ years later, the angel Gabriel told him that, joy of joys, he and his wife Elizabeth, childless all their years, would suddenly have a son of their own, to be named John the Baptizer, Zechariah disbelieved, and was stuck speechless, literally, for the duration of Elizabeth's pregnancy until baby John was born! These two situations were markedly different. Zechariah was an ordained priest, and serving in the Holy of Holies. A rope was tied around one of his ankles, customarily because for priests who entered the Holy of Holies, where the very presence of God dwelt, something "unusual" might happen to them. If they didn't come out of the Holy of Holies under their own power in a reasonable length of time, other priests and Levites would pull on the rope and drag the priest out of the Holy of Holies. For remember that

no one could enter the Holy of Holies except the priest and only on one day a year, Yom Kippur. That was it. One day a year. And if a priest entered with an unrepentant heart, having unconfessed sin, well, he just might not come back out alive! Being the serving high priest was definitely a most high honor, but it also could be quite risky and dangerous!! But that was all before Christ Jesus went to the cross of Calvary. Things were vastly different after Lord Jesus completed His work.

For when our Lord gave up His Spirit, physically breathing His last on the cross, at that very instant, the enormous, thick, heavy drape in the Temple that separated the Holy of Holies from the “lesser” Holy Place, was split in two from top to bottom. The symbolic meaning of this was unmistakable. What had kept mankind separated from Father God, was now removed. The sin that prevented intimacy between God and mankind was now atoned for, and like Adam before he sinned, we can freely enter into God’s presence, approach His throne of grace, hugging His legs, even climbing up into His lap, and going to sleep upon His loving breast. Like it was always meant to be. But only if we come through Christ Jesus’ blood. You must try it!!

Recall what our Savior Lord tells us in Mark 8:34-38, and elsewhere: “If you truly want to follow Me, you should at once completely disown your own life. And you must be willing to share My cross and experience it as your own, as you **continually surrender** to My ways. For if you let your life go for My sake and for

the sake of the gospel, you will ***continually*** experience true life. But if you choose to keep your life for yourself, you will forfeit what you try to keep. For what use is it to gain all the wealth and power of this world, with everything it could offer you, at the cost of your own life? And what could be more valuable to you than your own soul? If you are ashamed of Me and My words while living among sinful and faithless people, then I, the Son of Man, will also be ashamed of you when I make My appearance with My holy messengers in the glorious splendor of My Father!”

Left to ourselves, we're utterly hopeless. Father God made us perfect, beautiful, and holy, like Himself. We were sinless, not even knowing what sin is. That was the huge tragedy and deception that the devil foisted upon our unsuspecting first parents. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, well, we never needed to know those things. We were pure and undefiled when we didn't know about evil. We were truly innocent children of God before that. But after they ate the fruit, there was no going back. We now knew what evil is. We flirted with evil by gazing at the enticing fruit. It was only a matter of time before we went all the way and bit. Adam and Eve could have looked, considered, left it alone, and we still would've been in perfect fellowship with God. But we let that temptation fester in our minds and succumbed. And sin's penalty is death. No ifs, ands or buts. It's just the way of perfection. God is perfect and holy. To live in His divine presence, with His divine life pulsating in and through us, we must be

perfect and holy like Him. But once sin entered, well, it was forever impossible. For if we're honest with ourselves, we sin in word, thought, and deed, more times every day than we could care to count! Which is why Lord Jesus had to come, to offer His perfect life as a sacrifice in exchange for ours. All of us have sinned. All of us would have to be sacrificed to atone for our sin. But since we're all sinful, we can't be a sacrifice. For only a perfect life sacrificed could negate our sin. So our precious Lord Jesus came in our place. Don't you just love Him? This, folks, is the true joy of salvation. We owe absolutely everything to Him!!

So when He tells us that we must *continually* surrender to His ways, it's because we're living in this sin-filled world, made decrepit by the sin that separates it from the everlasting, energizing life of God, which has caused it to decay and decay ever since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden. When we don't *continually* surrender to Lord Jesus' ways, we're necessarily affected by the decaying, rotting world around us. So examine your life, your way of living. Are you ever ashamed of Christ? Are you ever living for yourself? If God asked you to immigrate to the Holy Land like He did Abraham, would you go? Do you know Him enough to love Him? Learn His ways and live in them, and I guarantee, the massive difficulties of our lives, especially as we all get older and our bodies decay, just become easier to deal with. We will physically die, but we're exchanging our otherwise destined unending death from sin, to everlasting life in Christ Jesus our Lord!

