

For What Are You Willing To Die?

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Assembly

Introduction:

The question hangs heavy in the air. As you sit in the chair, the events of the past few weeks seem a blur. You don't remember much about the day they found your Bible. You were on your way home from the worship assembly when someone rear-ended you. You didn't notice, but the impact caused your Bible to slide out from under the passenger seat. When the policeman questioned you, he happened to look through the window and saw it. Without further question, he told the wrecker to impound the car, handcuffed you, put you in his car and drove you to jail. The trial was hurried. The prosecution brought in your next door neighbor who testified that she had never seen you drink and you always went somewhere on Sunday. Your boss testified that you worked hard, never cut corners, but he always thought something was funny because whenever your co-workers began to tell dirty jokes, you left the room. Other witnesses came forward, but it is all jumbled together. The verdict was announced. You were guilty: convicted of being a Christian who not only reads but also believes the Bible. Your day of punishment arrived and they strapped you into the electric chair and put the tape over your eyes. Then somebody said a stay of execution has been offered if you will simply claim that the Bible is a book of fairy tales and Christianity is a hoax. They asked the question that weighs down your mind right now. You have before you a choice of life or death. You could choose to accept their offer and never look to Christianity again. Or you could lie. You could say what they want and then when you are free you could just be more careful in the future. Or you could deny their request and have them throw the switch that will end your life in an instant. You are asked again, "Will you deny the Bible or will you die for it?" What is your answer?

I am glad that sort of thing does not happen in America today. I want to believe I would deny their request. But that is easy to say while in the pulpit and perhaps not as easy while under the gun, literally. **Hebrews 11** talks about many saints who were faithful to God. Toward the end of the chapter the Hebrew writer makes an interesting statement, "... others were tortured, not accepting their release in order that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground" (**Hebrews 11:35-38**). Who were these people and for what were they willing to die? Examine some Bible characters willing to die and ask, "For what am I willing to die?"

Discussion:

- I. Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah – Willing to die over who is God!
 - A. In **Daniel 3**, Nebuchadnezzar, the king who had conquered their people, dragged them away in captivity, changed their names, given them an education, provided them a living and held their lives in his hand, had set up a golden image and commanded them to worship it.
 - B. But Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah knew this statue was no god. They knew who was their God and they were willing to die for Him. Interestingly, these men did not have to renounce Jehovah. They simply had to add some other gods to their list. But they were unwilling and were prepared to die. If it were us, would we be willing to die or would we fall down before the image?
- II. Paul – Willing to die over who Jesus is!
 - A. In **Acts 23:6**, while Paul was on trial before the council of the Jews, he slyly turned the attention of the council on itself and away from him. Perceiving that some of the council were Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, and some were Pharisees, who did, he proclaimed, "I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" This caused the Pharisees in the group to want to defend him.
 - B. This was an interesting play on the real reason for the trial. He was not on trial because he believed in the resurrection, but because he believed and taught the resurrection of Jesus. He was on trial because he believed Jesus was God in the flesh who had died and been resurrected. The Jews opposed the teaching. But Paul was ready to die for it. In fact, before Paul was arrested in Jerusalem he proclaimed in **Acts 21:13** he was ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus. Would we be willing to die or would we back off and claim Jesus was not God?

III. Daniel – Willing to die for God’s law and pattern!

- A. In **Daniel 1:8-16**, Daniel was willing to risk his life, and the lives of others, to remain undefiled by the king’s food. We do not know exactly what would have been defiling about this food. But Daniel did and was ready to die rather than break God’s pattern for his life and service.
- B. Consider this situation carefully. First, the dietary laws of the Old Covenant were surely minor issues in the face of so many other laws that could have been violated. Second, so many others were complying. Why not just go with the flow? Claim you were forced to eat it. Surely God would understand. Daniel knew better. When in a covenant with God, He expects us to follow His patterns and Daniel was willing to die for it. Would we be? We make a big deal about following God’s patterns in worship and work. Would we be willing to die for these patterns, to keep from being defiled by disobeying?

IV. Daniel – Willing to die to properly worship God!

- A. Daniel’s life was in danger a second time in **Daniel 6**. Years later and under a different ruler, in fact a different empire, Daniel was commanded not to pray. In **Daniel 6:6-9**, the satraps and officials of King Darius convinced him to make it illegal to pray to any god other than himself for 30 days. When Daniel knew of the decree, he continued in his normal practice of praying toward Jerusalem with his windows open, three times a day.
- B. Keep in mind, Daniel could have easily closed his window and hidden his prayers. Daniel could have reasoned, “Its only 30 days, I’ll just wait until the injunction expires.” But he didn’t, he was willing to die to properly worship God. Would we be willing to die? Let us make sure not to fool ourselves. We can hardly claim that we would be willing to die to pray, if we are not willing to sacrifice a few minutes of sleep, work or television in order to pray.

V. Joseph – Willing to die to maintain moral purity!

- A. Joseph’s is another story we know well. In **Genesis 39:7-20**, Potiphar’s wife framed Joseph because he would not sacrifice his moral purity for her. Joseph knew full well that his life was in her hands. Yet, he was ready to die, rather than sacrifice his purity.
- B. Consider Joseph’s temptation. He had the good life. He was ruler of the house and was now offered the master’s wife, the one thing which had been withheld from him. It could be kept from the master and life would go on in ease. But Joseph was ready even to die. Would we?

VI. John the Baptist – Willing to die rather than ignore someone’s sin!

- A. While Joseph was ready to die to maintain his own moral purity, John the Baptist was willing to die seeking someone else’s moral purity. According to **Matthew 14:3-4**, John was arrested because he pointed out that Herod’s marriage to Herodias was unlawful and immoral. His unyielding stance on this eventually led to his death (**vs. 10**).
- B. I think this is particularly appropriate in our day. As our society becomes increasingly immoral, more and more people want to claim that teaching God’s standard regarding homosexuality should be considered hate crime. Should that ever happen, where would that lead us? Would we be fined, jailed, beaten? Would we be executed? We might think that is extreme, but then being beheaded for claiming a marriage is unlawful was extreme wasn’t it? Are we ready to die to proclaim God’s law of moral purity?

VII. The Apostles – Willing to die just to teach!

- A. In **Acts 5**, the apostles were imprisoned by the Jewish council and according to **Acts 5:33**, the council intended to slay all of them. However, Gamaliel had the men removed from the council and convinced the Jews not to act so rashly (**vss. 34-40**). In the end, they were beat and commanded not teach in the name of Jesus again (**vs. 40**). No doubt, the apostles were told if they kept it up they would be punished, even killed. But notice **vs. 42**, “Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” They were willing to die just to teach people about Jesus.
- B. Are we willing to die just to teach about Jesus? Let us caution ourselves to be honest with ourselves. We can hardly claim that we would be willing to die just to teach, if we constantly make excuses about why we don’t teach people when our lives are not in danger. Are you willing to die to teach?

VIII. James and Peter – Willing to die for offending those in another religion!

- A. In **Acts 12:1-2**, Herod had the apostle James executed. When he saw that this pleased the Jews, he had Peter arrested and intended to slay him as well (**vs. 3**). I find this interesting. Why were the Jews pleased at the death of James? Because James and Peter had offended them. The apostles had condemned the Jews for remaining in the now defunct religion and not becoming real servants of God and becoming Christians. James and Peter had preached the offense of the cross and offended these people in another religion and they were ready to die for that. Are we?
- B. Understand, these men did not set out to offend. Their goal was to save. But the fact is, to everyone who refuses to accept the true religion of Christ the message of Jesus is offensive. That is Paul's point in **I Corinthians 1:21-24** and **Galatians 5:11**. We do not set out to offend others for their false religion, but we know we will. Are we willing to die for it?

IX. Jeremiah – Willing to die for proclaiming the coming judgment of God!

- A. In **Jeremiah 26:20-23**, we learn of a prophet named Uriah the son of Shemaiah who was martyred for proclaiming that judgment was coming upon Jerusalem and Judah. The text claims the message was similar to Jeremiah's. Imagine how Jeremiah must have felt, knowing about this man's execution. **Jeremiah 26:24** explains that someone aided Jeremiah and kept him from being executed at that time. But, nevertheless, Jeremiah continued to proclaim this same message. He was willing to die to let people know God's judgment was coming.
- B. There is a judgment coming in our future. Every single one of us will face the judgment day (**Hebrews 9:27**). Few people want to hear about the judgment. Most people don't want to hear about the reservation in hell they are making for themselves by the way they live their lives. Regrettably, many Christians don't even want to hear about the judgment and hell that awaits if they do not make sacrifice and serve the Lord with all their heart, soul and mind. Are we, like Jeremiah, prepared to die for that message? Or would we prefer to soft pedal it and back away from preaching the judgment lest we offend?

X. Esther – Willing to die in order to save others!

- A. The story of Esther is amazing. Through the cunning of Haman, the entire populace of the Jews in the Medo-Persian Empire was about to be wiped out. Esther was in a position to save her people, however, if she tried to act, she could have been put to death herself (**Esther 4:11**). With some persuasion from her cousin, Esther determined to act on behalf of her people to save them. Her attitude was, "I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish" (**Esther 4:16**). She was willing to die in order to save others. Are we?
- B. At first, this may seem somewhat different from the other issues we have discussed in this lesson. But, in fact, it is not. In reality, it encompasses all the others and gets to the real point. When we boil each of the other scenarios down to their common denominator, it all has to do with saving people. When we ask this question about what are we willing to die for, the real issue is about saving people. If we are not willing to die for all of these things, then we are saying we are willing to let people go to hell rather than save them by our being faithful unto death (**Revelation 2:10**). Are you willing to die to save others?

Conclusion:

Do not miss the point of this lesson. We do not have to be martyred to be saved. Several of the individuals we have discussed did not. Joseph, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Esther all died of natural causes. However, we must be willing to die, if need be. For what are you willing to die?

All of this can be somewhat disheartening and discouraging, to think we may have to die just to serve Christ. To encourage you, let me remind you why we can even be here to worship God. Because Jesus Christ was willing to die in order to serve and save us (**Romans 5:8**). Remember, Jesus died not so we would have to die for Him, but rather so we might live eternally. In conclusion, I want you to know, not everyone is called to die for Jesus. But everyone is called to live for Jesus, sacrificing our sinful man and submitting to Jesus in faithful obedience, confessing Jesus as Lord, repenting of our sins and being baptized for the remission of those sins. Then we will be raised to walk in newness of life (**Romans 6:4**), living for Jesus.