

## GREATER LOVE!

Jn. 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

On another Remembrance Sunday, - along with the crowds gathered around the cenotaphs, - it has been appropriate for us to again respectively commemorate those who have given their lives in the two World Wars, and in conflicts since. In many of the ceremonies, the words of the Lord Jesus have been quoted as a fitting tribute to the fallen, **Jn. 15:13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

And yet, it draws our minds away from the battlefields of France, Belgium, Germany and other regions throughout Europe, North Africa and the Far East ... and it brings us to a battlefield where the forces of Hell confronted and engaged the Son of God on an unimaginable scale. In many of the Allied war cemeteries, there is a white cross standing high above all the graves ... It was upon a wooden cross on a hill where the Captain of our salvation lay down His life for the soldiers of His army. On the cross of Calvary Divine Love demonstrated itself stronger than death, Hell, the devil and all his forces ... In the Book of the Revelation (ch. 19), the apostle John describes the Name of our Saviour as Faithful and True, and how His clothes were dipped in the blood of the enemies He defeated on that day ...

Up from the grave He arose, With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,  
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever, with His saints to reign. ... Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

At Thiepval, in northern France, on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, the Battle of the Somme began. When the German soldiers fired their artillery, the British soldiers were immediately on the offensive. In one particular trench, a box of bombs was being opened for distribution but they had accidentally slipped down into a trench, which was crowded with men, and two of the safety pins had fallen out. ... Immediately, a young twenty-year-old soldier, - Private Billy MacFadzean from Lurgan, Co. Armagh, - instantly realized the danger to his comrades, and threw himself on top of the bombs. ... The bombs exploded and blew him to pieces. He well knew the danger, but without a moment's hesitation he gave his life for his comrades. He well-deserved the Victoria Cross he was awarded posthumously. The place where he died is today marked with a single cross.

When we look to the hill outside of Jerusalem, - two thousand years ago, - we're not staring at a *victorious cross*, or a victorious Calvary ... We're looking instead to the **Victorious Christ**. Our trust is in Him for our salvation.

He is not a counterfeit Saviour who promises what He cannot deliver, but instead, **Heb. 12:2** for the joy that was set before him [*of securing the salvation of His people*] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. ... His sacrifice was in obedience to His Father ... the Father Who offered His Son on Calvary, and Who declared to His people, **Is. 43:1** I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. Even before the tree was planted that bore Him ... even before the nails that pierced his hands and feet were shaped, He had purposed, believer, **I Peter 1:4** an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you ...

Oh, the love that sought me!

Oh, the blood that bought me!

Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold"

... **Eph. 1:4** According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.

There is no another account of love which has lasted like that of God's love at Calvary. It has stood the test of time, and all the opposing pressures that have been trying to deny it. It doesn't matter where a person comes from, what language he speaks, how he has been brought up ... or whatever ... The Gospel of the **Victorious Christ** is as powerful today as when it touched the heart of the thief on another cross beside our Saviour. The man who hung at Jesus' side, - despite the sin he had committed, - was changed, and because of the **Victorious Christ**, he became *victorious in Christ*.

Through Christ alone ... and there is no obstacle to who He can save. What defines it is this: **Rom. 3:23** all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God ... and the reason Jesus came is well-documented in each of the Gospels ... **Mt. 9:13** (also **Mk. 2:17** and **Lk. 5:32**) I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance ... **Jn. 3:16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ... The reason He came was to save sinners from their sin. He did not come to save the self-righteous because they see no need to be saved, but He died on the cross to save the vast immeasurable number of redeemed, known only to God ... **Rom. 3:24** justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

That means there is salvation in none other (Acts 4:12) for as John the apostle wrote, **I Jn. 3:16** Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ... He, Who is equal with

God, - ... Who *is* God, - set aside all the riches and privileges of Glory to enter this world, knowing He would ultimately die upon a cruel cross. ...

Was it for me, the nails, the spear, The cruel thorns, the mocking jeer,  
That rugged cross, 'twixt earth and sky, - Was it for me He came to die? ...

Was it for me, that opened tomb, Dispelling fear and death and gloom?

So vast a truth proclaims to me That I through Him can victor be. ...

He loved me so! He loved me so! Dark Calvary He chose to know,  
To vanquish sin and death and woe; 'Twas all because He loved me so."

I don't believe it theoretically, symbolically, hypothetically, or with an intellectualism that has no bearing on reality. Instead, I know it triumphantly, and I can say it gratefully, that the Son of God laid down His life for me at Calvary ... and that attached to the garments of righteousness is the award that only Heaven can bestow, - the **Victorious Christ**, - *Heaven's VC*, - the honour the Father confers upon His children.

That takes us to another consideration ... The highest civilian medal is the George Cross, named after King George VI. It is an award recognising the extreme valour of civilians in conflict. Just as a soldier can display the letters VC after their name, the civilian can display the letters GC. ... And just as the believer has been privileged to display the **Victorious Christ**, so also theirs is the privilege to be known in Heaven as ...

**GOD'S CHOSEN** In Ps. 89, God declared, **Ps. 89:3** I have made a covenant with my chosen. That covenant is based upon the foundation of His grace. It initially applied to the children of Israel, **Ps. 33:12** Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance. He further promised, - and He has never rescinded the promise, - **Ps. 89:4** Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations ... **Ps. 132:13** For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation. **14** This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. But God's plan did not finish there, for He had a purpose to send the Lord Jesus as **Lk. 2:32** A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Gospel of Christ was preached in Jerusalem, and thousands of *Jews* believed and were saved (Acts 2). From Jerusalem the Gospel spread throughout Judea and to the region of Samaria (Acts 8), and in Acts 10 the Scriptures record how the light first came to lighten the Gentiles in the salvation of Cornelius the Roman centurion, the first Gentile to be converted to Christ. The promise of the Lord Jesus was being realised, **Acts 1:8**

ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. ... And the Jews were the first missionaries ... and what a debt we owe to that nation! ... And while we are on the subject, Isaiah prophesied, ... **Is. 2:2** it shall come to pass *in the last days*, - when Jesus returns, and establishes His Millennial Kingdom in Jerusalem, - that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. **3** And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

... And it was a taste of things to come when, - after Pentecost, - the disciples moved out from Jerusalem, and Judea, and Samaria ... and the Gospel began to extend to the uttermost part of the earth, - as Jesus promised, **Mt. 24:14** *this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations*, - ... The Gospel spread, and Satan was powerless to stop it ... Saul of Tarsus was an enemy of the Gospel, but God wonderfully saved him, and as Paul the apostle, a devout Jew from birth, addressed the church in Gentile Ephesus, **Eph. 2:12** ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: **13** But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are *made nigh* by the blood of Christ. **14** For he is our peace, who *hath made* both one, and *hath broken* down the middle wall of partition between us ... **16** ... that he *might reconcile* both unto God in one body by the cross ... **18** For *through him* we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. This process of our salvation is all of God, - it began with, continues with, and will conclude with God.

And how did all this happen to me personally? ... There arrived a time when He began to stir within my heart thoughts of my own sinfulness and unworthiness to meet God. It impressed upon me there is coming a day when I must appear before God ... and if I was to continue rejecting Christ as my Saviour, I would be condemned and lost forever in the continuously burning fires of Hell.

But the grace of God did not leave me in my sin ... And I have to humbly confess that if God had not chosen to do a work of grace within me, I would have no hope for I could not, - in any way, or to any degree, - have built the bridge across that vast abyss from my sinfulness to God's holiness. ...

Enter, the Lord Jesus Christ. ... Greater love hath no man than this ... and He laid down His life for my justification, - He became my *propitiation*, my atonement for sin. The price He paid for me was at the cost of His own precious blood. It is by grace alone we are saved through faith alone. ... The grace is God's gift alone ... and even the faith is God's gift ... because dead in trespasses and sins as I was, I could never have believed in Him, and I would never have been saved. You see, **Eph. 2:8** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **9** Not of works, lest any man should boast.

And when I stand in Heaven, I'll be there not through my own righteousness, but through the righteousness of my Saviour for, - you and I, believer, - **Eph. 2:10** we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. *Created!* ... Nothing can create itself. I didn't bring about one iota of my salvation, - it is all of God. He died for me. ... Before I knew Him, He already knew me. Before I had chosen Him as my Saviour, He had already chosen me as His child. There was nothing for which I could commend myself to Him ... *Nothing!* ... I'm a child of God through grace alone.

... And He has privileged me with the **Victorious Christ**, and with being counted amongst **God's Chosen**. The final military honour we shall consider and transpose into the spiritual decorations of the believer is the ...

### **DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS**

This medal is normally awarded to members of the Royal Navy, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary and the Merchant Navy. ... It was only at his death, we learned this medal had been awarded to Tom Wyse for bravery in the face of extreme danger, during the Second World War. But take it within our context, - *Distinguished Service Cross*, - ... how would you consider it?

Would you look to the cross, and venerate the cross as distinguished? Is it the cross we honour? ... Maybe it's the Gospel that has been preached over the past two thousand years? No, it's neither the cross nor the Gospel ... precious as they are to our salvation. ...

The cross itself was only two pieces of wood joined together. The cross doesn't save. ... Neither does a dead man on a cross save. To keep Christ on the cross today, - hanging helpless and lifeless, - rejects all He has achieved for us. ... Christ is not on the cross! He's alive today!

Yes, He hung on the cross from early morning to late afternoon ... For the first three hours, he suffered the same pain as the two men on either side of him, - the excruciating agony of crucifixion ... but for the three hours following, He suffered far more than those other two thieves ... and He suffered more than any man or woman could imagine because His Father placed upon His precious and only-begotten beloved Son, all our sins, and He suffered, - He endured, - the eternal punishment which was rightly ours.

... And yes, they laid His body *cold* in the tomb ... but ... “Up from the grave He arose!” ... So, it is not the cross we venerate ... neither do we venerate a dead Christ ... but it is the *distinguished service* our Saviour accomplished for us *on* the cross,

There was no other good enough To pay the price of sin;  
He only could unlock the gate Of heaven and let us in.

Salvation is only in Him! ... When John was standing with the great number in Heaven waiting for someone to come and open the scroll, one of the elders told him, **Rev. 5:5** Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof ... And as John continued to look, he saw in the midst of the Glory of Heaven, **5:6** a Lamb as it had been slain ... **7** And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And then the great number of the Redeemed began to sing, **9** Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; **10** And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth. Then the one chorus opened out into another great hymn of praise, **12** Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.

Our Saviour won Heaven’s praise by faithfully, - of His own Sovereign choice, - laying down His life that we would become eternally His. Yes, His is the utmost of *distinguished service*.

And, because of what He has accomplished in our salvation, the *distinguished service cross* is also to be referred to the believer, for the Lord Jesus said to His disciples, **Mt. 16:24** If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. The purpose of the Christian life is by following our Saviour faithfully, to bring glory to God ... and in bringing glory to God, we attract the scorn and acrimony of the world. You can’t follow the Saviour and be friends with the things of the world, for, - wrote James, - **James 4:4** whosoever

therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God ... You can't serve two masters, - it's either the world or Christ! (Mt. 6:24). ... You can't serve in one army, and be on good terms with the enemy!

Being a Christian gives us responsibilities and obligations for which one day God will call us to account, **Rom. 14:10** for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The requirement is that we are found faithful ... even as our Saviour was found faithful to His calling. We are on this earth for a short time, - compared with eternity, - and it is God's requirement we live as children of the King, for the glory of His Name.

When I stand in glory, I shall see His face,

And there I'll serve my King forever, In that holy place"

... But in preparation to serve God in Heaven, we must serve Him here on earth. ... The psalmist referred to this *distinguished service*, **Ps. 100:2** Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing ... and Paul wrote, **Col. 3:24** Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. ... John described the result of faithful service, **I Jn. 3:2** it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. ... *Distinguished Service!*

At the end of the Gulf War, in 1991, the American troops were returning home. On the last day (28<sup>th</sup> February) in Iraq a young soldier died in a helicopter crash. As many soldiers had done, he had written a letter, in the event of his death. The letter was addressed to his mother and given to a good friend with instructions to post it to her only if he was killed. When the mother opened the letter, the message from her dead son read like this, "Mom, if you're reading this letter, it means I didn't make it. But that's okay Mom, because I'm seeing Heaven, I'm seeing Jesus". ... That young soldier was a Christian who not only served in the United States army, but he also served in the Lord's army.

**CONCLUSION.** The apostle Paul wrote, **II Tim. 4:8** there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. So, you see, there *are* awards awaiting the believer in Glory. Our place in Heaven is due to the **Victorious Christ**, for through Sovereign and saving grace, we belong to the ranks of **God's Chosen**, seeking to follow in obedience our Saviour ... and one day receive His reward for **Distinguished Service**. Amen.

... So, on this Remembrance Sunday, we not only give thanks for those who laid down their lives on earth's battlefields ... we give thanks for Him Who went to Calvary where He **Is. 53:4** hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, ... Who **5** was wounded for our transgressions, [*and*] bruised for our iniquities (v.5) ... was oppressed and afflicted (v.7) ... He is the great and supreme Example, **Jn. 15:13** Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends ... for He demonstrated such love and such grace when His Father **Rom. 5:8** commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.