

COMMUNION: OUR PLEDGE TO THE LAMB

This evening the song we heard the ensemble sing is a reminder of Christ's call to those first disciples. The Pledge of Allegiance they made reflects how we are to operate as Christ's followers today.

Jesus calls men and women, boys and girls to pledge to follow Him at all costs, never looking back, never turning back, always seeking Him more than anything else.

Sacramentum¹ was the Military oath of Roman soldiers of Caesar's Legions, the most powerful institution of the 1st century. Spread across the ancient world, they were the personal representatives of the Emperor. Bound together with a life or death allegiance, they were invincible. In Israel an occupied country, and in all the New Testament cities of Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse and so on, they were known and seen daily.



Daily the Early Church met in Acts to renew this pledge. They called the Lord's Supper a sacramentum, or oath of loyalty. And as they celebrated His Table each day or week, it was a renewal of that oath. The History of the servants God has used shows the incredible price a pledge of allegiance to Christ's name has cost. Listen to just the Twelve.

- Peter was crucified in Rome with his head down because he felt he was unworthy to die in the same manner as Christ;

¹ William Barclay, The Lord's Supper 1967, Abingdon Press (128) [NTC-MATTHEW-35], p.7.

- Andrew was crucified at Edessa;
- James, brother of John, was (Acts 12) slain by Herod's sword;
- John now being exiled on Patmos (and some records indicate he was horribly martyred by being cast into boiling oil);
- Matthew was beheaded in Ethiopia;
- Thomas was thrust through with a spear in India;
- Simon the Zealot, was crucified in Briton;
- Thaddeus was crucified at Edessa;
- Bartholomew was beaten and crucified in India;
- Philip was crucified at Heliopolis in Phrygia;
- James the Less was clubbed to death in Jerusalem;

But what led them to such levels of loyalty? Most of us feel they were so special and empowered we could never be like them. But if we just consider what our Master and Savior asks of us, offers us, and pours upon us, we will see that we also can deny ourselves and follow Him. An early way the 1st century Christians described the Lord's Supper was by a Latin term "sacramentum". Long before religion obscured that word with various and confusing meanings, they took it in its original and purest form.

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So our forbears often met to renew their supreme loyalty to our Master, Lord and King. They like us wanted to be continually reminded of our absolute allegiance to the Lamb of God.

When the early Christians came to celebrate the Lord's Table, it was in its original meaning. It was to them much like the oath of loyalty taken by soldiers entering the Roman Legion. A Roman Soldier's oath was to solemnly swear to several personal commitments:

- "to obey the commands of his general, serving him to the best of his ability at all times,
- "...to always following the written words of the Counsel (Roman Imperial Warfare Guide)...",
- "...to never leave the gathered regiment and flee from any battle (and finally)..."
- "...to hold the Emperor's well-being as most important to them, dearer to them than themselves or their children".

² William Barclay, The Lord's Supper 1967, Abingdon Press (128) [NTC-MATTHEW-35], p.7.

After the centurion or first soldier repeated this oath, all the others were to say one by one: "the same for me". To a Roman soldier this pledge was a declaration of loyalty above which nothing could be more far reaching. From start to finish this oath was a solemn promise of complete and absolute and even sacrificial loyalty.

Thus as God's people we declare a pledge of absolute loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ! It would be safe to say that Jesus only expects the same and even more that Caesar. Listen to what our Lord Jesus Christ expects:

- "I will obey the commands of my King" Mark 8:34-37 When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.³⁵ "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.³⁶ "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? ³⁷ "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?
- "I will serve the Lord to the best of my ability at all times" Romans 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- "I will Always following the written words of my God", John 8:31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
- "I will never leave the gathered regiment and flee from any battle" John 10:27-29 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.²⁸ "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.²⁹ "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand; Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. ¹ John 2:19 They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they was of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.
- "I seek the Lord's well done as most important to me" Matthew 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you; Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.
- "Lord, you are dearer to me than myself or my children". Matthew 10:37-39 "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.³⁸ "And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.³⁹ "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

Now what does that do to those who are following Christ this way? Turn to the end of the story Revelation 12:11 “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. NKJV

So this morning think of some modern servants who have followed in those steps. This morning I have invited seven faithful saints who loved Jesus more than life itself. Listen as they testify:

JOHN NEWTON

My name is John Newton born in 1725 in old England. My godly mother died when I was a young child. So a sea-captain father, who took me to sea at age eleven where I forgot the Scriptures mother had taught me, raised me.



Later, in the British navy I had earned the reputation of being able to curse for two hours straight without repeating a word. Restless and wild, I tried to desert, was caught, stripped, whipped severely, and degraded to the ranks. I eventually ran away to Africa, but only so “I might sin my fill.” And I did.

Debauched and distant from God, I fell into the hands of a Portuguese slave trader. For months the chief woman of the trader’s harem treated me like an animal, beating me and forcing me to grovel in the dirt for my food.

Escaping at last, I found the shores of Africa and a passing ship where I earned the position of first mate as a skilled navigator. But my evil desires took over and I broke out the ship’s rum and got the entire crew drunk. When the captain found out, he was so furious he hit me, knocking me overboard.

I would have drowned were it not for a sailor who pulled me back on board by spearing my thigh with a boat hook. The wound was so large that it left a scar big enough to put my fist in. Some weeks later, when the ship neared the coast of Scotland, it sailed into a storm and almost sank. For days I manned the pumps below deck in what seemed a hopeless nightmare.

It was then that I desperately called out to God. He answered my helpless cry, and I emerged from the hold of that ship to later become the chaplain of England’s Parliament and even to preach before the king. I am the vile blasphemer whom many would subsequently refer to as the second founder of the Church of England. And it was I who wrote:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,

Was blind, but now I see.

In later life I had to watch as cancer slowly and painfully killed my wife over a period of many months. I believe it was about two or three months before her death, when I was walking up and down the room, offering disjointed prayers from a heart torn with distress. A thought suddenly struck me, with unusual force, to this effect³ "The promises of God must be true; surely the Lord will help me, if I am willing to be helped!" It occurred to me, that we are often led ... [from an undue regard of our feelings], to indulge that unprofitable grief which both our duty and our peace require us to resist to the utmost of our power. I instantly said aloud, "Lord, I am helpless indeed, in myself, but I hope I am willing, without reserve, that thou shouldst help me."

But to the end I⁴ never forgot God's mercy to me. Once a friend of mine was complaining about someone who was resistant to the gospel and living a life of great sin. "Sometimes I almost despair of that man," the friend remarked. "I told him, I never did despair of any man since God saved me."

In my most advanced years my mind began to fail and I had to stop preaching. But when friends came to visit I always remarked, "I am an old man. My mind is almost gone. But I can remember two things: I am a great sinner, and Jesus is a great Savior."

The mercy of God moved me to offer my body as a living sacrifice to God and to seek to please Him kept me through my 82 years of pain, suffering and loss. But they were nothing compared to this. You are headed someday to join me in this land Bright shining as the Sun, please let God's amazing grace draw you to pledge life long obedience to the Lamb!

C. T. STUDD



Hello my name is CT Studd. I was born in 1858 to an incredible successful English family with vast real estate and business interests all over the British Colonial Empire.

When my father died in the 1880's, I inherited a substantial amount of money—several hundred thousand dollars in my day, tens of millions in yours.

My pledge of allegiance to Christ took me from the comforts of great wealth to the discomforts of missionary service to the glories of heaven. Jesus never failed me for

³ (Trusting God [Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988], 195-96. Newton quotation from John Newton, The Works of John Newton [reprint; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985], 5:621-22; emphasis in original.)

⁴ Boice, Mind Renewal, p. 56-57.

a moment. On January 13th, 1887, I wrote nine checks and gave away my fortune as carefully as a businessman invests in some 'gilt-edged' securities. I chose safe and high yielding securities in the Bank of Heaven. This was no fool's plunge on my part. It was my public testimony before God and man that I believed God's Word to be the surest thing on earth. God promised me an hundredfold interest in this life, not to speak of the next. This became a reality for me like all those who believe God's Word and act on it.

On July 3, 1888, I wrote⁵ the following letter to General Booth the founder of the Salvation Army explaining why my new bride and I gave everything to God:

"Henceforth our bank is in heaven. You see we are rather afraid— notwithstanding the great earthly safety of the Bank of England—we are, I say, rather afraid that they may both break on the Judgment Day. And this step has been taken not without most definite reference to God's Word, and the command of the Lord Jesus, Who said, "Sell that ye have and give alms. Make for yourselves purses which wax not old." "

When we had given all our money away, I packed up my new bride, and went to Africa as missionaries for the rest of our days. That is the gift of giving that God prompted in my heart and all those with me who love Him more than life!

My ambition⁶ and prayer had always been to die a soldier's death on the field of battle, and not be a drag on my fellow-workers through months or years as an invalid. I was a museum of diseases when I left China, and was afterwards hardly ever free. I had a life long battle with asthma, recurring malaria and dysentery as well as the chills and pains of gallstones ever with me in varying combination. Yet God enabled me to go on working not 8 but 18 hours a day, addressing, often for hours, thousands of his fellow-creatures in the heart of Africa's darkest jungles, telling them of Jesus Christ and the wonders of His Love—and this to the very end of my days.

But only those who were with me can realize the sufferings of those last two years of 1930 and 1931. I experienced dreadful weakness, nausea, heart attacks, but, worst of all, those terrible attacks of breathlessness and violent shivering. I used to turn a dark hue and my heart almost stopped beating. The cause of all this was not discovered till on my deathbed, when a doctor present diagnosed it as gallstones. Yet the joy of those years far outweighed the suffering, for God had given me to see the two great desires of his heart: unity amongst the missionaries and manifest evidences of the Holy Ghost at work amongst the natives.

Think about what came out of the gift of my life to Christ: through the fortune I gave to Christ? Hudson Taylor was helped in the founding of the China Inland Mission, George Mueller's orphanages were expanded in London, great Salvation Army extensions were made, and the founding of the Moody Bible Institute. In Africa at my

⁵ (Norman Grubb, C. T. Studd [Fort Washington, Pa.: Christian Literature Crusade, 1972] pp. 59–62. Used by permission).

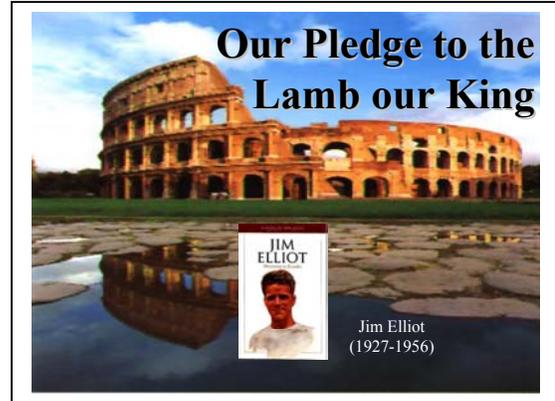
⁶ Norman Grubb, CT Studd, p. 216-217.

death there were 30,000 born again, baptized and disciplined pygmies whom I found in 1910 as naked, murderous, grossly immoral cannibals butchering each other in the darkest jungles of Africa. I now sing around the Throne of the Lamb, clothed in white raiment and worshipping Jesus.

That is how the Spirit of God operates. Do you see yourself loving Jesus more than life? If you do, be obedient⁷ because there will be tremendous joy.

JIM ELLIOT

My name you may know, it is Jim Elliott. I was born in Oregon in 1927. I would be 76 this year were I still there with you on earth. My pledge of allegiance to Christ touched my heart with the reality that my life was best invested with the Lord. I used to often tell people, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." Jesus said hold on to life and all your stuff and it gets burned up and wasted, give it to Him now and it lasts forever, it really not a big choice once you really think about it.



Soon after graduating from college, I wrote in my diary: "God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life but a full one like You, Lord Jesus."

In 1948, I wrote in my journal, "I seek not a long life, but a full one, like You, Lord Jesus."

Two years later, I wrote: "I must not think it strange if God takes in youth those whom I would have kept on earth till they were older. God is peopling Eternity, and I must not restrict Him to old men and women."

God wanted to use my four comrades and me in a special way. We were called on January 8, 1956, to "people Eternity". We were slain by the people they were seeking to reach. As the savage and godless Aucas charged our camp and filled these earthly bodies of ours with their spears and arrows our spirits clothed immortal winged their flight to the very Throne of God. We were clothed with white robes and allowed to face His presence and join in the song of heaven. What has happened to the Aucas since then is proof that our blood as martyrs is indeed the seed of the church. Many Aucas are now Christians.

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10) Jesus said and He has. I am so thankful I have this crown to cast at His feet and tell Him I

⁷ MacArthur, John, *Spiritual Gifts*, (Chicago, IL: Moody Press) 1997.

didn't waste my life He gave me. I loved Him more than my own self and now my joy is inexpressibly full of glory.

Well there they are, testimonies of allegiance to Christ. Are you pledging allegiance to Him today. Are you renewing your pledge? Thus the Lord's Table is a time we stand as God's people and with the pictures of Jesus in our hands and on our lips we declare a pledge of absolute loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ!

Revelation 22:3-4 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him.⁴ They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.



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