

"The Cost of Belonging"

Scripture Lesson: - Acts 12: 1-8.

Text: - Acts 12: 1-3.

Introduction: - Reason for using the Weymouth translation which distinguished James from those about him was that he "belonged to church". He did not belong a great while. He paid with his life for the privilege of belonging to church. "He killed James the brother of John with the sword". He received but little notice. John's lived to a ripe old age.

What is this church to which James Belonged. We find it called by various names. Disciples, the body of Christ, Brotherhood. The church is spoken of by Paul as a family. The family of God. How did the disciples come to such a conviction? "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another". He affirms that love is the acid test of vital church membership. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one toward another". It was this love that Christians had for each other that made the pagan world gaze on them with wistful wonder. "Behold how these Christians love each other".

What is involved in belonging to the church?

1. Self-giving. The very word "belong" implies this. If I have a car, I can say that I have a right to do with it as I please. I can drive it, lend it, do with it as I choose. But if I belong to the church, the church has a right to claim me. I am no longer my own.

Greatest foe of Christianity is communism. It demands commitment to the uttermost.

Even so, really to belong to the church is a costly thing. If your church membership costs you nothing, it is worth nothing. No one likes

a cheap church membership.

2. Belonging carries with it the idea of fitting in. To belong to a church is to fit into a group that is brotherly. If you are a contrary spirit you will find the atmosphere most distressing. A wild party in a hotel room. Would have to be a hell in the Bible to take care of the crowd who would not fit into heaven. Judas. To belong to a church then, is to belong to a brotherhood.
3. To belong is to help build the brotherhood.

We shall seek to build the brotherhood of men and women who have a brotherly spirit. If we help to disrupt the brotherhood we are not the friend of Jesus. "He that is not with me ~~scattereth~~ is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth.

III. How did James belong to the church?

How did James belong to the church? He became a member of his own free will. Jesus invited him to become his follower. He also persisted in his loyalty to Jesus. As James belonged to the church, so do we. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." It is your privilege to become a part of the brotherhood we call that church. It is our privilege to help build the church and thus help spread this brotherhood round the world. But it is costly. Couple on a transatlantic liner.

Paul often spoke of himself as the bond slave of Christ. Yes that is the proper word. We have the privilege of belonging to the brotherhood, of helping to build it. If we are bloodwashed. It is costly, but if we are willing to pay the price, we shall find it the open door to the life abundant.