

If I Perish, I Perish

— Esther 4:16b

**A commentary on the
immortalised cry of Esther of old**

ELIJAH THOMAS CHACKO

1st July AD 2008

When Esther cried, “*If I perish, I perish*,” she was willing to part with all her new found glory and pomp as the queen and consort of the Emperor of the day. More than that, she was imperilling her life to the point of death, staring squarely at the face of death, when she consented to execute the assignment which Mordecai had committed to her. The performance of this delicate task for the sake of God’s people scattered globally throughout the 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia, could have jeopardised her life if the whole undertaking had backfired. Wherefore she commanded Mordecai to gather the Jews of Shushan to fast on her behalf for this hazardous operation. Esther was willing to be consigned to death, the constitutional penalty should the king not accept her person and her approach to him without his prior permission. Such was Esther’s consecration for the sacred cause of the Church. Jerusalem was above her chief joy¹ and the holy matters of God commanded her immediate attention and attendance, though she was the queen of the worldwide empire. She was not unlike Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Nehemiah and a phalanx of other spiritual luminaries, who staked their earthly careers and status for the despised Church of Christ struggling to survive in the fringes of society.

If Esther did not rally to the cause of the afflicted Church then she and her “*father’s house shall be destroyed*”.² On the other hand, if she had dedicated her life for the welfare and deliverance of the Church, she may have

¹ Psalm 137:6b

² Esther 4:14b

died in the line of duty. Either way, Esther was liable to perish. For Christians it is not so much a predicament as to when our life upon earth would expire. We all perish at one time or another. *“Our outward man perish,”* says Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, who then adds, *“yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”*³ The wisest of all kings, Solomon, puts it this way, *“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die.”*⁴ It is how we die that matters. The apostle could not have put it more elegantly, *“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*⁵ For Paul it was glorious to die for Christ. To die for Christ is the same as dying for the Church, which is His body. *“What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the Name of the Lord Jesus.”*⁶ And though the prospect seemed so perilous even to others, yet Paul would not be denied of this great honour and privilege of dying for Christ. Wherefore Paul maintained unequivocally, *“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.”*⁷

The apostle had his philosophy of life de-

³. II Corinthians 4:16b

⁴. Ecclesiastes 3:1,2a

⁵. Philippians 1:21

⁶. Acts 21:13

⁷. Acts 20:22-24

rived from the very Gospel he preached; he allowed this philosophy to configure his outlook towards life and death; often both in his life and his writings he upheld this stance faithfully. I can think of three instances:

1. When he wrote in his second epistle to the Corinthians: *“But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in Whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.”*⁸ The apostle affirms here that it is both the resurrection hope and the resurrection power that is in Christ Jesus that gave him courage and strength to face the prospect of death as he engaged himself faithfully in the Gospel work. It was not unlike the regard that Esther adopted when she prepared herself to be a sacrifice. We are wont to remember also Isaac, who was once offered to be a sacrifice before the angel of the LORD God, Jehovah Jireh, prevented Abraham at Mount Moriah. In a way we are all meted with the sentence of death when we obediently take upon ourselves the fulfilment of the great commission. We have no moral right to preach the Gospel of eternal life if we dare not endanger our lives whilst prosecuting the preaching of it.
2. Paul had such a blessed view of the afterlife in Christ that he actually looked forward to enjoy this blessed event. *“For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.”*⁹ Hence

⁸. II Corinthians 1:9,10

⁹. Philippians 1:23

Paul had this wonderful appreciation of the life beyond death. Paul welcomed death because it provided the portal and access to celestial bliss.

3. Indeed Paul knew that when the human body perished, the Lord would grant it another clothing. *“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.”*¹⁰ Paul had a very clear view of the spiritual realm. He saw the human body subject to decay and putrefaction, whereas the human soul as immortal.

It is not wrong to say that Esther did not have the same degree of illumination of the great apostle, wherefore she was unable to usher death with the same magnitude of courage and welcome. Hence she employed the term perish instead of die or sleep. The Old Testament saints did not enjoy the clarity and depth of what the afterlife in Christ Jesus is, as the apostles did and as we do. But they may have realised it in hues of variance, even as the psalmist avers, *“Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of His saints.”*¹¹ We do not know to what extent Esther was nurtured to appreciate the glory of the demise of the saints. She certainly was not fully schooled like Stephen, the very first martyr after the resurrection of Christ. She obviously did not appreciate Christian death as Paul who dis-

¹⁰. II Corinthians 5:1-3

¹¹. Psalm 116:15

tinguishes it as “*sleep in Jesus*”.¹² In Hebrew, the word “perish” (abad) connotes the idea “to be lost”. For Esther, to die was to perish. Yet to die for the Church, she was willing. This resolve to be a sacrifice for the Church should be imputed largely to Mordecai who had taught her to see the Church as the apple of God’s eyes. It was not unlike the way Moses’ mother had groomed him; it reminds us also of how Naomi affected Ruth the Moabite unto godliness. If the clarity and the light of the Gospel was shed on Esther, as it has on us, she might have echoed the same triumphant strains of the greatest of the apostles and defied death by saying, “*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”¹³

This immortalized saying of Esther was her expression of perfect submission to the providence of God. When Esther gallantly bellowed “*If I perish, I perish,*” she was not just pondering on death. She was rather thinking of martyrdom. For dying as a martyr is quite different from dying as a Christian. For the Christian the comfort and consolation in death is to know that it is to be “*asleep*”¹⁴ and “*to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better*”.¹⁵ But Stephen did not just die as a Christian. He earned the distinction of dying as the first martyr of the New Testa-

¹². I Thessalonians 4:14b

¹³. I Corinthians 15:54b-57

¹⁴. I Thessalonians 4:15b

¹⁵. Philippians 1:23b

ment dispensation. He “*fell asleep*”¹⁶ albeit in the defence of the truth of the Scriptures and the Gospel of Christ; it was in steadfastly identifying with the true Church and in denouncing the falsehood of the pretending and institutional (then the Jewish) Church¹⁷ that the span of his life and ministry was abruptly truncated. It was as though Stephen relished the manner of his death. He could have assumed that it was a great honour conferred on him to die in such a glorious way. As creature life ebbed out of him, he could triumphantly broadcast abroad, “*Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God*”.¹⁸ Paul the apostle spoke of this kind of glory in this manner: “*Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evildoer, even unto bonds; but the Word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.*”¹⁹

For most people, the proximity of death and the spectre of martyrdom can be a very intimidating and paralyzing force. But the Gospel of Christ is a very effectual antidote for such a malaise because it is about life and life eternal and immortality. Yea, the death of Christ has brought death to death! For the Gospel accepted and received with spiritual conviction must rout the fears gendered by the anticipation of physical death. In its stead we should be girded by the passion to be “*faithful unto death*”.²⁰ This is a holy passion that smothers

^{16.} Acts 7:60b

^{17.} Galatians 4:25

^{18.} Acts 7:56

^{19.} II Timothy 2:9,10

^{20.} Revelation 2:10b

all the craven fears. The apostle, who himself was on the brink of death, exhorted Timothy and all Christians that we should not cower in distress at the approach of death by reminding us tacitly that the Gospel is all about life eternal and immortality and the abolishment of death: *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the Gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”*²¹

Those who obtain an experimental acquaintance of the Gospel power is well able to overcome all the fears and pangs of persecutions and death as a Christian. Perhaps this is a good acid test in our day when an overwhelming majority in the visible churches glibly profess the Christian faith and even have the audacity to suggest that they are sent of God for the work of the ministry. Do we have an experimental acquaintance of the Gospel grace? After all the *“sacrifice of fools”*²² have been rendered, there are vital posers to be fielded. Are we saved? Are we elected of God? Are we anointed and sent? Or are we just deluded like the hordes of heretics? Are we deceiving ourselves unto eternal hell fire? The

²¹. II Timothy 1:7-10

²². Ecclesiastes 5:1b

apostle gently reminds us, *“For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.”*²³ Christians should face persecutions and death placidly and calmly as did the apostle. Only by an experimental conviction of Christ’s conquest over the power of death can we be composed and collected enough to speak of the worthiness of our Gospel and the preciousness of the Church so as to endure death for them.

Esther of old may not have enjoyed the quantum of light of the apostle and the saints of the New Testament; nevertheless she was equal to the challenge of sacrificing all for the *“elect’s sakes”*.²⁴ It spoke of her esteem that she had for God’s people. This esteem was not depreciated by the fact that she was installed as the queen of the empire. Indeed despite all the honour and grandeur she was conferred with, she was willing to abandon them all and lose her life for the Church’s sake. For when she had affirmed *“If I perish, I perish,”* she may have been expressing the very sentiments of the apostle, *“For I am now ready to be offered”*.²⁵ If we are to overcome the tentacles and grip of Satan, his Antichrist and his False Prophet in these last and evil days, we ought to do so according to what John wrote, *“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”*²⁶ It is this last aspect of John’s exhortation herein that Esther practised. She loved not her life unto the death.

As our Lord enjoins us, *“He that loveth his*

^{23.} I Corinthians 4:20

^{24.} II Timothy 2:10a

^{25.} II Timothy 4:6a

^{26.} Revelation 12:11

*life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”*²⁷ Well, Esther did not perish in this instance. God delivered her and through her, God also wonderfully saved the Church worldwide. Esther had Mordecai, her spiritual mentor and warden, to thank for for her triumphant spiritual exploits. Otherwise, bereft of spiritual understanding and wisdom, she may have perished without the saving grace of a Christian, let alone enjoy the martyr’s glory. She may have perished in ignominy and shame; we cannot dodge the warning issued to Esther by Mordecai, *“but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed...”*²⁸ For not only will we bring harm to our own lives but by virtue of the Covenantal principle, we bring harm to those who come under the ambit of our influence. Wherefore when we fail to be faithful even unto death to Christ Jesus, His doctrines, His Church and His Gospel, we may bring upon ourselves much disgrace and loss. Alas, we may end up dying as betrayers of Christ and that, my dear friends, is truly perishing. God forbid. ❧

²⁷. John 12:25

²⁸. Esther 4:14b

