

Study # 11

Brokenness Releases the Glory of Cruciformity

A. The Breaking of a Grain of Wheat

The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified . . . unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. The man who loves his life [$\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ (*psuche* #5590 “soul, outer life”)] will lose it, while the man who hates his life [$\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$] in this world shall keep it for eternal life [$\zeta\omega\eta$ (*zoe* #2222 “life”)]. Whoever serves me must follow me (John 12:24-26)

If we would follow Jesus, we too must be like the buried wheat grain and have our shells broken to allow the life of Jesus to grow and produce fruit. Watchman Nee expresses the need of our brokenness as follows:

Life is in a grain of wheat, but there is a shell, a very hard shell on the outside. As long as that shell is not split open, the wheat cannot sprout and grow . . . His life is imprisoned within us and we need the breaking of the Lord to allow His life to flow forth.¹

Part C below deals with the importance of brokenness in repentance; however, Jessie Penn-Lewis points out that the breaking and dying of our outer life do not necessarily involve repenting of sin; brokenness can also mean the giving up good things for His life to come forth, even as Jesus gave up His good life and His public ministry:

Let us think a moment about that picture of the grain, as applied to the believer. The grain may have a beautiful coat, but it is hard. . . The only way to make it fruitful in the production of other grains is to drop it into the earth, where it loses its outer shell, its beauty, . . . and all that made “life” beautiful . . . If it is left in the ground to give its life entirely, a new life will later press through the dark earth back into the sunlight and

¹Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit* (Cloverdale, IN: Sure Foundation Publishers, Inc., 1976), 11-12.

become an ear of wheat that will ultimately produce fruit, thirty or sixty fold.²

Further, Penn-Lewis points out that some have a “victorious soul” but are hard on others. They may do well in working for God, and “yet lack that passion for self-sacrifice, which would lead us to be poured out upon the sacrifice and service of other’s faith like the Apostle Paul.”³

B. The Breaking of the Alabaster Box.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (John 12:1-3)

I am sure the reader will find Watchman Nee’s comments on this story very insightful and challenging:

If the alabaster box is not broken, the pure spikenard will not flow forth. . . . some are still treasuring the alabaster box, thinking that its value exceeds that of the ointment. Many think that their outward man is more precious than their inward man . . . Without the breaking of the outward, the inward will not come forth.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, the aim of the Lord is to break this outward man.⁴

Therefore if we have never before wholly and intelligently consecrated ourselves to the Lord, let us do so now, saying: “Lord, for the future of the church, for the future of the gospel, for Thy way, and also for my own life, I offer myself without condition, without reservation, into Thy hands. Lord I delight to offer myself unto Thee and am willing to let Thee have Thy full way through me.”⁵

²Jessie Penn-Lewis, *The Centrality of the Cross* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC, 2000), 45.

³Jessie Penn-Lewis, *Much Fruit* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC), 14.

⁴Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit*, 12.

⁵Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit*, 14.

Then, Mr. Nee goes on to show that the Cross is a paradigm for our own brokenness and it provides the method for us to receive brokenness:

When we really understand the cross we shall see it means the breaking of the outward man. The cross reduces the outward man to death; it splits open the human shell. The cross must break all that belongs to our outward man—our opinions, our ways, our cleverness, our self-love, our all.⁶

Here are two other scriptures that emphasize the importance of our brokenness:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalms 51:17)

But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. . . . (2 Cor 2:14-16)

C. Brokenness in Repentance

In his famous little book, *The Calvary Road*, Roy Hession has considerable to say about our brokenness at the Cross being essential for the release of Christ's nature through us:

. . . The Lord Jesus cannot live in us fully and reveal Himself through us until the proud self within us is broken. . . . It is so often self who tries to live the Christian life . . . is often doing Christian work . . . gets irritable and envious and resentful and critical and worried. . . . is hard and unyielding in its attitudes to others. . . . is shy and self-conscious and reserved. . . .

Being broken is both God's work and ours. He brings His pressure to bear, but we have to make the choice. . . . Brokenness in daily experience is simply the response of humility to the conviction of God. And inasmuch as this conviction is continuous, we shall need to be broken continually. And this can be very costly, when we see all the yielding of rights and selfish interests that this will involve, and the confessions and restitutions that may be sometimes necessary.

⁶Watchman Nee, *The Release of the Spirit*, 14-15.

For this reason, we are not likely to be broken except at the Cross of Jesus. The willingness of Jesus to be broken for us is the all-compelling motive in our being broken too. . . . We see Him willing to have no rights of His own, no home of His own, no possessions of His own, willing to let men revile Him and not revile again, willing to let men tread on Him and not retaliate or defend Himself. Above all, we see Him broken as He meekly goes to Calvary to become men's scapegoat by bearing their sins in His own body on the Tree. . . only the vision of the Love that was willing to be broken for us can constrain us to be willing for that.

Every humiliation, everyone who tries and vexes us, is God's way of breaking us, so that there is a yet deeper channel in us for the Life of Christ. . . . the only life that pleases God and that can be victorious is His life—never our life, no matter how hard we try. But inasmuch as our self-centred life is the exact opposite of His, we can never be filled with His life, unless we are prepared for God to bring our life constantly to death. And in that we must cooperate by our moral choice.⁷

In order to break our wills to His, God brings us to the foot of the Cross and there shows us what real brokenness is. We see those wounded Hands and Feet, that Face of Love crowned with thorns and we see the complete brokenness of the One who said, "Not my will, but Thine be done," as He drank the bitter cup of our sin to its dregs. So the way to be broken is to look on Him and to realize it was our sin which nailed Him there. . . . some of us have found that there is no prayer that God is so swift to answer as the prayer that He might break us.⁸

He's like a treasure of great worth
 Contained in vessels earthen-made;
The vessel must be broken through
 And thus the treasure be displayed.

— Witness Lee/John Ingalls

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⁷Hession, *The Calvary Road*, 13-16.

⁸Hession, *The Calvary Road*, 31.