

My Taskmaster's Funeral

By Jeanette Scallan

I was born a slave to sin. Bound in ever-increasing chains of guilt and shame, I lived in a dungeon of darkness with no hope of escape. My daily life was one of servitude to the harshest of taskmasters who drove me mercilessly day and night. Our relationship was a complicated one; abusive, yet filled with perverted affections. I hated the tyrant, yet longed for attention and approval, so I did the Taskmaster's bidding. The hate was certainly mutual, yet my captor could not bear to part with me. There was such great satisfaction to be derived from my pain, and the taskmaster found my torment to be delicious. Ever the deceiver, this overlord made promises of pleasure in exchange for obedience. Such promises were never fulfilled. Only a temporary taste was granted, then quickly withdrawn, and I was immediately berated for believing the lies. Constant abuse was heaped upon me for every failure to meet what seemed an impossible standard. I made constant attempts to escape, but as each one was thwarted, I eventually lost hope. One of us had to die, and I feared (perhaps even hoped) it would be me.

It was at this lowest point that I received news which seemed almost too good to be true. The God of all the universe was aware of my plight. In fact, I was not alone. All of mankind had been deemed to be in the same situation as myself. All had sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). In His love and pity, God had sent His own Son to take our much-deserved wrath upon His own shoulders. This perfect One, who knew no sin, was made to be sin for us so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2 Co 5:21). My taskmaster's power had been broken, and my freedom had been purchased. My Emancipator had redeemed me by His own death, burial, and resurrection. He had paid my sin debt with His own blood, then risen from the grave to prove He had the power to do such a thing! I had been declared justified. All I had to do to enjoy this freedom was to simply believe it was true. I did believe, and a glimmer of light entered my dark existence. I embraced this light, and saw in its glow that my shackles had been broken. I was saved, and I was free!

Unaccustomed to freedom, I tried to walk on faltering legs. I immediately stumbled, and thought I heard a faint chuckling sound in my ear. I struggled to my feet to try again, but fell with my first step. I didn't know how to walk. The laughter grew louder, and I recognized the voice. I tried again and again, drawing on every ounce of strength within me. "Try harder", whispered the laughing voice. The more I struggled the more painful each fall became, and the louder the laughter grew. I knew beyond a shadow of doubt that my Redeemer could not lie; that He had indeed purchased my freedom. Why couldn't I walk in it? Now the taskmaster's voice taunted me mercilessly, "Who do you think you are? You can't do this. You will fail like every time before, and you might as well give up. Go back to what you know, and serve me. It would be easier than this." Fear now immobilized me, and doubt gripped my heart. The light grew dim.

A message came to me from the pages of my Savior's Holy Word. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (Ro 6:1)" My spirit was stirred, and I answered in agreement with Him, "God forbid"! Reading on, I tried to understand what to do

next. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Ro 6:2-4)”. My Redeemer considered me to be dead, buried, and risen with Him? I was ashamed to admit that I simply did not understand how this could be. I was still here, I still felt the same, and I was still failing. I felt such despair, and the taskmaster’s laughter rang with glee. I cradled my Savior’s Book in my arms, and cried out to Him for help. As the last of my wracking sobs subsided, I fell into a stuporous daydream.

In my mind’s eye, I saw my Redeemer. With gentle hands he helped me up, washed my wounds, and covered me with His own robes of righteousness. Then He bid me, “Come and see.” A large room was set before me, and I could see that a funeral was being held. A coffin, surrounded by flowers, lay at the far end of a long aisle between seats filled with people on both sides. Doleful music played in the background as a pious looking man with a pinched face made his way to the podium. He spoke in a monotone voice, and recited a litany of religious works the deceased had performed. “Attended services whenever the doors were open, gave tithes and offerings, was water baptized, taught Vacation Bible School, led the children’s choir...” On and on he droned in a passionless voice. The crowd of mourners seemed to barely hear him, so engrossed were they in their own personal musings. I was only able to catch brief phrases here and there, as the din of conversation grew louder. “Can’t actually be dead...just doesn’t make sense...what will we do now? ...it must be a mistake...I just don’t believe it”. I began to realize that no one had noticed me or the Savior. It was as if they couldn’t see us, and my Redeemer confirmed this was true. “Do you understand what this is?”, He asked. “A funeral, my Lord, but for whom I couldn’t say.” I feared He would grow weary with my lack of understanding, but he gently pointed to the coffin. “This is your taskmaster’s funeral.” My heart leaped with joy at these words, “What? Dead? Can it truly be so?” He smiled, and nodded. Then I looked around and asked, “Who are all these people, and why would they mourn such a tyrant?” He waved His hand around the room, “All who are here lost something when your taskmaster died. These mourners are the present evil world. They knew your taskmaster in the flesh, and loved the filth that made them feel better about themselves. Comparing themselves among themselves, they are unwise (2 Co 10:12). The one speaking is the vain religious system of this world, that lost a driven worker who toiled ceaselessly in the empty pursuit of self-righteousness.” As the weight of His words began to sink in, I saw Him fix His eyes on me, “Now, go and look in the coffin. Go and see what you have lost.”

Fear gripped my heart as I made my way up the aisle, each step bringing me closer to the gleamingly varnished box. I peered over the edge of the coffin, and was shocked by what I saw lying there. Carefully arranged on cushions of the softest satin was a pitiful, scarred, and twisted corpse wearing filthy rags. I saw the hands which had beaten me so mercilessly for every perceived infraction, but they no longer looked menacing. Instead, they looked weak and frail. I saw the feet which had taken such pleasure in kicking me when I was down, but now they were drawn in on themselves. They no longer looked strong enough to even walk. The arms which once had pushed me around were now nothing but skin and bone. Then, my breath caught in my

throat as I looked into the face of my constant tormentor. Recognition confirmed the truth which I had always known, but never confronted. The taskmaster who had so relentlessly enslaved me was wearing my face! She was me. Had been all along, and she was dead.

I fell to my knees crying, and poured out my thanks to the Savior for rescuing me from her; from myself. He gently lifted me up, and I found the courage to ask the burning question within me. "I see now that You took her to the cross with You, and that she died there when You paid for my sins. Why then, my dear Redeemer, do I still hear her voice, feel her lusts, and see her sins?" From the pages of His Word, my Lord instructed me. His Word said I was now a new creature, and that old things had passed away (2 Co 5:17). His Spirit had sealed me, and circumcised me from the flesh with the circumcision made without hands (Col 2:11). Nevertheless, I was still inside this corrupt body, and for good reason. I was to be an ambassador for Christ, telling others they can also be reconciled to God (2 Co 5:20). I would be a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1), a repository of "the light of the knowledge of God in the face of Jesus Christ" that was contained in an earthly vessel as proof that the power is of God, and not of me (2 Co 4:6-7). He promised that my inner being would be renewed day by day, even as my outward body perished (2 Co 4:16), that as I studied His word rightly divided (2 Tim 2:15) my mind would also be renewed (Rom 12:2), and that His Spirit could quicken my mortal body because He would actually dwell in me (Rom 8:11). Best of all He promised that one day He would come for me (1Thess 4:17), and give me a new body like His (Phill 3:21). This was my blessed hope, and hope maketh not ashamed (Rom 5:5).

His Word further instructed me to ignore the voice of the old taskmaster. To make no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14). "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for ye are not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14)" This was to become my new anthem, even as I endured the infirmity of my flesh. For, though evil would still be present with me, even when I desired to do good (Rom 7:21), sin could no longer condemn me (Rom 8:1) because I was now in the Spirit, and not in the flesh (Rom 8:9). My response should be to simply reckon it to be true that the old taskmaster is dead indeed (Rom 6:11), and yield myself to God as one who is alive from the dead (Rom 6:13).

After my instruction, my Redeemer placed the sad, twisted body of the old taskmaster in a tomb. A heavy stone was rolled in place, and I felt sure I would never see that old hag again. Then, my Lord showed me a shiny mirror with gilded edges, and bid me to look into it. "What do you see?", He asked. I was horrified as I gazed at my image. There was the filthy face of my dead Taskmaster staring back at me! As I cried out in horror, I heard my Savior say, "Walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7). If you look into the world's mirror, all you will see is who you used to be. That is all it can reflect. Turn your eyes upon Me. What do you see?" I turned to gaze upon Him. Words were inadequate to describe the perfect beauty radiating before me. The things of earth began to grow strangely dim, and I was filled with a peace that passed all understanding. "Keep your eyes fixed on me, and I give you a promise". Once more He instructed me from His Word, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Co 3:18)".

As His words rang in my ears, I was shaken loose from my reverie. It had only been a deep daydream, a way for my mind to process the truths I had struggled to understand, but I knew that I was forever changed. “For we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Co 5:7)”, I whispered. Suddenly, the day seemed brighter than it had before. “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess 5:18)”. As I spoke these words, I looked around me. What had seemed a dungeon moments before, now contained an air of comfort and coziness. “Rejoice evermore (1 Thess 5:16)”, I spoke aloud to no one but myself. I took in a deep breath, and noticed the previous staleness was missing. This air was fresh, and sweet. I felt refreshed, and full of hope.

“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage (Gal 5:1)”, I recited while rising to my feet. I began to stagger a bit, then remembered the account of Abraham. “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform (Ro 4:20-21)”. This steadied me, and I took a step. Excitement thrilled my soul as I realized I hadn’t fallen, and I quickly tried another step. I immediately fell on my face. The old familiar laughter rang out, and yet it seemed strangely distant. I ignored it. Another scripture came to mind, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall (1 Co 10:12)”. I realized that the first step had been taken in faith, but the second step had been taken in my own strength. The problem was, I was desperately weak. I had no strength of my own. For a moment, my own weakness overwhelmed me, but then I remembered the words of the Apostle Paul. “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (2 Co 12:9-10)”. I acknowledged my weakness, and thanked my God for it. Shifting from my strength to His, the power of God rested upon me. Christ in me propelled me forward, and I began the lifelong process of learning to walk in the Spirit. Won’t you join me?