

A BURDEN UNDER BADGER SKINS

~Other Speakers G-L: Allan Halton:

The apostle Paul exhorts us, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6.2). The Greek word used here is *baros*, meaning, heavy burden, from which we get our English wheel barrow. This is an exhortation to us all to put into practice the beautiful law of the love of Christ—everyone carrying the burdens of others instead of their own, and thus fulfilling what Christ did when, as He carried His own Cross, it was our burdens He was bearing. If only we could see more of that. When the law of Christ—the love of God—is working in the body of Christ, we do not have to carry the heavy burdens of life in this world—at least not our own heavy burdens.

But there is a burden that God intends each of us to carry, and which we shrug off only to our great loss. This burden is in fact a gift to us.

Let’s read that whole passage in Galatians.

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden” (Gal. 6.2-5).

The Greek word for burden in this last sentence is *phortion*, or load. We get our English portion from it. In other words, each of us has a God-given burden to carry. Each of us has been given a portion to carry in our Christian walk, and it is our responsibility, and privilege, to carry it.

This reminds me of the priests of old as they travelled from place to place through the wilderness. It was the responsibility of the Levites, the priestly tribe, to carry the tabernacle—all of which was relative, of course, to the ark.

“At that time the LORD separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the LORD...” (Deut. 10.8)

The various pieces with which the tabernacle was furnished—the ark itself; the table of showbread with all its dishes and utensils; the lampstand, its tongs and snuffers, and its vessels of oil; the golden altar and its incense—all “all the instruments of ministry wherewith they minister in the sanctuary” (Num. 4.12)—these were all covered with a veil of blue, and then over that veil of blue was placed a covering of “badger’s skins,” as the King James has it. Other translations call it goatskins or sealskins or some other kind of hide—a rough exterior that would protect these things from the elements en route. The brazen altar was covered with a veil of purple in which the vessels of the altar had first been placed, and then it also was covered with a veil of badger’s skins.

Then all these things were carried along by their staves upon the shoulders of the priests. They were not to touch these things with their hands.

They were all veiled. No outside observer would be able to tell what was hidden underneath that ordinary leather hide. The badger skin or goat skin veiled what was beneath.

There was one difference. All these things were covered with a covering of blue or purple, then over top the badger skins were placed. But the ark itself was covered first with the veil of the tabernacle behind which it was always hidden, then came the covering of badger skins, and finally over top of the badger skins was “a cloth wholly of blue” (Num. 4.6). With the ark, the veil of blue was on the exterior.

When in transit from place to place through the wilderness, the ark could always be distinguished by this veil “wholly of blue.”

Many of the Levites were permitted to use carts to carry the burdens they had been designated to carry—posts, frames, bases, hangings, tent pegs, and so on. But the articles of ministry, and the ark itself, were to be carried upon the shoulders of the priests. (See Numbers Ch. 7.6-9.)

And so, here is Israel walking along through the wilderness, the cloud of glory protecting them from the blazing desert sun (Num. 10.34). They are a people on the move. Where are they going? They are not quite sure what the next stop will be. But ultimately they have been promised “a land.” They are not there yet. That’s all

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right. They trust their God to be faithful to His promise. And the ark goes before them “to search out a resting place for them” (Num. 10.33).

And each of the priests is carrying a burden, each is carrying his own portion. How long will he have to carry that burden? As long as the cloud is on the move. Till the next resting place. He will have to carry it till the tabernacle is set up again in the “resting place” God has in mind. Then every man’s portion will be called for, and the priests will lay their burden down. What each one has carried will be set in its proper place, will be fitted together with all that the others have been carrying in the journey.

What each one has been carrying is all relative to the ark of the glory of the Lord. That glory cannot rest till it finds its rest in the tabernacle in the midst of His people, and all is in place and fitted together according to His design.

Now... as we travel through the wilderness, others around us may not know what is hidden beneath that goatskin they know as you or me. And as a result, we may often be misunderstood. That’s all right. The Lord knoweth them that are His, and we are content with that. Let us be faithful to carry our burden, our portion, as we walk along through the wilderness of life—some burden that is forming in us, some beautiful facet of Truth God is causing us to rejoice in, and which we long to see fulfilled in His people. Perhaps, while it is forming, we do not recognize that it is God Himself who has seeded our burden, and we wish He would relieve us of it. But light dawns, and we recognize our burden for what it is—the glory of the Lord... veiled. And we embrace it, and carry it faithfully. Is our portion heavy at times? Yes. At times it is very heavy. But we recognize it as God’s gift to us, and we will not part with it for worlds. For, the time comes when the wraps are removed, the coverings are taken away, the tabernacle is set up, and the glory of the Lord is unveiled. The glory of the Lord finds its home in His tabernacle and is revealed there—in you and me and others He has fitted us together with.

One thing more. What about that cloth “wholly of blue” over the ark itself? We long to see the glory of the Lord. But... that precious burden He has granted us to carry. Do we recognize that burden for what it is—the glory of the Lord... veiled? The inevitable time will come when the glory of the Lord is unveiled. But all along our wilderness way, difficult at times though it is... the blue of heaven is always over the badger skin, the goatskin, that others know as you and me.