

# Sweetened

## by the Tree

Thomas von Imbroich (1533-1558), also known as Thomas the Printer, was a young minister in the Anabaptist movement. He had joined the movement only about four years before he wrote this letter from prison, to his wife.

**M**y desire for you is grace and peace from God the Father and a burning love for all virtue (Co. 1, 1 Pe. 4, 2 Pe. 1), through Jesus Christ our Savior, and that the Holy Spirit strengthen your heart. Oh that you may, unspotted and with a pure mind, persist in doing God's will, until the day of the appearing of the Great God! In that day His furious wrath shall go forth against all the ungodly

ways and the unrighteous deeds which men have worked. But to those who with patience have labored in good works, He shall give blessing, unto eternal life. To Him be praise and honor, now and into eternity. Amen! Ps. 11, Is. 13, 2 Th. 1, Ro. 2

Because we are surrounded on every side by weakness, my dear sister in the Lord, and the determination of the old Adam is difficult to kill, I think it is only reasonable that we stir up one another with the grace we have received (He. 12, Co. 3) so that we do not turn around at the halfway mark, nor murmur with Israel in the wilderness. Remember, a piece of wood in the water can make everything sweet!<sup>1</sup>

So, we should not let go of praying like Joshua that the sun go not down until we have exterminated all our enemies. Nu. 11, Jo. 10 We need to remember the example of Saul, who did not destroy what the Lord delivered to him. The Lord wants Jericho to be overthrown and nothing left alive in it. I realize that I am not telling you anything new, how it went with Achan when he hid some forbidden things in the ground, things that his heart lusted after. 1 Sa. 15, Jo. 6, 7

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<sup>1</sup> He is probably referring to Exodus 15:25, where Moses threw the tree into the bitter water to sweeten it. If we follow Jesus' example of crucifying our self-centeredness (dying on the tree, which is the tree that makes the water sweet) when we walk into bitter circumstances, those very circumstances can end up being made "sweet."

Thus it is that men are swindled (by the snake, when he dangles a lovely apple in our sight continuously) when they act upon the desires of their natural mind. Paul gives a real warning about resisting these lusts when he said, “Do not live according to the wisdom of the flesh, obeying its desires. But rather mortify your members, so that the outer man decreases and the inner man increases day by day. Because if the death of Christ is not applied to our body, His life will not be revealed in us. 2 Co. 4:11, Ge. 2, Ga. 5, Ro. 13, Co. 3.

So, let the Word of God dwell richly in you unto all wisdom, so that the name of the Lord will be praised. Because the death of Christ is nothing other than a dying to sin, and we are admonished to imitate that death. “Because you are dead,” says the Scripture, “and your life is hid with Christ in God.” 2 Ti. 2, Ro. 6, 8, Co. 3, 2 Co. 4, Ph. 3, Ge. 32

Yes, Jacob’s hip is dried up, death is swallowed up in victory ... because we are dead to sin (which is the strength of death)! We have become godly and righteous through the resurrection of Jesus, in whom we walk in a new life, that is to say, we are created anew in the spiritual resurrection. Is. 25, 1 Co. 15. Ro. 5 He has removed sin from us on the tree so that we could be loosed from sin and live righteously. That is the reason it is no little thing to boast in the death of Christ. How can anyone who lives in sin say that Christ died for him? Ro. 6, Co. 3, Is. 53, 1 Pe. 2, 2 Pe. 2, 2 Co. 4.

Since Christ died once to sin, when a believer now lives, he lives to God. And the life of Christ, which alone is righteousness, is fully reflected in him. Ro. 6 So, I truly admonish each one to hold the Lord Jesus in memory, and do according to the healing words that came out of His mouth. His words are eternal life, and we should kill the old man. 1 Pe. 1, Jo. 6,13, Mt. 11 That is why Paul says, “For it is sharper than a double-edged sword, and divides apart the soul and spirit, the joints and marrow.” Where this is not put into action, it is but a dead letter. This is because whatever has life and moves itself in men will either be the fruit of [spiritual] death or the power of God to life. He. 4, Ro. 3,6,8; Ga. 3

So ... with fear and trembling, let’s walk before God carefully in word and deed, setting before us, as a mirror, the godly clarity of His goodness. Whoever correctly contemplates that goodness shall find consolation that no

tongue can speak. In this are all the treasures and richness of the knowledge and mystery of God. Ep. 5, Ja. 1, 1 Co. 2

For this reason, take pains in everything that you may have a peaceful conscience and not be ashamed in the day of His coming. For the end is coming when the Lord shall say to the reapers, “Apply your sickles and harvest, because the time to harvest is here. The harvest of the earth is withered, so dry that one can hardly see green.” Lu. 21, Mt. 24, Re. 14

But be brave, my dear wife, and take for an example the patience of Leah, the congeniality of Ruth, and demonstrate faithfulness as Michal did to David. Be wise and sensible like Abigail so that you and your house may be preserved. 1 Pe. 5, Ge. 29, 30; Ru. 2, 3; 1 Sa. 19, 25

Be heroic like Judith and gentle like Esther, chaste as Susanna and obedient as Rebecca. And, pray for the life of your children, with the Shunammite woman. Don’t be too easy on them so that they become strong-willed like Adonijah and Absalom, or Hophni and Phinehas. On the other hand, don’t be too hard on them, like Saul was to Jonathan. Ge. 24, 1 Sa. 2, 4, 20, 1 Ki. 1, 2; 2 Sa. 15, 16

You are commended to the grace of God; be useful in continual prayers to God. When you prepare yourself for prayer, think of the Lord’s word where He says, “When a priest enters the tabernacle of testimony to offer incense, being unclean, he shall die.” So, sanctify yourself to the Lord, because He is holy. The God of all grace will give you the Spirit and strengthen you in your inner man, so that you turn not to the right hand nor to the left. Le. 10, Le. 19, 21, 1 Pe. 1

Remember those who are afflicted and tempted, for it is better to go into the house of sorrow than into the house of joy. ~

While in prison, Thomas wrote one of the most widely-used Anabaptist Confessions of Faith, as well as seven letters (of which this is one). He had preached and baptized and started churches along the lower Rhine River.

Did Thomas know that he would shortly need “the tree” to sweeten his 3rd baptism, a beheading? Not long after this letter, Thomas joined the ranks of the martyrs, on March 5, 1558. He was 25 years old when he ended his labors.

*Only 25 ...*

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