

## REVEREND JONES AYUK'S SERMON

**TEXT: MK. 8:34-36** *“And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can a man give in return for his life?”*

I got a call in the early hours of Monday August 8<sup>th</sup> 2011 that Pa Mbiwan is no more. For over eighty six years, Pa Mbiwan had been the towering giant in the lives of the Mbiwan family, the one to whom I and many others turned to for guidance, wisdom, inspiration and faith. For now though, only a shell is left, the physical presence of Pa Mbiwan that we had become accustomed to, is no more.

Just under four months ago, we had congregated in Bomaka on the invitation of the Mbiwan girls in what I now realise was a befitting **GOODBYE** to an extraordinary man, who lived a simple life and died quietly in his sleep. There was no need to call a doctor or an ambulance, no palpable evidence that the end was near, no need for months or even years of stressful care from his children and family, no need for doctors to open him up, poking his body and inserting tubes into his mouth, nose or even his chest. There was no need for this rock of a man to be subjected to the indignity and humiliation of a hospital bed. As determined as ever, he had made it abundantly clear that he did not need that. When the time came, the fruit had to simply fall from the tree, when the bell tolled and time itself struck in the early hours of August 8<sup>th</sup> 2011, Pa simply left the stage, and now, he is alive in our individual and collective memories.

My dear friends, life will always include circumstances that incite fear or guilt or worry: if not illness, it could be material hardship. If not the constant demands from children, it could be childlessness. If not the demands and pressures of marriage, it could be a life of singleness. If not the fear of failure, it could be the sometimes destructive ambition for success. In such a world, we have a choice: to fear God or to fear everything else. As the Bible says; personal enemies pose no ultimate threat, because God can vanquish any enemy. Is it hunger? Not at all, because God can supply. Is it Death? Even that, the worst of human fears, offers no final barrier against God's love and compassion.

*"Death be not proud, writes the English poet John Donne, though some have called thee Mighty and Dreadful, thou art not so... we shall all wake eternally and Death thou shall die."*

This is the hope that drives and sustains us, that encourages us to fight on and push on, because we have this abiding faith in a God who is the conqueror. That even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, at the blast of the trumpet, death itself will submit, and we shall be set free, free at last to live out our full potentials without fear or guilt or shame.

***"I am not ready to walk alone,"*** this has been the phrase that kept coming to mind ever since I had been meditating and reflecting on Pa Mbiwan's life and legacy. But if I can summon the courage to walk alone on this difficult journey of faith, it depends in large part on the strength and encouragement I received from a giant of faith like Pa Mbiwan, against whom I leaned for over eight years as one leans against a towering tree of the forest. From him, I learned humility and trust and gratitude and faith. The legacy left by Pa Mbiwan stretches long and far and wide, spanning continents,

affecting not just fellow engineers and his contemporaries of West Cameroon, he made real impact to individual lives- PM Musonge and his bride Anne Mojoko Musonge; Mola Njoh Litumbe; Prof. Victor Anomah Ngu; Mr Peter Ayukegba; Pa Daniel and Eyere Takor; Ma Manyi Iyok; Mr Nchafu Mbiwan, Revd Enonchong Mbiwan, the Mbiwan girls – even me; these are but some of the personalities who today stand as a testament to the work and life of this colossus of a man. But, not only them, there are scores of ordinary men and women, whose lives he impacted, and who may never have the chance to testify to the many redeeming qualities of Pa Mbiwan.

My dear friends, I know of no one who better illustrates Jesus' most-quoted statement, that ***“whoever loses his life for my sake will find it...”*** like Pa Mbiwan. From the perspective of our success driven culture, a Chartered Engineer who graduated from the University of Wales the same day Queen Elizabeth II was being sworn in as the Queen of England and Wales in 1953, who, as pioneer General Manager of the West Cameroon electricity Corporation, Powercam, earned more money than the President of the Federal Republic of Cameroon - yet and in spite of it all, he lived a life of simplicity and humility and gratitude to God and he had a grand sense of calm. Such a man is the perfect example of what Jesus meant by. ***“...Losing your life in order to find it.”***

I feel privileged to have had a role, as his Pastor, in shining a light on his life. We need only to meet one good man or woman to help reshape and transform your life, and I had the inestimable privilege of spending hours upon hours with this titanic of a man, discussing the Bible and other subjects of interest. In doing so, I got to know a distinguished and faithful follower of Jesus. For that, Pa Mbiwan, I thank you.

Pa Mbiwan's own journey has come to an end, here in Besongabang, the land of his ancestors; mother earth will open her bowels and swallow him up. The joy and blessing of his pilgrimage here on earth is the fact that he has been to many places and seen many things. Because he was moulded and refined by the crucibles of time and experience, and because he had seen much, he spoke very little. For him, words did not come easily. Nevertheless, for him and for all of us still holding on to life, there is a destination to which we are all walking. I have always believed that the only worthwhile goal for human life is for us to be made like Jesus, and I am not ashamed, with all my imperfections, to give that as the purpose of my life. I love the realism of John when he says that; **"... now we are all God's children; it is not yet clear what we shall be, but when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."** (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:2). So much is not yet clear on this side of the Jordan, but to see Jesus as he is, and to be changed as a result, is the only part of my hope in the resurrection that I would rather die than abandon. If we dismiss such a claim as nonsense, or if we doubt it at all, then Paul says we are of all men most miserable.

Finally, ***"Many that we loved have left us,***

***Reaching first their journey's end;***

***Now they wait to give us welcome-***

***Brother, Sister, Child and friend.***

***When at last our journey's over,***

***And we pass away from sight,***

***Father, takes us through the darkness***

***Into everlasting light.***

***Besongabang, Funeral of Pa Mbiwan, Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> August, 2011.***