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The Road to the Cross

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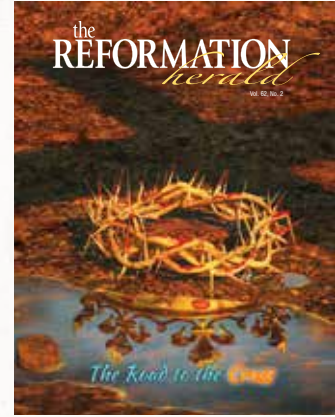
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"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold."—Education, p. 57.

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THE CROSS: A LIFESAVING CONCEPT

Jesus Christ is the Creator clothed in human flesh. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. . . . And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1–3, 14).

Through love, the Word that spoke the universe into existence condescended to our lowly human estate to lift us up and remake us—restore us—to the image of God. We are strengthened to break away from the corrupt mold of this fallen world to be amazingly transformed—enabled to become like Him in character, back to the way we were originally designed to be. "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

Jesus "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7, 8).

When Christ submitted Himself to be smitten, scourged, and crucified on a wooden cross to pay the price for our wrongdoing, He revealed the power of a tremendous, unselfish love beyond comparison. "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6–8).

"The cross of Calvary appeals in power, affording a reason why we should love Christ now, and why we should consider Him first, and best, and last, in everything. We should take our fitting place in humble penitence at the foot of the cross. We may learn the

lessons of meekness and lowliness of mind as we go up to Mount Calvary, and, looking upon the cross, see our Saviour in agony, the Son of God dying, the Just for the unjust. Behold Him who could summon legions of angels to His assistance with one word, a subject of jest and merriment, of reviling and hatred. He gives Himself a sacrifice for sin. When reviled, He threatened not; when falsely accused, He opened not His mouth. He prays on the cross for His murderers. He is dying for them. He is paying an infinite price for every one of them. He would not lose one whom He has purchased at so great cost. He gives Himself to be smitten and scourged without a murmur. And this uncomplaining victim is the Son of God. His throne is from everlasting, and His kingdom shall have no end. . . . Look, O look upon the cross of Calvary; behold the royal victim suffering on your account. . . .

"The Son of God was rejected and despised for our sakes. Can you, in full view of the cross, beholding by the eye of faith the sufferings of Christ, tell your tale of woe, your trials? Can you nurse revenge of your enemies in your heart while the prayer of Christ comes from His pale and quivering lips for His revilers, His murderers—Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34)?"

Everybody's got problems these days—all of us do. It seems that everyone is struggling just to survive. But one look to the significance of Calvary's cross helps us get it all into perspective. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" (1 John 3:1). The abundant love of Jesus as the sacrificial the Lamb of God is indeed beyond measure.

So, in this issue of *The Reformation Herald*, please join us, as we look into some of the various aspects of that divine sacrifice, relishing in the glorious hope it brings to all who will open their heart to receive it. *R*

References:

¹ That I May Know Him, p. 65.

UNDERSTANDING THE CROSS AS A SYMBOL

KEY PERSPECTIVES
FROM HISTORY

By Vinicius Kannen

INTRODUCTION

Even before His ordeal at the crucifixion, Jesus Christ invited the human race to sacrifice their passions by taking up their cross in following Him (Luke 14:27). Paul declares, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Galatians 6:14). He further notes, "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18). So, how should we understand the symbolism of the cross?

Although various opinions may arise from this question, Sister Ellen G. White's use of the term "cross" in relation to the gospel may help us clarify this matter: "Hold up the cross of Calvary. This will rebuke heathen philosophy and pagan idolatry. Lift up the cross of Calvary higher and still higher, as the identi-

fied reality of Christianity."¹ Should we interpret this text in a literal manner and parade the streets with crosses or decorate our churches and homes with it in an ornate display of our faith? Certainly not, as reading this text in full clarifies its meaning. "What we need is truth, present truth. Let the truth shine forth in its unmeasured superiority, in all the dignity and purity that distinguish true religion. An acquaintance with the Word of God will strengthen us to resist evil. . . . Let all our works, our every enterprise, show forth the sacred principles of the gospel."² In this passage, the cross seems to have been used as **an ideal literary tool that most easily illustrates Christ's sufferings to save humanity.**

Like the New Testament author's, Sister White used the cross as a literary symbol to convey Christ's suffering as the means of redemption and what that requires from us today. "There has been so little self-



denial, so little suffering for Christ's sake, that the cross is almost entirely forgotten. We must be partakers with Christ of His sufferings if we would sit down in triumph with Him on His throne."³ "Now many Protestants find it difficult to prove their doctrines from the Bible, and yet they have not the moral courage to accept the truth which involves a cross; therefore they are fast coming to the ground of Catholics, and, using the best arguments they have to evade the truth, cite the testimony of the Fathers, and the customs and precepts of men."⁴

The cross did not always hold this meaning in the minds of God's people. "To the people of Christ's day, the cross was a symbol of the power of Rome. It was the instrument of the most cruel and humiliating form of death," reserved for the vilest of criminals.⁵ In relation to Christ's death, "the cross of Calvary shows how far Satan will carry his work."⁶

"The crucifixion of Christ was a murder instigated by Satan and carried out by people who had separated themselves from God."⁷ Christ Himself foresaw this malignant deed, declaring, "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me" (John 14:30). The Spirit of Prophecy further reveals the satanic scenes on display at the cross: "By those who mocked Christ as He hung on the cross, Satan and his angels were personified. He filled them with vile and loathsome speeches. He inspired their taunts."⁸ Moreover, "the principalities and powers of darkness assembled round His cross. The arch apostate, still retaining his lofty stature, led the apostate host, who were leagued with human beings in the strife against God."⁹

Unbeknown to the murderous throng, however, "companies of [holy] angels were marshaled in the air above the place."¹⁰ Though "legions of evil angels were all about [Christ]; yet the holy angels were bidden not to break their ranks, and engage in conflict with the taunting, railing adversary, nor were they permitted to minister to the an-

After pagan vs. Christian faiths clashed with one another over the centuries and much blood was spilled, things changed—they in fact mellowed as Christianity silently introduced pagan customs into its own worship.

guished spirit of the divine Sufferer. It was in this terrible hour of darkness, the face of His Father hidden, legions of evil angels enshrouding Him, the sins of the world upon Him, that from His pale lips were wrenched the words, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"¹¹

In that hour of apparent defeat, Christ gained the victory. Though Christ "had been rejected and condemned, and nailed to the ignominious cross...that cross, that instrument of shame and torture, brought hope and salvation to the world."¹² Thereafter, the cross took a new meaning, becoming the central theme of the apostles preaching. Let us take a moment to reflect on the reality of what took place there.

Colossians 1:20 tells us that it pleased the Father "to reconcile all things unto himself" by Christ who "made peace through the blood of his cross". This makes it clear that it was through the blood shed on the cross that Christ, in reconciling the world to God, sealed the covenant of grace. Blood itself is a symbol of life ("for the life is in the blood" Deuteronomy 12:23) and its shedding is an evidence of death. John's word's "unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood" (Revelation 1:5) is a figurative way of saying that our purification from sin required the sacrifice of Christ's life. Thus, the focus of the gospel message is the self-sacrificing death of Christ for our sins and our call to follow Him in the path of self-denial. This is the idea associated with the literary symbol of the cross. Today, however, many professed Christians have lost sight of the true meaning of the cross. They "claim to reverence the cross. They exalt the symbol of Christ's sufferings," but "in their lives they deny Him whom it represents."¹³

The cross appears as an ornamental feature on many church buildings and on communion tables, making it a central object in Christian worship. "Everywhere it is outwardly honored and exalted. But the teachings of Christ are buried beneath a mass of senseless traditions, false interpretations, and rigorous exactions."¹⁴

While we may not hold religious reverence for the object itself, what place if any should a material cross have in religious worship? To answer this question it may be helpful to understand the use of the cross in history.

THE CROSS AS A PAGAN SYMBOL

The cross has been used as an astrological and religious symbol in both Eastern and Western civilizations for centuries. Magicians and astrologers have used it to reference the four cardinal points and the sun's daily rotation.¹⁵ The Celtic cross, an emblem used by primitive pagan European civilizations, is still a current example of this.¹⁶

Archeological evidence shows the cross was a religious symbol for northern Europeans (*i.e.*, Odin), the Egyptians (Isis), the Greeks (Bacchus), the Chaldeans (Bel or Baal), the native American Indian tribes (*i.e.*, Aztecs), the Mongolians, the Tibetans, and many other civilizations. It could thus be considered a universal religious symbol for either pagans or Christians throughout the ages.¹⁷⁻²⁰ George S. Tyack observed in his book, *The Cross in Ritual, Architecture, and Art*, that "It is strange, yet unquestionably a fact, that in ages long before the birth of Christ, and since then in lands untouched by the teaching of the Church, the Cross has been used as a sacred symbol."¹⁷

Writings that describe Mary at the foot of the cross over Christ's death closely resemble Ishtar's mourning over the death of Tammuz. Coincidentally, the cross also began to be used as a Christian symbol at this time.

THE ANKH OR CRUX ANSATA

The ankh is a cross found in Coptic Christianity. It has the upper vertical bar replaced by a loop that resembles an inverted tear drop. Egyptology reveals that the Ankh, also known as Crux Ansata, accompanied the goddess Sekhmet and the sun-god Ra as a symbol of perpetual life. The ankh was also the symbol of Ra's authority, as the supposed bestower of life and the world, given to Pharaoh and his priests. While the Ankh's T represents masculinity, its crowning O, the tear drop shape, illustrates femininity. Indeed, this cross symbolizes fertility and the act of conception.¹⁸

In the early Christian era, the apostles' clear condemnation of idol worship is noteworthy in Paul's visit to Athens: "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (Acts 17:16). In one of his letters, Paul warns the Corinthian believers on the subject: "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry" (1 Corinthians 10:14). Again, Paul sends another exhortation to the Corinthian believers: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:16). Given the ubiquitous use of the cross as a pagan symbol and given the admonition of God's messengers against any relationship between His followers and paganism, it is understandable that there is virtually no record of the use of the cross in the early church.

HOW DID THE CROSS END UP IN CHRISTIAN CHURCHES?

The Jewish Encyclopedia suggests that the use of the cross as a religious symbol by Christians only began around two centuries after Christ's death. As more and

more pagans accepted Christianity as their new religion, they brought with it their customs and culture. In Egypt, following more than two centuries from its foundation by Mark the Evangelist at 42 C.E., the Coptic Church came to accept the Ankh as a Christian symbol.^{19, 20} Only but recently has the Coptic Christian Church in Egypt replaced the Ankh with the Ethiopian cross as its symbol.²¹ During the 1st and 2nd centuries, there is no record that the early Christians used the cross as a symbol of their faith. In their day, the cross was an instrument used for a painful criminal public execution method. Rather than the instrument of death, the focus of their faith was the Christ who had died for them and had risen from the dead and was alive forevermore in heaven. But after a time, a change came upon the faith of the early church. The Spirit of Prophecy explains, "the zeal of the believers began to wane, and their love for God and for one another grew less. Coldness crept into the church. Some forgot the wonderful manner in which they had received the truth. One by one the old standard-bearers fell at their post. Some of the younger workers, who might have shared the burdens of these pioneers, and thus have been prepared for wise leadership, had become weary of oft-repeated truths. In their desire for something novel and startling they attempted to introduce new phases of doctrine, more pleasing to many minds, but not in harmony with the fundamental principles of the gospel. In their self-confidence and spiritual blindness they failed to discern that these sophistries would cause many to question the experiences of the past, and would thus lead to confusion and unbelief."²² From A.D. 200 onwards, Christians started to believe that the

marking of a cross on the forehead would have the power to ward off demons. They also began to swear by the cross. As much as the Greek word *stauro* [pole or stake] was an abbreviation that scribes used for the cross, it became a widespread Christian symbol after the 4th century.²³⁻²⁵

In 312 A.D. a remarkable event triggered significant changes favoring Christianity; however, it led to its apostasy as well. Before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, where Constantine was to meet Maxentius' much stronger forces, he allegedly had a vision of a heavenly cross of light bearing the inscription "In Hoc Signo Vinces" ("In this sign thou shalt conquer"). His victory solidified his power over the Roman Empire. Further, it opened the doors for Christianity to be the state religion.²⁶ This fact coincided with adopting the cross as a Christian symbol and entry of pagan rites and customs into Christendom, such as the worship of images and saints and the notion of Sunday sacredness.^{27, 28}

Ellen G. White explains that "the nominal conversion of Constantine, in the early part of the fourth century, caused great rejoicing; and the world, cloaked with a form of righteousness, walked into the church. Now the work of corruption rapidly progressed. Paganism, while appearing to be vanquished, became the conqueror. Her spirit controlled the church. Her doctrines, ceremonies, and superstitions were incorporated into the faith and worship of the professed followers of Christ."²⁷

In his book *Babylon Mystery Religion*, author Ralph Woodrow notes that: "It was not until Christianity began to be paganized (or, as some prefer, paganism was Christianized), that the cross image came to be thought of as a Christian symbol. It was in 431 that crosses in churches and chambers were introduced, while the use of crosses on steeples did not come until about 586."¹⁹ Indeed, "the 1260 years of papal supremacy began with the establishment of the papacy in A.D. 538, and would therefore terminate in 1798"²⁹ This illustrates that cross

usage seemed to have facilitated the assimilation of the new religion by the pagans. Excuses were mounting, and the 2nd commandment of God's law started to be forgotten.

The historian Paul Corby Finney suggests another reason for the beginning of the use of the cross from the third century onwards: "The reasons for the non-appearance of Christian art before 200 have nothing to do with principled aversion to art, with other-worldliness, or with anti-materialism. The truth is simple and mundane: Christians lacked land and capital. Art requires both. As soon as they began to acquire land and capital, Christians began to experiment with their own distinctive forms of art."³⁰ The best explanation for the emergence of Christian art in the early church is the vital role of images in Greco-Roman culture. "As Christianity gained converts, these new Christians had been brought up on the value of images in their previous cultural experience and they wanted to continue this in their Christian experience."³¹ However, "Not all the beauty of art can bear comparison with the beauty of temper and character to be revealed in those who are Christ's representatives."³² Bearing in mind the Old Testament prohibitions against idol worship, the use of sculptured images would become an ongoing problem in the history of Christianity.

THE CROSS IN PERSPECTIVE TO THE SYMBOLS IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

Since humanity's sinful fall, dark forces have been trying to confuse the minds of God's followers. In the history of ancient Israel we can see how these forces, led by Satan, worked to destroy the true worship of God. "By leading [God's people] into idolatry, [Satan] would destroy the efficacy of all worship; for how can man be elevated by adoring what is no higher than himself and may be symbolized by his own handiwork? If men could become so blinded to the power, the majesty, and the glory of the infinite God as to represent Him by a graven image, or even by

"As religion had declined in power, it had increased in pomp. The educators of the time sought to command respect by display and ostentation. To all this the life of Jesus presented a marked contrast."

a beast or reptile; if they could so forget their own divine relationship, formed in the image of their Maker as to bow down to these revolting and senseless objects—then the way was open for foul license; the evil passions of the heart would be unrestrained, and Satan would have full sway."³³ "Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry," (1 Corinthians 10:14, KJV) Paul exhorted his readers, no doubt aware of the corrupting influence of idol worship. "...What agreement hath the temple of God with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:16, first part).

The natural tendency of the unconverted heart in worship is to revere the symbol in place of that which it symbolizes. This can be clearly seen in the bronze serpent Nehushtan. That bronze serpent had been built according to God's plan to help His people to trust in Him in their time of need following centuries of bondage in Egypt (Numbers 21:8, 9). "They knew that there was no virtue in the serpent itself, but it was a symbol of Christ; and the necessity of faith in His merits was thus presented to their minds. Heretofore many had brought their offerings to God, and had felt that in so doing they made ample atonement for their sins. They did not rely upon the Redeemer to come, of whom these offerings were only a type. The Lord would now teach them that their sacrifices, in themselves, had no more power or virtue than the serpent of brass, but were, like that, to lead their minds to Christ, the great sin offering."³⁴ That metal serpent symbolized the Son of God (John 3:14, 15). However, that which in itself was designed for the good of God's people, had become an idol. King Hezekiah, in his work of restoring the true worship of God, destroyed it. (2 Kings

18:4) Considering God's displeasure when a symbol created by Himself was worshiped in His stead, Christian's can expect no less should they venerate the object of Christ's martyrdom rather than Christ Himself.

Venerating the cross, rather than the one who was crucified upon it, has led to the idea that the cross differentiates Christians from other religions' followers as the sacrifice altars marked God's people in ancient times.³⁵ This idea may also be related to a misinterpretation of Hebrews 13:10.³⁶ Thus, we should also consider the uniqueness of the ancient Israelite altars.

God had provided clear instructions on how His altar should be built: "if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it" (Exodus 20:25). Hence, Abel's, Noah's, Abraham's and the altars of many others had no resemblance to the pagan ones of their times. This cannot be affirmed about the material cross.^{14, 17, 18, 19, 21} Whether it was for pagan usage or Christian usage, the cross is a manmade object rather than a naturally occurring one such as a stone. Current material crosses cannot therefore be considered a parallel replacement in Christian worship for ancient Israel altars.

The early Christians saw the reality of the cross in its most shocking colors (Acts 2:23; Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Peter 2:24). For them, the body of Christ, was the actual altar (Hebrews 13:10), the whole temple per se (Revelation 21:22; John 4:21–26; Matthew 26:61 and 12:6; John 2:21; 1 John 2:2).

A MODERN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CROSS AS A SYMBOL



The bronze serpent Moses uplifted was a symbol of the Son of God (John 3:14, 15). Yet the Father ordained King Hezekiah to destroy it after it had become an idol to the people (2 Kings 18:4).

seemed to me but a little above the pagan worship. . . . I was forcibly reminded of the words of Paul at Athens when he exclaimed, 'Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.'"³⁸

We should also note Ellet J. Waggoner's explanation of the role of the cross in the massive conversion of heathens to Catholicism. "When the Christian religion was narrowed down to the material cross, and to the making of the sign of the cross, and the heathen were told that this cross was represented everywhere and in everything, and that whatever prosperity they had while heathen was due to the ubiquitous figure of the cross, what was there to keep them from adopting it? They were convinced that Christianity was the universal religion—the religion of nature—and so they turned their temples into churches; the image which they had worshiped as Jupiter, they now worshiped as Christ; the cross became their household god; the vestal virgins gave place to nuns; the peripatetic philosophers became mendicant friars, and so eventually paganism became Roman Catholicism."³⁹

It should further be considered that: "This is the religion [Catholicism] which Protestants are beginning to look upon with so much favor, and which will eventually be united with Protestantism. This union will not, however, be effected by a change in Catholicism; for Rome never changes. She claims infallibility. It is Protestantism that will change. The adoption of liberal ideas on its part will bring it where it can clasp the hand of Catholicism."⁴⁰ As Protestants lose sight of

A close examination of the writings of the Spirit of Prophecy further clarifies how the symbol becomes detrimental to a person's faith when it is venerated as a substitute for that which it was intended to symbolise. "Papists place crosses upon their churches, upon their altars, and upon their garments. Everywhere is seen the insignia of the cross. Everywhere it is outwardly honored and exalted. But the teachings of Christ are buried beneath a mass of senseless traditions, false interpretations, and rigorous exactions."³⁷ Moreover, "as

the Jews professed to revere the law, so do Romanists claim to reverence the cross."³⁷ In keeping with this chain of ideas, Ellen G. White provided her personal impressions of a close connection between revering the physical cross and the worship of statues and saints. On a visit to the Alps, she describes: "Old men who were tottering on the brink of the grave would cross themselves and bow low before the various images of Christ, the apostles, and the saints. I had never witnessed anything of the kind except in the heathen Chinese Joss houses, and this

the true meaning of the cross, and venerate the object in place of the one who died upon it, they will no doubt find common ground upon which to unite with Catholicism.

THE CROSS: FROM AN ILLUSTRATIVE AID OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING TO A PHYSICAL FAITH SYMBOL

The usage of illustrative literary devices to convey a more complex message is recurrent when reading the Bible. From the Old to the New Testament, the Bible is full of illustrations aiding humans to understand God's will. The cross-related issue could not be different. A careful interpretation of many texts from the Bible or the Spirit of Prophecy is required (i.e., 1 Corinthians 1:17 and Ref. 1)—otherwise certain truths can be distorted, and the true meaning of the text lost. Despite very few exceptions (Matthew 10:38; Luke 14:27), the synoptic gospels described the cross as an instrument of torture by which Christ died. However, Paul summarizes Christ's suffering in a single word, the cross, in several of his letters to the recently converted Gentiles (i.e., Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians).

Therefore, we should remember that the act of crucifixion was how Rome demonstrated its power over all who were conquered. People were terrified by it. The Roman historian Appian reported that the surviving slaves from the Third Servile War were crucified throughout 105 miles, from Rome to Capua.⁴¹ The Jewish-Roman historian Josephus vividly depicts how crucifixion was used in Jerusalem's destruction: "they (the Jews) were first whipped, and then tormented with all sorts of tortures, before they died, and were then crucified before the wall of the city. . . . [The Romans] caught every day five hundred Jews; nay, some days they caught more . . . their multitude (the crucified Jews) was so great, that room was wanting for the crosses, and crosses wanting for the bodies."⁴²

These facts help us understand that Paul did not have to write

much besides "the cross" for the Gentiles of that time to realize that Christ had terribly suffered for our sins, and that, by His blood, we are atoned before the Father. Conversely, a Jewish readership did not require much poetic illustration about the cross. Its depiction is cruder, and its meaning more precise (see Hebrews 12:2 and 1 Peter 2:24). Taking Galatians 6:14 as an example, someone may replace "the cross" with "blood" or "suffering" and "crucified" by "dead" and soon realize that the text does not change its meaning. This singular exercise helps us to understand how Colossians 1:20 clarifies the meaning of Galatians 6:14 or Ephesians 2:16, or many other complex passages. It further explains why 1 Corinthians 1:17 has been misunderstood by some who take this verse out of its context in the letter or to the time that it was written (please compare

1 Corinthians 1:17 to 2:2). Such misinterpretation has led some early Christian writers to provide a dim view of the cross.

Tertullian, a prolific early Christian writer (A.D. 155–220), wrote that "a figure of the sins which the soil of the flesh brought forth for us, but which the power of the cross removed."⁴³ Here, sins are not cleansed by Christ's blood anymore, but by the cross instead. Tertullian's understanding about the cross is further found in the Catholic prayer "Stations of the Cross" ("Because, by Your holy cross, You have redeemed the world.")⁴⁴ Tertullian also wrote "Ad omnem progressum atque promotum . . . frontem crucis signaculo terimus." (On every step we take . . . we make the sign of the cross on our forehead).⁴⁵ Accordingly, Hippolytus of Rome (A.D. 170–235) established that the "sign of the cross" combined with "the trinitar-



ian formula (In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti)⁴⁶ is an essential ritual in Christian liturgy and daily duties. Around the same time, the Carthage bishop Cyprian (200–258 C.E.) declared that the sign of the cross had had miraculous powers since antiquity: “when Moses, for the overthrow of Ama-lek, who bore the type of the devil, raised up his open hands in the sign and sacrament of the cross, and could not conquer his adversary unless when he had steadfastly persevered in the sign with hands continually lifted up.”^{47, 48} These examples illustrate how far off humans may go in trying to interpret God’s message, and how a single distorted idea may lead to a far more outlandish interpretation of the scriptures.

In clear contrast, a valid Bible message echoes the same tune throughout the millennia. As Isaiah (7th to 8th centuries B.C.E.) wrote, “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands” (Isaiah 49:16). And Zechariah (5th to 6th centuries B.C.E.) added, “And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends” (Zechariah 13:6). And John the Apostle (6–100 C.E.) confirmed, “Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands” (John 20:27). And Ellen White described, “Our Redeemer

will ever bear the marks of His crucifixion.”⁴⁹ This beautiful chain of God’s inspired revelation has undergone more than two thousand years of human history unchanged. This heartbreaking message contains the proper understanding of the cross, which the apostle Peter synthesized well: “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

CONCLUSION

The cross has been an ancient religious symbol that many streams of Christianity have adopted through the centuries. Although most Christians would agree that the heathen worship of the cross is against God’s holy Law, a lesser number would realize that the focus of the Christian is to be the sacrifice of Christ and His suffering for our sins. Rather than the embellishing of churches with crosses or the body with amulets, Christianity is a personal call to a life of self-denial and fellowship with Christ in suffering. Human traditions have turned the symbol of this call into a mysterious relic. But for those who look beyond the relic to the word of God, they see Christ’s suffering and death on the cross as the foundation of their faith. For them the word of God alone is

sufficient to establish their faith, for faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). May the blood of Christ and what its shedding on the cross means for us be the focus of our faith, as it is written: “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” and “having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself” (Hebrews 12:2; 1:19, 20). *R*

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We should remember that the act of crucifixion was how Rome demonstrated its power over all who were conquered. People were terrified by it. . . . Paul did not have to write much besides “the cross” for the Gentiles of that time to realize that Christ had terribly suffered for our sins, and that, by His blood, we are atoned before the Father.



THE STATEMENT

BASED ON JOHN 3:16

By Bethany Muresan

“For God so loved . . .” This is an awesome love—a love incomprehensible to the human mind. It was this love that looked beyond the ungratefulness and sinfulness of mankind. Love stronger than death brought hope to a world that had mocked and derided its Creator. It was this love that provided the way of escape from sin. We’re talking about a love that’s perfect, unselfish, and complete.

Christianity differs from all other religions in that the God we worship is a God Who loves us. Of course, there are many other reasons why we recognize and worship the Almighty, the Omnipotent Creator. But for now, let’s consider

only the aspect of His character of love.

In the world, we find many different systems of belief. Many religions recognize the existence of a superior being. In fact, many different so-called gods are worshipped. Some of these gods are considered to be wise, others powerful, etc. Thus, characteristics we know to be qualities of the only true God are often attributed to these false gods. But there is a distinction. None of these other “gods” stooped down to the point of death on behalf of mankind simply by virtue of His far-reaching love toward undeserving humans. Instead of asking us to reach upward—which we would be

utterly incapable of doing, “the God of the Bible comes looking for us, takes on human flesh in the person of Jesus in pursuit of us (see John 1:14), and provides the very avenue for us to come back into a relationship with him.”¹

John 3:16 is the basis for the whole Biblical narrative and is quite possibly one of the most famous and most often quoted Bible verses. It’s the kind of verse people will put on a bumper sticker or on a T-shirt to show that they profess Christianity. Even to those that haven’t memorized many Bible verses in their life, John 3:16 will ring familiar to anyone who’s been even casually exposed to the faith. This verse “has

been called the Golden Text of the Bible² It's like an elevator speech. It's a summary of everything you need to know, but just enough to get you digging for more.

John 3 starts off the discussion between Jesus and Nicodemus. "Nicodemus had come to the Lord thinking to enter into a discussion with Him, but Jesus laid bare the foundation principles of truth."³ We find the statement of God's love (John 3:16) tucked inside this conversation. Here we find the purpose of Christ's life and death on earth defined as the greatest possible expression of God's infinite love.

GOD PURSUING US

John 3:16 opens with "God" being the subject who is about to perform an action. Nicodemus was familiar with the scriptures and had sought to do God's will. But did he truly understand the character of God? Do **we** understand the character of God?

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It's not just a New Testament concept that God came to save the lost. Throughout the Scriptures, we find that God has sought us. In Matthew 21, we find the analogy of messengers being sent to the evil tenants. Only after several attempts did the owner of the vineyard finally send his son. Obviously, Christ had to come and die—as no other ransom would have been sufficient. What we can see from this, however, is that God's condescension to meet humanity was not limited to the time Christ walked on earth.

If we go back all the way to Genesis, immediately after sin, in Genesis 3:9, we find that "the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" God knows everything. "He obviously knew where they were, but he wanted them to know he was looking for them—in spite of their rebellion, rejection, and disobedience."⁴

God's desire to reach out to lost people is also exhibited in Luke 15 through the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. In all three instances, God

is portrayed as seeking that which was lost. In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd goes out to find the sheep that went astray. In the parable of the lost coin, the house was diligently swept. In both cases the lost item did not make steps to return—it couldn't. Even in the story of the prodigal son, the Father was just waiting for his return so he could welcome him with a loving embrace. It was a knowledge of the father's love that brought the son back home.

"We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

SO LOVED!

He didn't simply love us. It says God **so** loved. Are you "...able to comprehend... what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Ephesians 3:18, 19)? You are so loved.

This love is not demonstrated only to those who accept the promise of salvation. "The love of God embraces all mankind."⁵ Because of God's gift in offering Christ, the world continues to exist. Babies are born each day, enjoying food, sunshine, air, etc. Grace is bestowed on everyone, regardless of whether they chose to recognize the divine Giver or not. "It is through that one gift that every other is imparted to men. Daily the whole world receives blessing from God."⁶

Christ's mission here on earth was motivated by love. John 3:17 tells us, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." God didn't send Christ to condemn us. No, we were already condemned. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8 NKJV).

His love doesn't stop there. Christ's death reveals that love is a permanent aspect of God's character. "Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast."⁷

THE WORLD—EVERYONE!

Remember, in John 3, Jesus was talking with Nicodemus. Unfortunately, the Jewish people of the time had the tendency to think that God's love was only for them and nobody outside their group. They considered themselves the "chosen" people and felt a sense of superiority to the pagan heathen nations surrounding and often even occupying their land. Perhaps this came as a surprise to Nicodemus. Not only did God love him and his people—God's love went beyond, even as far-reaching as the entire globe.

Each and every human being that has ever lived is included in this declaration of God's love. No one's left out. This Gift is addressed to all.

Let's take a moment to look at some Old Testament passages to emphasize the all-inclusiveness of the invitation:

- Genesis 12:3, God promised Abraham, "in thee shall **all families of the earth** be blessed." Not only would the blessing be for his descendants, but also for all families that would exist.
- Isaiah 49:6, "I will also give thee for a light to the **Gentiles**, that thou mayest be my **salvation unto the end of the earth.**"
- Psalm 96:3 instructs us to, "Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among **all people.**"

The "world" referenced in John 3:16 is a global, cross-cultural, multi-ethnic world. It's a world filled with people of varying backgrounds and experiences. But they all share one thing in common: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Because of that, all are in need of a Saviour.

"This speck of a world was the scene of the incarnation and suffering of the Son of God. Christ did not go to worlds unfallen, but He came to this world, all seared and marred with the curse. The outlook was not favorable, but most discouraging."⁸ But the promise stood, "He shall not fail nor be discour-

aged, till he have set judgment in the earth" (Isaiah 42:4).

God could have very easily just blotted this world out of existence and been done with it. But He didn't. Instead, He saw fit to make it the expository of His goodness, the recipient of the greatest Gift love could ever bestow.

How many people included in the "world" that "God so loved" haven't heard about that love? If somebody loved you, you probably would want to know about it, wouldn't you? That's why Christ's commission to His followers is: "Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all people" (Mark 16:15 GNT). Preach the Gospel—the Good News. In other words, let the world know that God so loved them too!

HE GAVE

Love requires sacrifice.

Love is not just a word, not just a feeling. In order for it to be trusted, it must be exemplified. It must be demonstrated. It must be embodied. God's love showed itself in a Gift. Not just any gift, oh no! It was everything. It was God Himself. It was death. It was necessary. It was optional. It was a choice. It was a sacrifice.

"The heart of God yearns over His earthly children with a love stronger than death. **In giving up His Son, He has poured out to us all heaven in one gift.**"⁹

The Son of God subjected himself to a life of poverty and distress. He did not choose to live a life of royalty while in this world. He took

upon Himself the form of a servant. He lived a normal childhood, faced with the taunts of boyhood years. He subjected Himself to the guidance and instruction of earthly parents. He underwent cruel mockery, was assailed by constant danger, and rarely experienced even the most basic conveniences of life. He suffered hunger. He traveled on foot to minister to souls or heal the afflicted. His life was a life of service.

"The Lord of life and glory did not consult His convenience or pleasure when He left His station of high command to become a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, accepting ignominy and death in order to deliver man from the consequence of his disobedience."¹⁰

Christ died surrounded by criminals and tortured with agony.



Love is not just a word, not just a feeling. To be trusted, it must be exemplified. It must be demonstrated. It must be embodied. God's love showed

itself in a Gift. Not just any gift. . . . It was everything. It was God Himself. It was death. It was necessary. It was optional. It was a choice. It was a sacrifice.

He took upon Himself the sins of the world and paid the price for our redemption. He was treated as we deserved to be treated. "The Son of man came ... to give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). "Christ's sacrifice in behalf of man was full and complete. The condition of the atonement had been fulfilled."¹¹

God gave everything for you and me. What are you willing to sacrifice in return?

"The spirit of liberality is the spirit of heaven. This spirit finds its highest manifestation in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In our behalf the Father gave His only-begotten Son; and Christ, having given up all that He had, then gave Himself, that man might be saved. The cross of Calvary should appeal to the benevolence of every follower of the Saviour. The principle there illustrated is to give, give. . . .

"On the other hand, the spirit of selfishness is the spirit of Satan. The principle illustrated in the lives of worldlings is to get, get."¹²

Love is not selfish. Love gives.

THE UNIQUE ONE

"In His Son, God gave Himself to save from eternal ruin all who would believe in Him."¹³

The King James Version of the Bible refers to Jesus as God's "only begotten Son." The term "only begotten" does not mean that He had a beginning (since He has always existed), but this rather refers to His uniqueness in relation to God and the created universe. The term "only begotten" is translated from the Greek word *monogenes* which literally means "unique," "only," or "only one of a kind." What makes Jesus unique?

John declares Him to "the Word," equal in nature to God and always with Him (John 1:1). Paul refers to Him as "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15), and Hebrews refers to Him as "the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3).

"The Lord Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, existed from eternity, a distinct person, yet one with the Father. He was the surpass-

ing glory of heaven. He was the commander of the heavenly intelligences, and the adoring homage of the angels was received by Him as His right. He was equal with God, infinite and omnipotent."¹⁴

Christ was the Creator, the one by whom the eternal Father made everything (John 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2). Being equal in essence with God, He is self-existent with an eternal lifespan. He has the same essence as the rest of the Godhead, all-powerful and all knowing. All the attributes of God are also attributable to Jesus. Their character is one and the same. Jesus had to clarify this in John 14:9, "Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?"

In beholding Jesus, we behold God Himself. As the one and only in the bosom of the Father from all eternity (John 1:18), Jesus was uniquely qualified to represent the Father to our world.

"For unto us a **child is born**, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and **his name shall be called** Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, **The everlasting Father**, The Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

There was no other hope of eternal salvation, than for Christ (who was One with the Father) to die on our behalf. A person could only pay the penalty for his or her own sin. Not even an angel's death could suffice! "I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour" (Isaiah 43:11).

Throughout His life on earth, Jesus' unique relationship to God was brought into question (John 10:29-33). It was not until His resurrection from the dead, that His uniqueness as the divine Son of God was declared in power (Romans 1:4). In Acts 13:30-33, Paul proclaimed Jesus' resurrection by God from the dead as the consummating fulfillment of Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." "Through this man," Paul

affirmed to his hearers, "is preached unto you forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things" (Acts 13:38, 39).

Jesus Christ is the one and only way to salvation: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all..." (1 Timothy 2:5, 6). "By His human nature He is linked with man, while through His divine nature He is one with the infinite God. Help is brought within the reach of perishing souls."¹⁵ "For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Ephesians 2:18).

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6). There is no other way.

ANYONE WHO BELIEVES

So far we've seen that God pursues us with perfect love that's demonstrated through the gift of His Son. The question that comes next is: What's our part? Up until this point, there's been no action on our part. God showed the love. God paid the price. We didn't deserve any of His goodness.

John 3:16 tells us: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God did all this so that we could have an opportunity. The stipulation is that we believe.

Anyone who believes receives. "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Genesis 15:6).

Believing is the primary condition for eternal salvation. Believing is an action verb. It sets in motion a new life in Christ. As the result of believing, God invites us to join His family through baptism, a symbol of the cleansing He's given us from sin. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

It doesn't stop there, though. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12).

He will give power. He will work in you, transforming your life. And you'll accept the changes He asks you to make because you *believe* that He knows what's best.

- Believe—Believe in the Lord with your whole heart
- Receive—Receive Christ as your personal Savior
- Live—Walk in newness of life

“Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude.”¹⁶

SHOULD NOT PERISH!

A negative response to the invitation to believe in Jesus has an eternal consequence: final damnation in the judgment. We have a choice. You can choose to believe or choose not to believe—choose to accept the offer of forgiveness through Christ or not. The Lord doesn't want to condemn anyone. “The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). But He won't force. His love is gentlemanly. We must accept it wholeheartedly in order for it to be efficacious to our salvation.

This phrase in the verse serves as a reminder that without Christ, we were destined to perish. All who do not accept the pleadings of mercy will have to meet their final judgment—to perish in the lake of fire and experience eternal death.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

EVERLASTING LIFE

If we believe and accept, Christ trades death for life. Instead of perishing, you're invited to live with Him forever. “O what love, what matchless love! Fallen human beings may become so closely united with Christ that they are glorified with Him.”¹⁷

The promise of life after death offers hope to a hopeless world. But eternal life means more than just that. It starts here and now. “And this is life eternal, that they might

“It was on the earth that the love of God was revealed through Christ. It is on the earth that His children are to reflect this love through blameless lives.”

know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). “In other words, eternal life commences when we enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

“As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming we begin the life eternal. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ.”¹⁹

Eternal life means living with Christ, being vitalized by His power, following His lead. Eternal life means walking with God like Enoch did, so closely that God couldn't stand to not take him to heaven with him. Eternal life implies a purpose-filled life, one of happiness and fulfillment. Accepting eternal life means embracing God's love in all the facets of your life.

And of course, there's the perk of going to heaven and living eternally. Heaven is cheap enough. The price has been paid. Will you believe?

Receiving everlasting life is more than simply never dying. It's being in heaven, living in the mansions Christ has gone to prepare for His children. It's being with Jesus forever. And it'll be better than you can even imagine. “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

“O what love! What wondrous love! The most exalted language cannot describe the glory of heaven, nor the matchless depths of a Saviour's love.”²⁰

THINK ABOUT THIS . . .

“There is nothing so ennobling and invigorating as a study of the great themes which concern our eternal life.”²¹

We've looked briefly at this one verse: John 3:16. God wants to make

this verse a reality in your life. There is still much more to learn about His love, His sacrifice, and His plan for your relationship with Him. I encourage you to explore eternal life by experiencing God's love for yourself.

“In the contemplation of Christ we linger on the shore of a love that is measureless. We endeavor to tell of this love, and language fails us. We consider His life on earth, His sacrifice for us, His work in heaven as our advocate, and the mansions He is preparing for those who love Him, and we can only exclaim, O the height and depth of the love of Christ! ‘Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ ‘Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God’ 1 John 4:10; 3:1.

“In every true disciple this love, like sacred fire, burns on the altar of the heart. It was on the earth that the love of God was revealed through Christ. It is on the earth that His children are to reflect this love through blameless lives.”²² *R*

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The Adoption



By Barbara Montrose

A HEARTWARMING PROCESS

We've all heard of how some adoptions take place in this world. Tragically, an abandoned infant or child may have been left at the door of an orphanage. Sometimes it's even in a place far less safe than that until they were finally adopted. Either way, the little one cannot comprehend the desperation of the situation—and maybe not even fully understand it in later years. Ultimately, when grown, he or she might not even realize how horrible life would have likely been without the miracle of eventually having been adopted by someone who cares.

Adopted children are usually chosen by self-denying adoptive parents who typically must pay huge sums of money, experience long, emotional waits and many disappointments, and travel halfway around the world just to pick up one orphaned child. Before the adoption, most of these children have never had a chance to enjoy a close relationship with their biological parents. While at the orphanage, they often had to compete with dozens of other children for the fleeting affection of a hired, perhaps overburdened, caregiver. So, the adoption process is a real labor of abundant love.

WHAT ABOUT MANY OF US TODAY?

Do you sometimes feel like you're an orphan? There are mo-

ments in life when we have a little taste of what it feels like when no one really understands what we're going through. No one is there at a crucial time. It seems as if no one around you is spiritually-minded with any kind of deep, genuine love for God. You feel alone and—to some extent—abandoned. The psalmist aptly describes the deep, ultimate solitude of the human condition in his prayer to his Creator: "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee" (Psalm 73:25).

The solitude seems even keener when surrounded by lighthearted, sarcastic persons who mock at seriousness.

"Nothing can more effectually prevent or banish serious impressions and good desires than association with vain, careless, and corrupt-minded persons. Whatever attractions such persons may

possess by their wit, sarcasm, and fun, the fact that they treat religion with levity and indifference is sufficient reason why they should not be associated with. The more engaging they are in other respects, the more should their influence be dreaded as companions, because they throw around an irreligious life so many dangerous attractions."¹

Dangerous attractions! What are the dangerous attractions that the enemy of your soul is dangling before your eyes to lure you? Your heavenly Father wants to draw you away from all such garbage. Christ spoke of the drawing power of His being uplifted on the cross for our sins with the words, "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:31, 32). If we do not resist this drawing, we will have a

greater blessing than ever thought imaginable. We are loved with an everlasting love. "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together" (Romans 8:15-17).

REDEMPTION = ADOPTION

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17, 18). What a privilege and honor it is to become an adopted son or daughter brought into a wonderful family!

"God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:4-10).

Jesus Christ "was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But **as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God,** even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:10-13).

Power to really become something! What is a son of God like? When a child is adopted into a family, there are many adjustments that need to happen—even if the child is adopted as a baby. The hereditary tendencies are not similar to those of the parents, so the child learns to adapt (yes, that's "adapt" with an "a" rather than "adopt.") Are we learning to **adapt** to the ways of the One who has so graciously **adopted** us?

"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many **as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God**" (Romans 8:12-14). Are you led by His Spirit? Without this, the rest is of no avail. The Spirit of God is revealed through the experience of Christ on Calvary's cross.

"The cross of Calvary challenges, and will finally vanquish every earthly and hellish power. In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence goes forth. It is the great center of attraction; for on it Christ gave up His life for the human race. This sacrifice was offered for the purpose of restoring man to his original perfection. Yea, more, it was offered to give him an entire transformation of character, making him more than a conqueror."²

NOT ONLY A CHILD—A CLIENT!

"God's appointments and grants in our behalf are without limit. The throne of grace is itself the highest attraction because occupied by One who permits us to call Him Father. But God did not deem the principle of salvation complete while invested only with His own love. By His appointment He has placed at His altar an Advocate clothed with our nature. As our Intercessor, His office work is to introduce us to God as His sons and daughters. Christ intercedes in behalf of those who have received Him. To them He gives power, by virtue of His

own merits, to become members of the royal family, children of the heavenly King. And the Father demonstrates His infinite love for Christ, who paid our ransom with His blood, by receiving and welcoming Christ's friends as His friends. He is satisfied with the atonement made. He is glorified by the incarnation, the life, death, and mediation of His Son.

"No sooner does the child of God approach the mercy seat than he becomes the client of the great Advocate. At his first utterance of penitence and appeal for pardon Christ espouses his case and makes it His own, presenting the supplication before the Father as His own request."³

WHAT ABOUT THE SO-CALLED SMALL STUFF?

We often assume that the little things in our life don't matter much. "Don't sweat the small stuff," people say. Sure, sometimes we all tend to overestimate the importance of details that may be relatively insignificant. But on the other hand, we also need to realize that in as simple a matter as partaking of the forbidden fruit, what may have appeared as a minor incident of disobedience on the part of our first parents opened the floodgates of woe upon an entire planet. Yes, little things do indeed matter—in particular, those that are indicative of our love, loyalty, and appreciation toward our Lord and Master who has graciously adopted us in His great mercy. The spirit of rebellion in little things paves the way to significant transgression in major things. How does this occur?

Inspiration explains: " 'He that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.' By unfaithfulness in even the smallest duties, man robs his Maker of the service which is His due. This unfaithfulness reacts upon himself. He fails of gaining the grace, the power, the force of character, which may be received through an unreserved surrender to God. Living apart from Christ he is subject to Satan's temptations, and he makes mistakes in his work for the Master.



“Your heavenly Father proposes to make you a member of the royal family, that through His exceeding great and precious promises you may be a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

Because he is not guided by right principles in little things, he fails to obey God in the great matters which he regards as his special work. The defects cherished in dealing with life's minor details pass into more important affairs. He acts on the principles to which he has accustomed himself. Thus actions repeated form habits, habits form character, and by the character our destiny for time and for eternity is decided.”⁴

“Through the power of Christ men and women have broken the chains of sinful habit. They have renounced selfishness. The profane have become reverent, the drunken sober, the profligate pure. Souls that have borne the likeness of Satan have become transformed into the image of God.”⁵

NOT ONLY A CHILD—AN HEIR!

Believers in Jesus are declared to be both “sons” and “heirs.” Paul says, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; ... that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17). But the “earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation [In Greek: *apokalu psin* — “unveiling,” “revealing,” “appearing”] of the sons of God” (Romans 8:19), “waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23), as we come to our full estate as sons. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his

Son” (Romans 8:29) Foreknowledge comes before predestination (decreeing) and predestination before fulfillment. “Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Romans 8:30).

We are assured: “If ye be Christ's, then are ye ... heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). Keep in mind, however, “that the heir, as long as he is a child [a minor under age], differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all” (Galatians 4:1)—“until the time appointed of the father” (Galatians 4:2). He does not actually come into his inheritance until he is of age. So, every child of God is a “son,” and “heir of God through Christ” (Galatians 4:7). We are “heirs of salvation,” “heirs of promise,” “heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him” (Hebrews 1:14; 6:17; James 2:25), to “be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

WHAT REALLY CHARACTERIZES THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD?

“Those who are sons of God will represent Christ in character. Their works will be perfumed by the infinite tenderness, compassion, love, and purity of the Son of God. And the more completely mind and body are yielded to the Holy Spirit, the greater will be the fragrance of

our offering to Him.”⁶

“God calls for separation from the world. Will you obey? Will you come out from among them, and remain separate and distinct from them? ‘For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?’ You cannot mingle with worldlings, and partake of their spirit, and follow their example, and be at the same time a child of God. The Creator of the universe addresses you as an affectionate Father. **If you separate from the world in your affections, and remain free from its contamination, escaping the corruption that is in the world through lust, God will be your Father, He will adopt you into His family, and you will be His heir.** In place of the world, He will give you, for a life of obedience, the kingdom under the whole heavens. He will give you an eternal weight of glory and a life that is as enduring as eternity.

“Your heavenly Father proposes to make you a member of the royal family, that through His exceeding great and precious promises you may be a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. The more you partake of the character of the pure, sinless angels, and of Christ your Redeemer, the more vividly will you bear the impress of the divine, and the more faint will be the resemblance to the world. The world and Christ are at vari-

ance, because the world will not be in union with Christ. The world will also be at variance with Christ's followers. In the prayer of our Saviour to His Father, He says: 'I have given them Thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.' ⁷

It gives our heavenly Father great joy to provide this wonderful opportunity for us. Shall we not respond in tremendous gratitude?

AN APPEAL TO OUR HEARTS

Inspiration addresses the following to many who profess to be followers of Christ: "Your calling is a high, an elevated one, to glorify God in your body and spirit, which are His. You are not to measure yourself by others. The word of God has presented you an unerring pattern, a faultless example. You have dreaded the cross. It is an inconvenient instrument to lift, and because it is covered with reproach and shame, you have shunned it."⁸

"If any man will come after Me," said Jesus, 'let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' Luke 9:23. Let us follow the Saviour in His simplicity and self-denial. Let us lift up the Man of Calvary by word and by holy living. The Saviour comes very near to those who consecrate themselves to God.

If ever there was a time when we needed the working of the Spirit of God upon our hearts and lives, it is now. Let us lay hold of this divine power for strength to live a life of holiness and self-surrender.⁹

To illustrate the wondrous change wrought through this miracle, we are reminded of the famous poem, "The Touch of the Master's Hand," by Myra Brooks Welch. Please enjoy it following this article. *R*

References:

¹ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 126.

² *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 6, p. 1113.

³ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 363, 364.

⁴ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 356.

⁵ *Mind, Character, Personality*, vol. 2, p. 601.

⁶ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 7, p. 909. [Emphasis added.]

⁷ *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 44. [Emphasis added.]

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁹ *Counsels on Health*, p. 139. [Emphasis added.]

The Touch of the Master's Hand

'Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
Thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.
"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,
"Who'll start the bidding for me?"
"A dollar, a dollar. Then two! Only two?
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;
Going for three...." But no,
From the room, far back, a grey-haired man
Came forward and picked up the bow;
Then wiping the dust from the old violin,
And tightening the loosened strings,
He played a melody pure and sweet,
As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,
With a voice that was quiet and low,
Said: "What am I bid for the old violin?"
And he held it up with the bow.
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?
Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice,
And going and gone," said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand.
What changed its worth?" Swift came the reply:
"The touch of the Master's hand."
And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd
Much like the old violin.

A "mess of pottage," a glass of wine,
A game—and he travels on.
He is "going" once, and "going" twice,
He's "going" and almost "gone."
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that is wrought
By the touch of the Master's hand.



By Etienne Lombard

“Follow Me”

INTRODUCTION

In the New Testament, we can read 19 times of Jesus’ direct call to different people to follow Him 19 times. The more specific appeal of taking up their cross and following Him occurs 4 times in the 4 gospels. “And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34). However, if we branch out throughout all history, we can see this appeal take many shapes and forms. Ever since the great revolt in heaven, where Lucifer and his angels rebelled against God, all the way down to today, we can hear God’s call, “Follow Me”.

THE RICH YOUNG RULER

Matthew and Mark tell the story of the rich young man. Luke calls him the rich young ruler. Though not much detail is told of his background, it is understood he was part of the small minority that held power and riches. In the time of Jesus, Palestine was a place where the majority of the people were farmers or herders and just earned enough to live. Only a very small percentage of the population were able to accumulate vast riches by living in port cities and working as successful merchants. An even smaller sector was also rich by being part of the ruling class, part of the Sanhedrin or connected to the Roman government.

“And when [Jesus] was gone forth into the way, there came one

running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).

Notice that he came running to see Jesus. He ignored all propriety due his station and kneeled before Jesus. He wanted to show that he was a willing learner.

“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother” (Mark 10:18, 19).

“Jesus desired to test the ruler’s sincerity, and to draw from him the way in which he regarded Him as good. Did he realize that the One to whom he was speaking was the

Son of God? What was the true sentiment of his heart?"¹

"And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth" (Mark 10:20).

"This ruler had a high estimate of his own righteousness. He did not really suppose that he was defective in anything, yet he was not altogether satisfied. He felt the want of something that he did not possess. Could not Jesus bless him as He blessed the little children, and satisfy his soul want?"²

"Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me" (Mark 10:21).

"Jesus saw in this ruler just the help He needed if the young man would become a colaborer with Him in the work of salvation. If he would place himself under Christ's guidance, he would be a power for good. In a marked degree the ruler could have represented Christ; for he possessed qualifications, which, if he were united with the Saviour, would enable him to become a divine force among men. Christ, seeing into his character, loved him. Love for Christ was awakening in the ruler's heart; for love begets love. Jesus longed to see him a co-worker with Him. . . . If the ruler had then given himself to Christ, he would have grown in the atmosphere of His presence. If he had made this choice, how different would have been his future!"³

"And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions" (Mark 10:22).

"Christ gave this man a test. He called upon him to choose between the heavenly treasure and worldly greatness. The heavenly treasure was assured him if he would follow Christ. But self must yield; his will must be given into Christ's control. The very holiness of God was offered to the young ruler. He had the privilege of becoming a son of God, and a coheir with Christ to the heavenly treasure. But he must take

"If the ruler had then given himself to Christ, he would have grown in the atmosphere of His presence. If he had made this choice, how different would have been his future!"

up the cross, and follow the Saviour in the path of self-denial."⁴

"The rich young ruler represents many in our world today. God has entrusted His goods to them that they may advance His kingdom by planting the standard of truth in places where the message has never been heard. But they do not carry out God's purpose. The words, 'Deny thyself, take up thy cross, and follow me,' cut directly across their cherished plans, and they refuse to obey."⁵

"How many have come to Christ, ready to cast their interests in with His, and, like the rich young ruler, earnestly desiring to inherit eternal life. But when the cost is presented to them, when they are told that they must forsake all, houses and lands, wife and children, and count not their lives dear unto them, they go away sorrowful. They want the rich treasures of heaven, and the life that measures with the life of God, but they are not willing to give up their earthly treasures. They are not willing to surrender all to obtain the crown of life."⁶

"Only those who will become co-workers with Christ, only those who will say, Lord, all I have and all I am is Thine, will be acknowledged as sons and daughters of God. All should consider what it means to desire heaven, and yet to turn away because of the conditions laid down. Think of what it means to say 'No' to Christ. The ruler said, No, I cannot give You all. Do we say the same? The Saviour offers to share with us the work God has given us to do. He offers to use the means God has given us, to carry forward His work in the world. Only in this way can He save us."⁷

JUDAS

Judas's story is a very interesting parable from which we can learn.

The gospel of Matthew shares an interesting little story. In chapter 8 after recounting the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' success in healing many, and the multitudes that follow Him, a scribe asks to follow Jesus everywhere He goes. Jesus gave a rather cold reply, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Then another disciple asked for time to go and bury his father first. "But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22).

No more information is given regarding these two people, but shortly afterwards Matthew gives the complete list of the disciples in chapter 10.

"And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these; The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him" (Matthew 10:1-4).

"Judas had joined the disciples when multitudes were following Christ. The Saviour's teaching moved their hearts as they hung entranced upon His words, spoken in the synagogue, by the seaside, upon the mount. Judas saw the sick, the lame, the blind, flock to Jesus from the towns and cities. He saw the dying laid at His feet. He witnessed the Saviour's mighty works in healing the sick, casting out devils, and raising the dead. He felt in his own person the evidence



Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ. He did not give up his worldly ambition or his love of money. While he accepted the position of a minister of Christ, he did not bring himself under the divine molding. He felt that he could retain his own judgment and opinions, and he cultivated a disposition to criticize and accuse . . . until he finally betrayed the Lord with a kiss.

of Christ's power. He recognized the teaching of Christ as superior to all that he had ever heard. He loved the Great Teacher, and desired to be with Him. He felt a desire to be changed in character and life, and he hoped to experience this through connecting himself with Jesus."⁸

The accounts in Matthew 8:18–22 and 10:1–4 appear to be related. It would certainly explain why Judas was given charge of the group's money bag. Jesus welcomed him into his disciple group with a notice

of all that needed to be sacrificed in following Him.

In any case, Judas had a great privilege—living with Jesus during his 3 years of ministry. He heard and saw everything that Jesus said and did. He also received power to perform miracles.

However, despite all these high privileges, he still did not surrender his heart to Christ.

"The Saviour did not repulse Judas. He gave him a place among the twelve. He trusted him to do the work of an evangelist. He endowed him with power to heal the sick and to cast out devils. But Judas did not come to the point of surrendering himself fully to Christ. He did not give up his worldly ambition or his love of money. While he accepted the position of a minister of Christ, he did not bring himself under the divine molding. He felt that he could retain his own judgment and opinions, and he cultivated a disposition to criticize and accuse."⁹

"Judas was blinded to his own weakness of character, and Christ placed him where he would have an opportunity to see and correct this. As treasurer for the disciples, he was called upon to provide for the needs of the little company, and to relieve the necessities of the poor. . . . In ministering to others, Judas might have developed an unselfish spirit. But while listening daily to the lessons of Christ and witnessing His unselfish life, Judas indulged his covetous disposition. . . . Often when he did a little service for Christ, or devoted time to religious purposes, he paid himself out of this meager fund. In his own eyes these pretexts served to excuse his action; but in God's sight he was a thief."¹⁰

Judas was too worried about getting to do what he wanted, that he did not look at what God wanted him to do. What about you, dear reader? Are you too concerned with getting your way, that you don't hear God's call for you?

PILATE

After Jesus was judged by the Sanhedrin, He was brought to Pilate to be condemned to death. Pilate

was used to dealing with all kinds of people, and yet he was surprised when he saw Jesus.

"Pilate looked at the men who had Jesus in charge, and then his gaze rested searchingly on Jesus. He had had to deal with all kinds of criminals; but never before had a man bearing marks of such goodness and nobility been brought before him. On His face he saw no sign of guilt, no expression of fear, no boldness or defiance. He saw a man of calm and dignified bearing, whose countenance bore not the marks of a criminal, but the signature of heaven."¹¹

Pilate was a man who had to constantly deal with politics. He always had to think what would be of greater advantage for himself. Yet when it came to dealing with Jesus, this was not politics—this was his heart speaking to him. When interviewing Jesus, Pilate listened with his whole heart, and we can almost feel the tension rising as he was inwardly debating whether or not to submit to the calling he knows is from on high.

"Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all" (John 18:33–38).

Right at that crucial moment, those few seconds between the

asking of that vital question and the silence, Pilate determined his fate. He decided not to wait for the answer, and not to give in to the silent appeal. Even when his wife gave him a warning that he should not condemn Jesus, Pilate did not listen to heaven's warning and listened instead to the crowd.

"Pilate longed to deliver Jesus. But he saw that he could not do this, and yet retain his own position and honor. Rather than lose his worldly power, he chose to sacrifice an innocent life. How many, to escape loss or suffering, in like manner sacrifice principle. Conscience and duty point one way, and self-interest points another. The current sets strongly in the wrong direction, and he who compromises with evil is swept away into the thick darkness of guilt."¹²

MATTHEW

Let us now look at a couple of examples in the opposite direction.

"Of the Roman officials in Palestine, none were more hated than the publicans. The fact that the taxes were imposed by a foreign power was a continual irritation to the Jews, being a reminder that their independence had departed. And the tax gatherers were not merely the instruments of Roman oppression; they were extortioners on their own account, enriching themselves at the expense of the people. A Jew who accepted this office at the hands of the Romans

was looked upon as betraying the honor of his nation. He was despised as an apostate and was classed with the vilest of society."¹³

Levi (or Matthew as he is known today) was a tax collector and though not much more is known about his background, we can easily imagine that he was also well-to-do. He had the means to live an easy life, though despised by his own people. Yet when the call came, he left all to follow Jesus.

"And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him" (Luke 5:27, 28).

"Matthew 'left all, rose up, and followed Him.' There was no hesitation, no questioning, no thought of the lucrative business to be exchanged for poverty and hardship. It was enough for him that he was to be with Jesus, that he might listen to His words, and unite with Him in His work."¹⁴

"To Matthew in his wealth, and to Andrew and Peter in their poverty, the same test was brought; the same consecration was made by each. At the moment of success, when the nets were filled with fish, and the impulses of the old life were strongest, Jesus asked the disciples at the sea to leave all for the work of the gospel. So every soul is tested as to whether the desire for temporal good or for fellowship with Christ is strongest."¹⁵

NICODEMUS

"Nicodemus held a high position of trust in the Jewish nation. He was highly educated, and possessed talents of no ordinary character, and he was an honored member of the national council. With others, he had been stirred by the teaching of Jesus. Though rich, learned, and honored, he had been strangely attracted by the humble Nazarene. The lessons that had fallen from the Saviour's lips had greatly impressed him, and he desired to learn more of these wonderful truths."¹⁶

Due to his position, Nicodemus had to meet Jesus in the darkness of the night. However, that one meeting changed his life. Though he kept himself apart from Jesus for the duration of his ministry, he kept his heart open to the working of the Spirit. He was a Pharisee, well-versed in the Scriptures. Unlike his fellow Pharisees, he allowed the Word of God to convince him that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Scriptures.

During that first encounter, Jesus spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart and compared it to the wind.

"While the wind is itself invisible, it produces effects that are seen and felt. So the work of the Spirit upon the soul will reveal itself in every act of him who has felt its saving power. When the Spirit of God takes possession of the heart, it transforms the life. Sinful thoughts are put away, evil deeds are renounced;



"Due to his position, Nicodemus had to meet Jesus in the darkness of the night. However, that one meeting changed his life. Though he kept himself apart from Jesus for the duration of his ministry, he kept his heart open to the working of the Spirit. . . He allowed the Word of God to convince him that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Scriptures."

love, humility, and peace take the place of anger, envy, and strife. Joy takes the place of sadness, and the countenance reflects the light of heaven. No one sees the hand that lifts the burden, or beholds the light descend from the courts above. The blessing comes when by faith the soul surrenders itself to God. Then that power which no human eye can see creates a new being in the image of God."¹⁷

This is the work that was being done in Nicodemus' heart. He did not surrender immediately, however, God was using him where he was so that when the time was right, he then could offer his life over to the Lord completely.

"After the Lord's ascension, when the disciples were scattered by persecution, Nicodemus came boldly to the front. He employed his wealth in sustaining the infant church that the Jews had expected to be blotted out at the death of Christ. In the time of peril, he who had been so cautious and questioning was firm as a rock, encouraging the faith of the disciples, and furnishing means to carry forward the work of the gospel. He was scorned and persecuted by those who had paid him reverence in other ways. He became poor in this world's goods; yet he faltered not in the faith which had its beginning in that night conference with Jesus."¹⁸

MODERN-DAY EXAMPLES

Throughout history there are multiple examples of people who accepted the call given to them. A story relevant to our lives today is that of Eric Liddell. He was the son of Scottish missionaries in China. As a young boy his parents sent him and his brother back to Scotland to attend boarding school. In school, his gifts of speed, strength and a sharp mind soon made him the favorite. He attained many honors in rugby and as a sprinter. During his time in the University of Edinburgh, Eric was known for being the fastest runner in all of Scotland. In 1924 he went to Paris as an Olympic athlete to represent

the United Kingdom in the Olympics. He was a sports star on the rise.

However, Eric was a Christian. He had given his heart to the Lord and was determined to honor God in all he did. During the 1924 Olympics he had decided not to race in the 100-meter race (his specialty) because it was held on a Sunday. According to what he had been taught as a child, Eric believed that Sunday was the Lord's day—and even though his coaches and teammates all criticized him for not running, he stood firm on his decision to honor God in harmony with what his conscience thought to be true. He had spent the previous months training for the 400-meter race, knowing that one was going to be held during the week. He was not a favorite for this race, and when racing, he was deprived of a view because he drew the outside lane. Eric was forced to race the entire race as a sprint, won the race, and set a record for the 400-meter race that was only broken as long as 12 years later! We can truly see that God honors those who seek to honor him.

But this is not all to his story. After finishing his education, Eric set out to return to China as a missionary. Though he was famous as an athlete and he was winning more and more fame, he decided to leave it all behind and pursue his calling: working for the salvation of the Chinese people. Yet there's more. . . . World War I had started, and Japan was invading China. Fear of danger for his family, Eric sent his wife and daughters away to Canada and chose to remain in China to encourage those in need during those perilous times. In 1943, when the Japanese reached the city where he was working, Eric was put in Weihsien Internment Camp. There, Eric was a faithful example of fidelity and Christian to all in need, even though he himself was suffering from a brain tumor. When he died 6 months before liberation in 1945, he was greatly missed by all the other prisoners, since he always knew how to bring comfort through God's word.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Reader, as you look over these stories you might think to yourself, "I am not rich, I do not have any special talents as these people mentioned here." Think of the words of the Hymn # 205 in the *Reformation Hymnal*: "Jesus is Tenderly Calling"

*Jesus is waiting oh, come to Him
now
Waiting today, waiting today;
Come with thy sins, at His feet
lowly bow,
Come, and no longer delay.*

God is calling you to give Him your heart. What will your answer be? Will you follow the example of the rich young ruler, Judas, and Pilate? Or will you follow the example of Matthew, Nicodemus, and Eric Liddell?

Whatever your calling, whatever your hope, listen! "If any man will come after Me," He says, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matthew 16:24). Obeying these words, in entire dependence on the Saviour, go forth to give to the world an example of what it means to be a Christian. Yoke up with Christ. This is the only bond of the gospel. Learn daily how to carry out more acceptably the instruction Christ has given. Live as becomes the subjects of His kingdom. To carry out the words "Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven"—this is our lifework."²⁰ *R*

References:

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- ² *Ibid.*, 518.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 519.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 519.
- ⁵ *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 14, Ms 150, 1899.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, vol. 12, Ms 87, 1897.
- ⁷ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 523.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 716.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 717.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 724.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 738.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 272.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 273.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- ¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eric_Liddell
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THE POWER OF THE CROSS

By Peter D. Lausevic
[Emphasis added throughout].

Did you know that before you were born, God had a special plan for you in your life? You were not randomly born to blindly make your way in the world and try to accomplish something over a lifetime. We have some idea of how this works as God explained to Jeremiah his purpose in life:

“Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5). That purpose became the driving force in the life of the young prophet.

At one point later, when faced with severe persecution, Jeremiah described the enduring, compelling power of that calling: “Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a **burning fire shut up in my bones**, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jeremiah 1:5; 20:9).

Before Jeremiah had any kind of visible form to be considered something noticeable from a human perspective, God knew him and set him aside—ordained him—to be a prophet of truth. This reveals how much God cares and works out His purposes for each and every one of us.

And not only does God have a plan for our life, a purpose for our existence, but God works things out in our lives in order to save us. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Because God has that plan to save us, He allows things to happen that seem to be against us in order to work it all out for our good if we respond to Him by our love, and are willing to cooperate with His purposes. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28, 29).

SAMSON

Before the birth of their miracle child, the parents of Samson were given specific instructions on developing the physical and mental health of their promised child in order to fulfill the purpose that God had for him before he was born.

“Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink, and eat not any unclean thing: For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb: and **he shall begin to deliver Israel** out of the hand of the Philistines” (Judges 13:4, 5).

God had a plan for Samson’s life that would have resulted in a satisfaction that only comes through obedience. Instead, however, Samson used the talents God gave him for his own selfish, misguided purposes and he suffered bitter consequences as a result. He associated with the enemies of God and explicitly disregarded the requirements that God had for His people. Instead of behaving consistently as a leader of Israel (a separate, distinct, uniquely theocratic nation), Samson united with unbelievers. “And Samson went down to Timnath, and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines” (Judges 14:1).



“And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes” (Judges 16:28). This statement is coming from a heart that is repentant, a heart that finally recognizes the wisdom in the ways and works of God. “In suffering and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance.”

Sadly, this young man with a divine call on his life began chasing after earthly happiness instead of pursuing the will of God. What would have happened if he had been as faithful as his parents in obeying the plan that God had for him? “Had Samson obeyed the divine commands as faithfully as his parents had done, his would have been a nobler and happier destiny. But association with idolaters corrupted him. The town of Zorah being near the country of the Philistines, Samson came to mingle with them on friendly terms. Thus in his youth intimacies sprang up, the influence of which darkened his whole life.”¹ By following God’s plan he would have had a happy life. We as humans too often seek happiness in the wrong ways and in the wrong places. But happiness is found in being and doing the will of our Creator who knows best how

His creation works and what kind of life will bring true happiness to His creatures.

When he married an unbeliever, “[Samson] did not ask whether he could better glorify God when united with the object of his choice, or whether he was placing himself in a position where he could not fulfill the purpose to be accomplished by his life. To all who seek first to honor Him, God has promised wisdom; but there is no promise to those who are bent upon self-pleasing.”²

In spite of all this derelict irresponsibility towards duty in the fulfillment of his purpose, Samson still had some measure of success in defending the Hebrew people from the Philistines. However, his continued disregard for the warnings God had given his people in mingling with the heathen had their natural consequences. Satan

first entices us to disregard the law of God and then when we follow his temptations, he leaves us to the consequences of our own actions.

Most of us are familiar with the tragic outcome that Samson suffered as a result of repeated folly:

“And when Delilah saw that [Samson] had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand. And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him. And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he

wist not that the LORD was departed from him. But the Philistines took him, and **put out his eyes**, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house" (Judges 16:18–21).

"What a change to him who had been the judge and champion of Israel!—now weak, blind, imprisoned, degraded to the most menial service! Little by little he had violated the conditions of his sacred calling. God had borne long with him; but when he had so yielded himself to the power of sin as to betray his secret, the Lord departed from him."³ Satan truly mocks those who follow his ways. This is nothing new, as he has been doing that since the very beginning. "And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the **accuser of our brethren** is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night" (Revelation 12:10).

THE CROSS OF CHRIST AND REPENTANCE

After being imprisoned and made sport of by the pagans in their service to their false gods, something happened to this morally weak, spiritually poor leader who had been called to a high purpose but had neglected and abandoned the plan of God for his life. "And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O LORD God, **remember me**, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes" (Judges 16:28). These are the same words of the thief on the cross, who said unto Jesus, "LORD, **remember me** when thou comest into thy kingdom" (Luke 23:42). In other words, this statement is coming from a heart that is repentant, a heart that finally recognizes the wisdom in the ways and works of God. "In suffering and humiliation, a sport for the Philistines, Samson learned more of his own weakness than he had ever known before; and his afflictions led him to repentance. As his hair grew,

his power gradually returned; but his enemies, regarding him as a fettered and helpless prisoner, felt no apprehensions."⁴

We know that Samson's repentance was genuine, as he is mentioned in the hall of faith listed in Hebrews chapter 11. Why, with such a failure, is it possible still to be saved? It is the power of the cross of Calvary. "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved **it is the power of God**" (1 Corinthians 1:18). Why is there power in the cross? "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin**" (1 John 1:7).

Through suffering, Samson had a chance to view Jesus and His cross. It is seeing this cross that brings salvation, no matter what we have neglected in the fulfillment of our purpose and no matter how far we have fallen. "He who desires salvation should fix his mind upon the cross of Calvary. It is there that the sinner may behold what sin has done. There he can see the infinite sacrifice that has been made to redeem him from the

penalty of the broken law of God. As the transgressor realizes his lost condition, he sees in Christ his only hope of salvation. From the cross he learns precious lessons of the life, the self-denial, the self-sacrifice, the goodness, the mercy and love of the Son of God, who gave himself for us. Calvary portrays the matchless attributes of the divine character. As he looks to the cross, he will hate sin; for he will understand that it was sin that rejected, reproached, denied, scourged, and crucified the Majesty of Heaven. He will love the Father, who gave all Heaven to men in the gift of his only begotten Son. His heart will be filled with an eager desire for the knowledge of God, and for an understanding of the plan of salvation. He who has had a vivid view of the cross, will hate sin, and love righteousness. His doubts will vanish in the clear light reflected from the cross of Calvary."⁵

For this reason, "all that we possess, our mental and physical powers, all the blessings of the present and the future life, are delivered to us stamped with the cross of Calvary."⁶ Even if we do not fulfill our purpose, Jesus, because of His great love for the





“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”

(Galatians 6:7).

human race, will not neglect His plan. “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. **For this purpose** the Son of God was manifested, **that he might destroy the works of the devil**” (1 John 3:8). Yes, the devil entrapped Samson and ruined his life—but Jesus our Saviour is greater than our failures, greater than our disappointments, greater than all the losses we have accumulated. He “hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace**, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light **through the gospel**” (2 Timothy 1:9, 10).

All this is available for us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also

to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). And that gospel is centered in the cross of Calvary. “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). Whatever it takes, whatever process we have to go through, Jesus our dear and true Friend is bringing us to the foot of the cross where there is salvation. “Hanging upon the cross Christ was the gospel. . . Will not our church members keep their eyes fixed on a crucified and risen Saviour, in whom their hopes of eternal life are centered? This is our message, our argument, our doctrine, our warning to the impenitent, our encouragement for the sorrowing, the hope for every believer.”⁷

Until we personally come to the cross, we will be wandering in this world without a purpose and without that genuine happiness that carries no regrets. “In genuine, saving faith, there is trust in God, through the belief in the great

atoning sacrifice made by the Son of God on Calvary. In Christ, the justified believer beholds his only hope and deliverer.”⁸

Jesus willingly went to the cross, knowing the cost before He came to this world. His love for the sinner was so great that in His divine wisdom and love, He gave up the heavenly universe to save even people like Samson, who chose the wrong path irrespective of the guidance given him. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5–8).

CONSEQUENCES

Samson had no time to remedy what he had sown. “Be not

deceived; God is not mocked: for **whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.** For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:7, 8). But that does not mean all is lost! "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but **he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire**" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Because of the power of the cross, the finally penitent Samson will at last be saved. Praise be to our merciful God! Yet in all such situations, there is still some measure of eternal loss. How? Why?

"Every sin, every unrighteous action, every transgression of the law of God, tells with a thousandfold more force upon the actor than the sufferer. Every time one of the glorious faculties with which God has enriched man is abused or misused, that faculty loses forever a portion of its vigor and will never be as it was before the abuse it suffered. Every abuse inflicted upon our moral nature in this life is felt not only for time but for eternity. **Though God may forgive the sinner, yet eternity will not make up that voluntary loss sustained in this life.**"⁹

The psalmist warns us: "I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints: but let them not turn again to folly" (Psalm 85:8).

The earlier—the sooner—one turns his life around, the better it will be in the end. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (Ephesians 5:16). "We are admonished to redeem the time. But time squandered can never be recovered. We cannot call back even one moment. The only way in which we can redeem our time is by **making the most of that which remains**, by being coworkers with God in His great plan of redemption."¹⁰

We see the example of Saul the persecutor who became the greatest evangelist that the world has ever known—second only to Christ Himself, of course. We can see that

this man of God had at least some time to rectify the damage he had done. This is why the earlier we experience this kind of conversion, the better.

Why is it that Paul held such a power? "To Paul the cross was the one object of supreme interest. Ever since he had been arrested in his career of persecution against the followers of the crucified Nazarene he had never ceased to glory in the cross. At that time there had been given him a revelation of the infinite love of God, as revealed in the death of Christ; and a marvelous transformation had been wrought in his life, bringing all his plans and purposes into harmony with heaven. From that hour he had been a new man in Christ. He knew by personal experience that when a sinner once beholds the love of the Father, as seen in the sacrifice of His Son, and yields to the divine influence, a change of heart takes place, and henceforth Christ is all and in all."¹¹

And what was the final result? What would he be looking for? "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:6–8).

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

The Lord is calling you today to take up your cross. There is salvation in the cross. It looks like destruction and complete loss, but it is the secret of salvation. "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and **take up his cross daily**, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but **whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it**" (Luke 9:23, 24).

"The cross, the cross; lift it . . . and in the act of raising it you will be astonished to find that it raises you, it supports you. In adversity, privation, and sorrow

it will be a strength and a staff to you. You will find it all hung with mercy, compassion, sympathy, and inexpressible love. It will prove to you a pledge of immortality."¹²

And why the cross? In accepting the cross we have a complete transformation. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, **he is a new creature**: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). What happens the moment we come in full surrender to that very detestable cross? "As the sinner, drawn by the power of Christ, approaches the uplifted cross, and **prostrates himself before it, there is a new creation**. A new heart is given him. He becomes a new creature in Christ Jesus."¹³

Why do we need that new heart? "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26). "Christianity proposes a reformation in the heart. What Christ works within, will be worked out under the dictation of a converted intellect. The plan of beginning outside and trying to work inward has always failed, and always will fail. **God's plan with you is to begin at the very seat of all difficulties**, the heart, and then from out of the heart will issue the principles of righteousness; the reformation will be outward as well as inward."¹⁴

Jesus Christ, from the beams coming down the ages from the cross of Calvary, is calling you today. Will you come to His cross and then take up yours? *R*

References:

- ¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 562.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 563.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 566.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 566.
- ⁵ *The Signs of the Times*, July 6, 1888.
- ⁶ *The Review and Herald*, December 14, 1886.
- ⁷ *The SDA Bible Commentary* [E. G. White Comments], vol. 6, p. 1113.
- ⁸ *Selected Messages*, bk. 3, p. 192.
- ⁹ *This Day With God*, p. 350.
- ¹⁰ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 342.
- ¹¹ *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 245.
- ¹² *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 47.
- ¹³ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 162.
- ¹⁴ *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 35.

50th Annual Campmeeting – Acaxochitlán, Mexico

Acaxochitlán, Mexico—Every year, the Mexican Union holds a campmeeting, and members gather from all over the country for the event. This April, the 50th National Campmeeting, entitled “Prepared for Eternity,” took place in Acaxochitlán, Hidalgo. The five days (April 13–17) were packed with activities—messages by Union leaders, local pastors, and GC President, Brother Eli Tenorio, plus the missionary school graduation ceremony, baptisms, a children’s dedication, and time in fellowship.



Health Seminar – Zuurbekom, South Africa

Zuurbekom, South Africa—A health seminar, entitled “The Healing Power of Plants”, was held in Zuurbekom on Sunday, March 13. During the seminar, the 27 attendees learned about common plants and their medicinal properties. Zuurbekom is an agricultural area with many farming plots. Our church property here has ongoing activities with the aim of serving and engaging the local community.



Spring Concert - Toronto, Canada

On the evening of March 27th, a spring concert was held at the SDARM Church in Toronto, Canada. The Youth Orchestra and Choir made that evening a memorable event, not only for the members of our church but also for the 25–30 guests, many of whom visited us for the first time. The aim of the music was to uplift the thoughts and feelings of the audience, and to transport them from the gloom of worldwide pestilence and a war-torn world to the realm of divine joy and peace. With grateful hearts, we testify that this lofty goal was attained, even beyond our expectations.

Canvassing in Tijuana and Tecate, Mexico

A group of 30 brethren, most of them young people, traveled from Colombia to Mexico in late 2021 for a challenging and successful canvassing experience in the cities of Tijuana and Tecate, along the Mexico–USA border. They were supported also by our brethren in Los Angeles and San Bernardino (USA). The young people had an extraordinary experience visiting homes, talking about health, sowing hope, praying for families, and distributing books, magazines, and Bibles. Many people were reached, and it was 40 wonderful days of labor.



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MOVING? Please let us know.

A HERO ON THE ROAD TO THE CROSS

We all like stories about heroes. A hero is someone who bravely does something that's not easy as a way of helping others that need it. Firemen and policemen work very hard and put themselves in a lot of danger to keep people safe. Many doctors and nurses do, too, and even some other kinds of people we may not even think of.

There are lots of ways to be a hero. The key is for us to not think only of ourselves, but for others and how to help them in a time of need.

In a world full of problems and troubles, it's good to think about heroes because they show us how we can become heroes, too. Some famous heroes in the Bible are Job, Noah, Moses, David, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Esther, Paul—and of course, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells their history and that of many others. We should read and re-read the stories of their lives and learn what made them heroes and think of how to be like them.

Today we're going to talk about a hero who was not so famous, but his name is in the Bible. This man comes into the picture when Jesus the Saviour had just had the heavy wooden cross forced onto His back. The Romans were being very mean, but Jesus was patient the whole time. He had not had anything to eat or

drink for many hours, He had not been given a chance to sleep, and He had been scourged (whipped with sharp metal pieces that made His skin bleed). Now the cruel soldiers expected Him to carry the huge cross on His back on the way to be crucified. His human body was not strong enough, so He fell fainting to the ground. Now who would be willing to carry that cross?

Simon of Cyrene, a kind stranger, saw what was happening. He heard the crowd yelling and making fun of Jesus. When the people saw Simon, they quickly grabbed him and put

the cross on Simon's shoulders.

Before then, Simon had not been a follower of Christ. But he felt that to bear the cross for Jesus was a blessing. He was very glad he got to bear that cross and he soon became a follower of the Master.

Sometimes we see something that's very hard to do. But we also see it would be good if someone would just go ahead and do it to help everyone. Why not be that person? Let's learn to be a hero like Simon of Cyrene! We'll be blessed just like he was.—BHM.

