

# THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Apr - Jun 2018

**Why did Jesus have to die?**

P.5

**The end of grace?**

P.16

**The day I lost my wedding ring**

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# One death, one resurrection

Many dailies carry an *obituary* column listing recent deaths with their photographs, birth and death dates, and some words of encouragement and hope. Some readers routinely skip this column because it reminds them of their own death.

Many tombstones also carry inscriptions like:

*Name, date of birth, date of death*

*Rest in peace*

*Remembered dearly by family and friends*

*Awaiting resurrection*

*"I [Jesus] am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live." (John 11:25-26)*

We do all these in the hope that one day, our deceased ones will come back to life, and be reunited with us. Is this really possible?

Well, one person's death and resurrection has actually made that possible. His name is Jesus Christ. His Script, the Bible, has a resurrection column, and the good news is: your name is in it!

## One for all

Because Jesus is Creator and Sustainer of all things, the entire human race is bound up in him, albeit mystically. Here are some verses to affirm that.

"All things have been created through Him [Jesus] and for Him. He is before all things, and *in Him all things hold together.*"<sup>1</sup>

"...the fullness of Him *who fills all in all*...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through *all and in all.*"<sup>2</sup>

"For *in him* we live and move and have our being."<sup>3</sup>

That means all humanity is *included* in his life, death and resurrection.

## One death

As Jesus represents humanity, his death is humanity's death. He took *all* our sins – past, present and future, and 'light' and 'heinous' sins – into himself and destroyed them on the cross. That's why scripture declares, *when he died we died.*



by  
Dr. P. Sellappan

Apostle Paul writes: "...one [Jesus] *died for all, and therefore all died*...just as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, ...death came to *all* people, because *all* sinned."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus didn't just die *for* us, but he died<sup>4</sup> *as* us. Our old, sinful man died with him on the cross. Because he died *our* death, we don't have to live that old life anymore. That's why Paul tells us, "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, he *is* a *new* creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."<sup>6</sup> We now live the new life.

## One resurrection

Jesus died and was buried. But he rose from the grave and appeared to his disciples over a period of 40 days in different ways/settings. Then he ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God in power, glory and majesty.

But he didn't go there *solo* (*alone*). He took all of humanity with him. That means we too are seated with him in power, glory and majesty. While it doesn't appear so, that is what he has accomplished for us. He did that for us, *as* us, whether we know it or not, believe it or not, feel it or not. That's the truth about our life.

That's why scripture tells us, *when he rose, we rose, and when he ascended, we ascended. He is seated on the right hand of God, and so are we.* That's how God sees us in the *spiritual* realm. Thanks to Jesus who made all this possible.

Apostle Paul writes, "For if, by the trespass of the one man [first Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! Consequently, just as *one* [person's] trespass resulted in condemnation for *all* people, so also one [person's] righteous act resulted in justification and life for *all* people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many [all] were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many [all] will be made righteous."<sup>7</sup>

## Jesus sums up our life

Jesus, representing all humanity, has included all people in his death and resurrection. What God accom-



<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:16-17

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:22-23;5:6

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>7</sup> Romans 5:17-19

# THE Plain Truth

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# What our readers say:

Dear Editor, I am writing to tell you how delightful that I have been able to “rediscover” the Plain Truth magazine. To be honest, I started subscribing and reading this magazine over 30 years ago when I was a student in Singapore. Though I was not accepting of the faith yet at that time, I remember being mesmerized by the Godly truth written in there. Over the many years and over many different addresses, I lost track of The Plain Truth address and it did not occur to me to look out for it. However I remember the impact the magazine had on me. Lately over the past year or so, I cannot recall how, I came into contact with the magazine again and promptly responded by including myself in the mailing list, once more. Once again, I had been restored to what originally moved my heart 30 years ago. In gratitude of the current wonderful effort and work your magazine has done in proclaiming Godly truth to the world, I have transferred RM3000 to the Plain Truth account. Thank you and your team. Keep the Spirit alive. Shalom and sincerely in Christ.

**Jack Lee**  
Singapore

*Ed.: God often works in mysterious ways and this definitely is one such incident! (I was reunited with my former housemate and friend after 40 long years through another person who happened to know him during a casual conversation while doing prison ministry! Since our reunion we have been calling and visiting each other quite regularly. God often enters our 'lost and found' stories.) Thanks Jack for your generous contribution and participation in this ministry.*

The Plain Truth is very informative and insightful. It provides a fresh and new perspective on several issues on Christianity, the bible, and world affairs. Keep it up! May God bless you all.

**V Rajan**  
Sungei Buloh

The Plain Truth is stimulating and interesting. It gives us Godly wisdom to face this challenging world. It keeps us focussed on our Creator.

**Lim S C**  
Klang

The Plain Truth broadens my knowledge of the Bible. It relates the Bible to our everyday life.

**Bobby Ng**  
Kuala Lumpur

The Plain Truth articles are expository and thought provoking. They make the scriptures come alive. The articles on personal encounters with God are inspiring and make us think more deeply of God's love for us. You are doing a wonderful job bringing the Gospel to others. Keep it up. God bless you.

**Peter Sebastian**  
Kuala Kangsar

The Plain Truth articles are very inspiring and informative. It's a good Christian magazine.

**Peter Lee Weng Onn**  
Alor Setar

The Plain Truth articles have changed my way of thinking and have strengthened my faith in God.

May God's showers of blessing be with all you faithful servants of God.

**Francis Tan**  
Singapore

What a magazine that is filled with so many life ideas. How can you afford sending such a quality magazine free to over 12,000 people every issue. I love the magazine and thank you for your generosity.

**Reader**  
Selangor

Every time I receive the Plain Truth, I'm reminded how fast months fly. Your magazine is a marker of time for me! Before reading, I like to flip through the whole copy to see what's in store. And it struck me that your editorial team is not afraid to have blank space in your pages. No wonder it has a "lightness" to it, even though some of your articles are heavy stuff. The emphasis (italicizing) of certain phrases/sentences helps me to stop and ponder over the points presented.

**Reader**  
Selangor

The Plain Truth contains articles of great interest. Messages of love are spread throughout the magazine—love all and hurt none. The articles are inspiring and the references make it easy to read and understand the Bible.

**Harjit Singh**  
Ipoh

The Plain Truth is a very good magazine. It enhances my faith and helps me in my daily life. It also helps me to find answers to life's most important questions.

**Winne Fam**  
Petaling Jaya

The Plain Truth is really interesting and meaningful. I really appreciate your sacrificial ministry to publish this great magazine. It helps me a lot to overcome this illusive world.

**Salai Lau Jyan Shan**  
Bukit Mertajam

The Plain Truth is interesting and informative. It gives hope to those who seek answers to life's questions. It guides me to live a better life and reduces my stress. Thank you!

**Wong Choi Ying**  
Ipoh

The Plain Truth surely is a magazine of Christian understanding. We are confused and find it hard to understand why there is so much suffering in this world. The articles explain in great detail why this is so, and in the process, we learn about God's great love for us, His children.

**Boey Chee Ho**  
Penang

The Plain Truth Magazine is an exceptional scripture-based magazine and I am glad to be included in your mailing list. To this day I am still using some of the articles from your magazine for teaching and references. Thank you. God bless.

**Reader**

I would like to continue subscribing to your magazine for the next few years. I have been enjoying all your articles for the past few years. Please continue your great work. It fills my days and nights with the love of the Almighty. God bless everyone who is doing this wonderful work. I hope you will continue to send me your magazine.

**P Paranjothi Yanok**  
Perak

I'm happy to see that The Plain Truth has come alive. Praise and thank God. And to all you good people who made it possible for this magazine to touch so many of the readers' hearts, I thank you. May all of your efforts reap a bountiful harvest for the future. Enclosed is a small donation.

**William Gomez**  
Butterworth

The Plain Truth is well written and enlightening and the encouraging articles help us to be more thankful to God who is all merciful and good to us all.

**Florence Lee**  
Singapore

After all these years you still remember to send me the magazine. That's simply fantastic! Needless to say, your magazine is most lively and spiritually enlightening. I enclose a small token that the good work may continue to spread.

**Albert Ng**  
Alor Star

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

# Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

Jesus had an amazingly productive ministry, teaching and healing thousands. He attracted large crowds and had potential for much more. He could have healed thousands more by traveling to the Jews and Gentiles who lived in other areas.

But Jesus allowed this work to come to a sudden end. He could have avoided arrest, but he chose to die instead of expanding his ministry. Although his teachings were important, he had come not just to teach, but also to die. Death was an important part of Jesus' ministry. This is the way we remember him, through the cross as a symbol of Christianity or through the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Our Savior is a Savior who died.

The Old Testament tells us that God appeared on earth on several occasions. If Jesus wanted only to heal and teach, he could have simply appeared. But he did more: he became a human. Why? Here's an important reason: so he could die. To understand Jesus, we need to understand his death. His death is part of the gospel message and something all Christians should know about.

## Born to die

Jesus said, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."<sup>1</sup> He came to give his life, to die, and his death would result in salvation for others. This is why he came to earth. His blood was poured out for others.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus warned his disciples that he would suffer and die, but they did not seem to believe it:

Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"<sup>3</sup>

Jesus knew that he must die, because the Scriptures said so. "Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?"<sup>4</sup>

Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.... "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day."<sup>5</sup>

It happened according to God's plan: Herod and Pilate did only what God "had decided beforehand should happen."<sup>6</sup> In the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus knew that he would soon be crucified, Jesus asked his Father if there might be some other way, but there was none.<sup>7</sup> His death was necessary for our salvation.

by  
Dr Michael  
Morrison

## The suffering servant

It was written in the Old Testament, Jesus said. Where was it written? Isaiah 53 is one of the prophecies. Jesus quoted Isaiah 53:12 when he said: "It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment."<sup>8</sup> Jesus, although without sin, was to be counted among sinners. Notice what else is written in Isaiah 53:

"Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.



For the transgression of my people he was stricken.... Though he had done no violence ... it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer ... the Lord makes his life a guilt offering.... He will bear their iniquities.... He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Isaiah describes someone who suffers not for his own sins, but for the sins of others. Although this man would be "cut off from the land of the living", that would not be the end of the story. "He will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many.... He will see his offspring and prolong his days".

What Isaiah wrote, Jesus fulfilled. He laid down his life for his sheep.<sup>9</sup> In his death, he carried our sins and suffered for our transgressions; he was punished so that we might have peace with God. Through his suffering and death, our spiritual illness is healed; we are justified, accepted by God.

### Dying an accursed death

"Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse," says Deuteronomy 21:23. Because of this verse, Jews considered any crucified person to be condemned by God. As Isaiah wrote, people would consider him "stricken by God."

The Jewish leaders probably thought that Jesus' disciples would give up after their leader was killed. It happened just as they hoped – the crucifixion shattered the disciples' hopes. They were dejected and said, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." But their hopes were dramatically restored when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection. Then, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled them with new conviction to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ. They had unshakable faith in the least likely hero: a crucified Messiah.

Peter told the Jewish leaders, "The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree."<sup>11</sup> By using the word *tree*, Peter reminded the leaders about the curse involved in crucifixion. But the shame was not on Jesus, he said – it was on the people who crucified him. God had blessed Jesus because he did not deserve the curse he suffered. God had reversed the stigma and shame.

Paul referred to the same curse in Galatians 3:13: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.'" Jesus became a curse on our behalf so we could escape the curse of the law, which is death. He became something he was not, so that we could become something we were not. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."<sup>12</sup>

He became sin for us, so that we might be declared righteous through him. Because he suffered what we deserved, he redeemed us from the curse of the law. "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him." Because he suffered death, we can enjoy peace with God.

### Message of the cross

The disciples never forgot the shameful way that Jesus died. Indeed, sometimes that was the focus of the message: "We preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles."<sup>13</sup> Paul even called the gospel "the message of the cross." Paul reminded the Galatians that "before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified."<sup>14</sup> That was how he summarized the way that he preached the gospel.

Why is the cross good news? Because the cross is the means by which Jesus rescued us from death. Paul focused on the cross because it is the key to Jesus being good news for us. We will not be raised into glory unless in Christ we are made "the righteousness of God." Only then do we join Jesus in his glory. The crucifixion is part of the process by which we are transformed from the old creation to the new.

Paul says that Jesus died "for us;"<sup>15</sup> he also says that he died "for our sins."<sup>16</sup> "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree."<sup>17</sup> Paul also says that we died with Christ.<sup>18</sup> Though our union with him in faith, we participate in his death.

It is as if we were on the cross, receiving the consequences that our sins deserved. But Jesus did it for us, and because he did it, we can be justified, or proclaimed as righteous. He takes our sin and death; he gives us righteousness and life. The prince became a pauper, so that we paupers might become princes.

Although Jesus used the word *ransom* to describe our rescue, the ransom wasn't paid to anyone in particular – this is a figure of speech to indicate that it cost Jesus an enormous amount to set us free. In the same way, Paul talks about Jesus redeeming us, buying our freedom, but he didn't pay anyone.

God loves people – but he hates sin, because sin hurts people. In the death of Jesus, our sins are set aside. But this does not mean that a loving Jesus appeared or "paid off" an angry God. The Father is just as merciful as Jesus is, and Jesus is just as angry about sin as the Father is. He is angry at sin because sin hurts the people he loves. Jesus is the Judge who condemns,<sup>19</sup> as well as the Judge who loves sinners so much that he dies for them.

When God forgives us, he does not simply wipe away sin and pretend it never existed. Sins have serious consequences – consequences we can see in the cross of Christ. Humanity's tendency to sin cost Jesus pain and shame and death.

The gospel reveals that God acts righteously in forgiving us;<sup>20</sup> his mercy is part of his righteous character. He does not ignore our sins, but takes care of them in Jesus Christ. Metaphorically, God presented Jesus as a sacrifice for our forgiveness. Sin has consequences, and Jesus volunteered to suffer the consequences on our behalf. The cross demonstrates God's love as well as his justice.<sup>21</sup>

As Isaiah says, we have peace with God because

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 20:28  
<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:28  
<sup>3</sup> Matthew 16:21-22  
<sup>4</sup> Mark 9:12; 9:31  
<sup>5</sup> Luke 24:26-27, 46  
<sup>6</sup> Acts 4:28  
<sup>7</sup> Luke 22:42  
<sup>8</sup> Luke 22:37  
<sup>9</sup> John 10:15  
<sup>10</sup> Luke 24:21  
<sup>11</sup> Acts 5:30  
<sup>12</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:21  
<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:23  
<sup>14</sup> Galatians 3:1  
<sup>15</sup> Romans 5:6-8;  
2 Corinthians 5:14

of what Christ did. We were once enemies of God, but through Christ we have been brought near.<sup>22</sup> In other words, we have been reconciled to God through the cross. It is a basic Christian belief that our relationship with God depends on Jesus Christ, including his death.

Christianity is not a list of things to do – it is accepting that Christ has done everything we need to be right with God – and this was done on the cross. “When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son.”<sup>23</sup> God reconciled the universe through Christ, “making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”<sup>24</sup> He did this before we believed it, before we were even born. Since we are reconciled through him, all our sins are forgiven – reconciliation, forgiveness and justification all mean the same thing: peace with God.

## Victory!

Paul uses an interesting image of salvation when he writes that Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities” by making “a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”<sup>25</sup> He uses the word for a military parade: the winning general brings captured enemy soldiers in a victory parade at home. They are disarmed, humiliated, and put on display. Paul’s point is that on the cross, Jesus did this to our enemies.

What looked like a shameful death for Jesus was actually a glorious triumph for God’s plan, because it is through the cross that Jesus won victory over enemy powers, including Satan, sin and death. Their claim on us has been fully satisfied in the death of the innocent victim. They cannot demand any more than what he has already paid. They have nothing further to threaten us with.

“By his death,” we are told, Jesus was able to “destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil.”<sup>26</sup> “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.”<sup>27</sup> Victory was won on the cross.

## Sacrifice

Jesus’ death is also described as a sacrifice. The idea of sacrifice draws on the rich imagery of Old Testament sacrifices. Isaiah 53:10 calls our Savior a “guilt offering.” John the Baptist calls him the Lamb “who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>28</sup> Paul calls him a “sacrifice of atonement,” a “sin offering,” a “Passover lamb,” a

“fragrant offering.”<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 10:12 calls him a “sacrifice for sins.” John calls him “the atoning sacrifice for our sins.”<sup>30</sup>

Several terms are used to describe what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Different New Testament authors use different words or images to convey the idea. The exact terminology or mechanism is not essential. What is important is that we are saved through the death of Jesus. “By his wounds we are healed.” He died to set us free, to remove our sins, to suffer our punishment, to purchase our salvation. How should we respond? “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”<sup>31</sup>

## Seven Images of Salvation

The New Testament uses a wide range of images to express the richness of the work of Christ. We may describe these images as analogies, models or metaphors. Each gives part of the picture:

**Ransom:** a price paid to achieve someone’s freedom. The emphasis falls on the idea of being freed, not the nature of the price.

**Redemption:** “buying back,” or for a slave, buying freedom.

**Justification:** being put right with God, as if declared by a court to be in the right.

**Salvation:** deliverance or rescue from a dangerous situation. The word can also suggest restoration to wholeness, a healing.

**Reconciliation:** the repair of a broken relationship. God reconciles us to him. He acts to restore a friendship, and we respond to his initiative.

**Adoption:** making us legal children of God. Jesus gives us a change in status, from outsider to family member. The phrase “born again” suggests a different way to enter the family.

**Forgiveness:** This can be seen in two ways. In legal or financial terms, forgiveness is like the cancellation of a debt. In terms of personal relationship, forgiveness means the setting aside of personal hurt or injury.□

<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4

<sup>17</sup> 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18

<sup>18</sup> Romans 6:3-8

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 25:31-46

<sup>20</sup> Romans 1:17

<sup>21</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 2:13

<sup>23</sup> Romans 5:10

<sup>24</sup> Colossians 1:20

<sup>25</sup> Colossians 2:15

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 2:14

<sup>27</sup> 1 John 3:8

<sup>28</sup> John 1:29

<sup>29</sup> Romans 3:25; 8:3; 1 Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 5:2

<sup>30</sup> 1 John 2:2; 4:10

<sup>31</sup> 1 John 4:11

Continued from page 2

plished for us in Christ is the truth about our life. We call this *objective truth*. It is *not* based on our belief, feelings, or experiences.

Our belief, feelings and experiences don’t always reflect that objective truth. We still sin, have pains and aches, fears and worry. We call this *subjective experience*. While our personal [subjective] experience may be way off from the objective truth (realized in Christ), we can trust the Holy Spirit to renew our mind and take us ever closer to the objective truth.

Our righteousness is based *solely* on what Christ has accomplished for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension, not on our good works or good behaviour. That means *our salvation is absolutely guaranteed*. Living a Godly life led by the Holy Spirit, however, will make our life more joyful and satisfying.

In his death and resurrection, Jesus has included the entire human race. We died and rose with him. Waking up to this reality and participating in *his* risen life is what the gospel is about.□



# Jesus - Alive Forevermore!

Jesus did not stay dead for long. Early Sunday morning, near sunrise, some disciples discovered that the Son of God had risen. They did not see the resurrection itself, but they saw Jesus, alive and well. Over a period of 40 days, they saw Jesus on numerous occasions. Then he rose into heaven.

But Jesus is not taking a vacation. His ministry continues, even in heaven. He serves and leads the church, interceding for us, helping us, preparing us for eternal glory. Christ will return, and after he has subdued every enemy, he will give everything to the Father. Mission accomplished.

## Resurrection

Many people have a hard time believing that Jesus rose from the dead. In their experience, dead people always stay dead. They are skeptical of such an extraordinary claim. The disciples must have been mistaken, they say, or else they made it up.

The disciples were skeptical, too. When they went to the tomb, they expected to find a body. When they did not find a body, they first assumed that someone had stolen it. They did not expect a resurrection. It was only when Jesus *appeared* to them that they believed that he was alive again.

Most Jews believed that there would be a resurrection at the end of the age, when everyone would rise for judgment.<sup>1</sup> But a resurrection into glory before the end was just as unexpected as a crucified Messiah. Although Jesus had taught both these ideas,<sup>2</sup> the disciples didn't understand or believe this. They expected him to stay dead.

But if Jesus is the sinless Son of God, then he is unique among the billions of people, and he did not deserve death. We should be surprised if he were *not* resurrected. We also have evidence that gives us confidence that Jesus rose from the dead.

Many of us also have experiences in our own lives that convince us that God exists, that he sometimes causes miracles, that Jesus is alive and the Holy Spirit is active in his people. This gives us further reason to believe that Jesus is alive.

## Significance of the resurrection

The resurrection meant life for Jesus—but a far better life than what he had on earth, the glory that he had with the Father before his incarnation.<sup>3</sup> By his resurrection, he was powerfully revealed as the Son of God<sup>4</sup>—the resurrection declared who he had been all

by  
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Morrison

along. The resurrection proves that God will judge the world through Christ.<sup>5</sup>

But the resurrection also means life for *us*. As Paul says, we will “be saved through his life.”<sup>6</sup> If you “believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”<sup>7</sup> “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.”<sup>8</sup> Our salvation depends not just on Jesus' death, but also his resurrection.<sup>9</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Daniel 12:2

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16:21; 17:23; Mark 9:9

<sup>3</sup> John 17:5

<sup>4</sup> Romans 1:4

<sup>5</sup> Acts 17:31

<sup>6</sup> Romans 5:10

<sup>7</sup> Romans 10:9

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:14

<sup>9</sup> 1 Peter 3:21

<sup>10</sup> Romans 4:24-25

<sup>11</sup> Romans 6:4

<sup>12</sup> 1 John 3:2

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:42-49

<sup>14</sup> Ephesians 2:5-6

<sup>15</sup> Colossians 2:12

<sup>16</sup> Romans 8:11

<sup>17</sup> Acts 1:3

<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:8

<sup>19</sup> Acts 1:11

<sup>20</sup> Acts 2:33

<sup>21</sup> Acts 5:31

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 7:27; 1:2

Justification, most commonly associated with Jesus' death, is also a result of his resurrection. Our salvation depends on the entire sequence of the incarnation: Jesus' birth, ministry, death and resurrection.<sup>10</sup>

Our baptism pictures our participation in Jesus' death and resurrection. Rising from the water pictures our new life<sup>11</sup> and it pictures our future: “We will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.” “When he appears, we shall be like him.”<sup>12</sup> Our resurrected bodies will be like his.<sup>13</sup>

God has “made us alive with Christ...<sup>14</sup>raised us up with Christ.” We were “raised with him.”<sup>15</sup> By faith in Christ, we are spiritually united to him. Our sins are given to him and paid by him, his righteousness and life are given to us, and we join him in his resurrection. “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.”<sup>16</sup> His resurrection is a promise that we will also live again!



## Ascension

After Jesus was resurrected, he “gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.”<sup>17</sup> On the last day, “he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.” He did not simply disappear. He went up bodily into the sky, as a visible indication that he was going into heaven. His post-resurrection appearances had come to an end. (His later appearance to Paul was abnormal.<sup>18</sup>)

As the disciples stared upwards, two angels appeared and told them that Jesus would return “in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.”<sup>19</sup> What were the disciples to do in the meantime? They were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the Holy Spirit, and then they were to be witnesses for Jesus throughout the world. They testified that he is alive, that salvation is available through him.

## At the right hand

Jesus did not just go to heaven—he was “exalted to the right hand of God.”<sup>20</sup> “God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior.”<sup>21</sup> Being at the “right hand” is a figure of speech meaning “in highest authority.” He is exalted above the heavens, ruler of all things.<sup>22</sup>

At least 12 times, Scripture says that Jesus is at the right hand of the Father. These are quotes from or allusions to Psalm 110:1: “The Lord says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” The picture is that the Father gives Jesus a throne, even while there are enemies to be subdued. God will take care of the enemies; Jesus is secure in his authority. Using the Latin word for “sit,” this is sometimes called the “session” of Christ—being seated on his throne.

## Ministry

Using his position of power in heaven, Jesus continues working for our salvation. He sends the Holy Spirit to us,<sup>23</sup> and the Holy Spirit testifies about Jesus and helps us understand what he taught.<sup>24</sup> The Spirit is the way that the Father and the Son live within us.

Jesus is our Advocate.<sup>25</sup> He is like a defense attorney who “speaks to the Father in our defense”—if anyone accuses us, Jesus is there as a perpetual reminder that our sins have already been covered by his sacrifice. It is pointless to make accusations<sup>26</sup>— there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

The risen Christ intercedes for us, to defend us and to give us help. “He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”<sup>27</sup> “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”<sup>28</sup> Because he can sympathize with our weaknesses, we can be confident that he will give us the help we need in our struggles.<sup>29</sup>

The book of Hebrews calls him our high priest, who sacrificed himself for us and now lives to help us.<sup>30</sup> Since our sins have been forgiven through his death, we can approach God with confidence.<sup>31</sup> “Since we have a great priest over the house of God,” we are encouraged: “let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.”

Jesus is our mediator, who resolves conflicts and brings us to God.<sup>32</sup> He ushers us into the throne room of heaven, assuring us that God hears us with favor. This is part of the ongoing ministry of Jesus Christ.

Jesus is also our Shepherd,<sup>33</sup> implying that he loves, protects and provides for us. Peter brings similar images to mind when he calls Jesus “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”<sup>34</sup> Jesus watches over us. The book of Revelation tells us that we are shepherded by a Lamb, a gentle guide who sacrificed himself for us.<sup>35</sup> He will supply our needs, because he knows what they are.

God assigned Jesus to be Head of the church,<sup>36</sup> and the church is to submit to his leadership in everything.<sup>37</sup> He has supremacy over all things.<sup>38</sup> Jesus already has all authority on heaven and earth.<sup>39</sup> God has seated him above every power and authority.<sup>40</sup>

Through faith, we join Jesus in his amazing journey. We are crucified with him, we rise with him, we are joined with him by the Holy Spirit. We will be given glory with him and will reign with him forever.<sup>41</sup> Believe the good news!

## Resurrection appearances

Before dawn, Mary Magdalene finds the tomb open and reports the body gone.<sup>42</sup> Other women arrive and are told by angels to tell the disciples.<sup>43</sup> They visit the tomb and find it empty.<sup>44</sup>

1. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene.<sup>45</sup>
2. Jesus appears to two women.<sup>46</sup>
3. Jesus appears to two men on the road to Emmaus.<sup>47</sup>
4. Jesus appears to Peter.<sup>48</sup>
5. Jesus appears to 10 of the disciples.<sup>49</sup>
6. One week later, Jesus appears when Thomas is present.<sup>50</sup>
7. Seven disciples see Jesus at the Sea of Galilee.<sup>51</sup>
8. The disciples meet Jesus on a mountain in Galilee.<sup>52</sup>
9. Jesus appears to 500 people.<sup>53</sup>
10. Jesus appears to James at another time.<sup>54</sup>
11. Jesus appears to the disciples just before ascending to heaven.<sup>55</sup> □

<sup>23</sup> John 15:26; 16:7

<sup>24</sup> John 14:26; 15:26

<sup>25</sup> 1 John 2:1

<sup>26</sup> Romans 8:33-3

<sup>27</sup> Hebrews 7:25

<sup>28</sup> Hebrews 2:18

<sup>29</sup> Hebrews 4:15-16

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 2:17; 3:1

<sup>31</sup> Hebrews 10:19

<sup>32</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5

<sup>33</sup> John 10:11;  
Hebrews 13:20

<sup>34</sup> 1 Peter 2:25

<sup>35</sup> Revelation 7:17

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 1:22; 4:15

<sup>37</sup> Ephesians 5:24

<sup>38</sup> Colossians 1:18; 2:10

<sup>39</sup> Matthew 28:18

<sup>40</sup> Ephesians 1:20-22;  
Colossians 2:10

<sup>41</sup> 2 Timothy 2:11-12

<sup>42</sup> John 20:1-2

<sup>43</sup> Matthew 28:5-7;  
Luke 24:1-9

<sup>44</sup> John 20:3-10

<sup>45</sup> John 20:11-18

<sup>46</sup> Matthew 28:9-10

<sup>47</sup> Luke 24:13-33

<sup>48</sup> Luke 24:13-34

<sup>49</sup> John 20:24

<sup>50</sup> John 20:26-29

<sup>51</sup> John 21:2

<sup>52</sup> Matthew 28:16-17

<sup>53</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6

<sup>54</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:7

<sup>55</sup> Acts 1:9

# Extravagant Grace

**G**race, which is described as God's unconditional and unmerited pardon, is the first word in the name of our denomination. God's grace, in the person of Jesus Christ, is for all humanity without distinction to race, status, gender or sinfulness. And that is why the vision of Grace Communion International South Africa is Living and sharing life-changing Hope, with all kinds of people in all kinds of places.

## Fairness

Most of us have a notion of fairness. Usually, by the time we start school we have a pretty good notion that life is not fair. Even so, we want, and we even expect life to be fair. When it isn't some of us can get pretty upset. But mankind's view of fairness and the Godly concept of grace are worlds apart!

In the parable of workers being called to labour throughout the day, Jesus gave us a lesson in fairness.<sup>1</sup> In verses 13-15 He explains: "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'"

A denarius was about the same as the pay of a Roman soldier - really good money for a day's work. So the workers eagerly accepted the job. But they were not happy that others got the same pay for far less work.

Jesus wasn't giving us a lesson on workplace ethics. He was explaining to us how grace works. It doesn't matter how good or sinful we have been, or for how long. Salvation simply isn't tied to anything but the richness of God's love and grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast."

As with any good gift we should trust the Giver and accept and embrace the gift.

What a blessing it is that with God we don't get what we deserve. We get everything we don't deserve—his unending love and a new life in Jesus Christ.

## But What About the Condemnation of the Law?

Jesus teaches us that true righteousness involves much more than the law. It involves not just our behavior, but also our minds—our thoughts, our attitudes, our wholebeing. In Jesus, we can see that we fall short all

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the time. But in Jesus, we trust in God's love and mercy for us. Even though we still wrestle with sin in this life and often fail, because of Jesus we are not condemned. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death"(Romans 8:1-2).

## Good Works

Our good works should then be a response to God's grace. Knowing that God will never forsake us nor leave us, we continue to fight against our sinful nature, trusting Christ to stand with us and strengthen us. In Jesus Christ, God does for us what we could never do for ourselves. Just as we could never create ourselves, so we could never redeem ourselves. We were in a deep, bottomless, miry pit of sin. There was no escape from the condemnation under which we all fall, unless God himself, the Creator and Redeemer, provided that escape. That is exactly what He has done.

It is a constant wonder to me, how we guardians of the true faith can become so skilled at complicating the greatest news in the world. We hold in trust the Good News of all good news — God gives free grace to sinners for Christ's sake — and then we break our necks to hide it behind great walls of rules, regulations and laws.

Jesus did not bring some "new and better" brand of religion. He brought the gospel, which is good news for sinners, which includes each one of us. For the sake of Christ, God has thrown away all the report cards, test results and detention notes and given everybody an A+ as well as a gold-plated invitation to eternal life.

The only problem is that a lot of us feel that we "don't want no charity." We'd rather feel like we have been — or through discipline and devotion have become — the right and proper sort of person upon whom God could appropriately bestow eternal life. We have been good Christians, and we don't want to be lumped in with a bunch of immoral losers who do nothing more than put their trust in Christ, while we have worked so hard and so long to imitate and obey Him. (We thank you, O God, that we are not like the rest of people — greedy, dishonest, adulterous or, for that matter, like this embezzler...)

Suppose we take up a challenge: give up the charade. Drop the legalism and the fear tactics. Quit

pretending to be worthy and righteous, admit we are hopeless sinners without anything to our credit, and put our trust in Jesus Christ, for whose sake God justifies the ungodly. I'm reminded that my own righteousness, Tim at his very best, is as filthy rags to God. "However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness."<sup>2</sup>

### Does That Leave Us With a License to Sin?

"You must not take grace too far or you will turn it into license to sin!" some would be inclined to admonish. As though lack of license has ever stopped anybody from sinning.

Hasn't anyone noticed that we are all sinners, even all us religious, God-fearing, church-going Christians? We always have been, always will be, in this life. It is only by God's pure and unfettered grace, as demonstrated once for all through Jesus Christ, that we are made something else — righteous — and not by avoiding sin, but by trusting Him.

It seems that our vigilant efforts to prevent anyone from "turning grace into license to sin" has resulted, ironically, in our managing to turn sin into a barrier to accepting grace. The church promises grace, then delivers condemnation. The church announces the gospel, then preaches hellfire. "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world."<sup>3</sup>

Nobody who trusts God wants to sin. When you trust God to love you and forgive you, you want to be like Jesus; you don't want to sin. But when we do sin, in spite of the fact that we don't want to, we have an advocate with the Father. Paul told Titus that it is grace that teaches us to say no to sin. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good."<sup>4</sup>

### It's Relational

It is grace that teaches us to say no to ungodliness. It's grace that makes us eager to do what is good. Knowing that we are already forgiven and accepted does not lead us into the devil's workshop, but into a deeper and more personal relationship with our Lord and Saviour. The gospel really is that simple. It really is good news.

It is usually people who see God as their judge, not their father, who try to take advantage of grace. When it comes to a lawful or judicial relationship, people ask themselves, "How close can I get to this line without getting in trouble?", but rarely does someone ask that question when it comes to an intimate relationship.

How stupid would we look if we asked, "How close can I get to not loving my spouse without them divorcing me?"

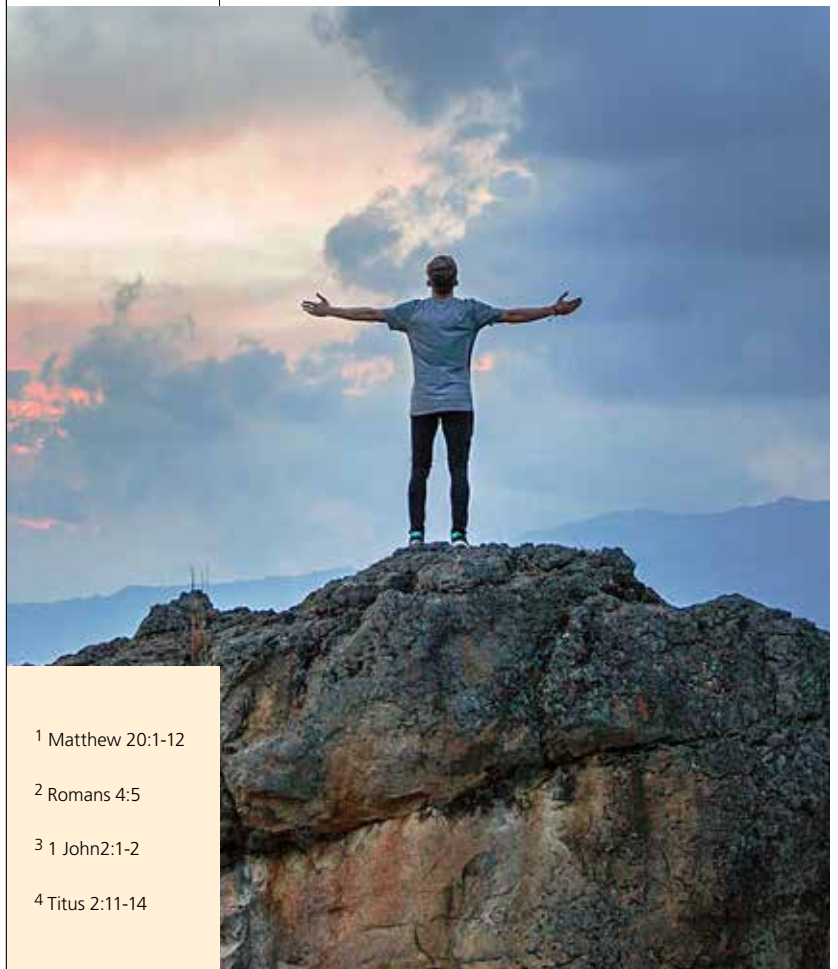
I fully believe that as a Christian you cannot take advantage of grace, for when you've truly tasted it, you will never want to. When we've experienced the joy and life of Christ in us, then none of our sinful desires are satisfying anymore, and when we do sin we are left feeling hollow and empty. There is something about that kind of grace, though, that just rubs some religious people the wrong way. True grace can't be controlled. It can't be tamed. It can't be used by the leadership as a social construction to manipulate the people. It's wild. And you have to trust it will do its job.

### Response to Grace

The best part about true grace is that it changes people. Real grace loves us right where we are, but it loves us too much to keep us there. We know we've accepted God's transforming grace if we begin to look different.

Now that we understand grace, how should we respond? With grace, of course. We should be merciful, even as God is full of mercy. We are to forgive others, just as we have been forgiven. We are to serve others, just as we have been served. We are to show extravagant, underserved grace toward others, just as God has showered us with His amazing unconditional and unmerited pardon.

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ☐



<sup>1</sup> Matthew 20:1-12

<sup>2</sup> Romans 4:5

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 2:1-2

<sup>4</sup> Titus 2:11-14

# Predestination, Justification, S

The doctrines (teachings) of *predestination*, *justification*, *sanctification* and *glorification* are essential to the Christian faith. There are several references to these doctrines in the New Testament. For example:

“...all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he *predestined*, he also called; those he called, he also *justified*; those he justified, he also *glorified*.”<sup>1</sup>

“May God himself, the God of peace, *sanctify* you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

These are abstract, difficult and often misunderstood doctrines. This article makes these doctrines plain and simple so everyone can understand.

## Predestination

In Scripture, predestination refers to God’s will – his preordained purpose - for us. It implies a (spiritual) goal or destination we are headed towards but haven’t reached yet. It implies moving from our current *mundane existence* to a *glorious existence*.

God created humanity in his image and likeness so we might share in his dynamic and joyful life – participate in his abundant life as his beloved children. That was God’s plan from before time began.

Apostle Paul declares this awesome truth thus:

“For he [God] chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he *predestined* us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”<sup>3</sup>

“In him [Christ] we were also *chosen*, having been *predestined* according to the plan of him [God] who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”<sup>4</sup>

“For those God foreknew he also *predestined* to be conformed to the image of his Son...”<sup>5</sup>

This pre-destined life with God is for *all* people. It includes *everyone* who ever lived (or will live) and doesn’t depend on their spiritual merits, good works or good behaviour. This God-ordained life flows from God’s lavish love for his dear children. It is *solely* by grace. We receive it with joy, gratitude and thanksgiving.

*Beware!* Some, in their faulty understanding of the gospel, preach a false gospel saying God created some



by  
Dr. P. Sellappan

for heaven and some for hell. This teaching is totally contrary to the true gospel. Gospel means *good news*. Sending people to hell is definitely *not* good news! God desires *all* people to be saved. He doesn’t want any to perish.<sup>6</sup>

## Justification

Justification means making or setting things right – from a wrong standing or posture to a right standing, from a wrong or broken relationship to a right relationship, from alienation to friendship.

Adam and Eve, representing humanity, sinned and alienated (separated) themselves from God. They lost



their spiritual direction. And in their fallen *mind-set*, they alienated themselves from God. The alienation came from *their* side, *not* from God’s side. They lost knowledge of God and His true purpose for them. This made them grope in spiritual darkness - without God and without hope.

Jesus, also representing humanity, came *as the last Adam and reconciled all humanity to God through His life, death, resurrection and ascension*. He assumed our sinful nature and destroyed it on the cross and opened the door of salvation - eternal life with God - to *all* people, so all may have fellowship and communion with God.



# sanctification, Glorification

While God offers salvation *freely* to all, we *each* must receive it *individually* to benefit from it. Because God is love, He will not coerce/force his salvation on us, no matter how good it is. He offers it freely and we must receive it freely.

Paul talks about this doctrine extensively in the New Testament. For example:

"...*all* are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."<sup>7</sup>

This verse tells us that *all* are justified freely by God's grace through Christ's redemptive work.

"For we maintain that a person is justified by *faith* apart from the works of the law."<sup>8</sup>



"Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because 'the righteous will live by faith.'"<sup>9</sup>

"You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace."<sup>10</sup>

"...know that a person is *not* justified by the works of the law, but by faith in (or more correctly: *by the faith of*) Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified."<sup>11</sup>

These scriptures tell us that God justifies us *solely*

by grace through faith in Christ (or more correctly: *through the faithfulness of Christ*) - what Jesus accomplished for us through His *incarnate* life.

Again, Paul tells us:

"Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by *faith*, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"<sup>12</sup>

This verse tells us that the Gentiles who put their trust in Jesus are also included in this justification (given right standing with God).

"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ..."<sup>13</sup>

This tells us that *when we have right standing with God we have peace with God*.

"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"<sup>14</sup>

This tells us that *Jesus' blood justifies and saves us from condemnation/destruction*.

"...so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."<sup>15</sup>

This tells us that *with justification we receive inheritance, sonship and eternal life from God*.

*Some may ask: "When is a person justified?" A person is justified when he (she) hears the gospel and receives Jesus Christ as his (her) personal saviour, and commits to follow him. This is also the time when he seeks baptism and receives the Holy Spirit. He is now a new creation, a 'born again' Christian.*

## Sanctification

Sanctification refers to the *process* where a believer is transformed gradually - changed more and more - into God's likeness by the working of the Holy Spirit. It refers to a believer's conversion from an inferior state to superior state, from a low quality life to high quality life, from human life to divine life.

Jesus prayed: "*For them* I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."<sup>16</sup>

Here, Jesus prays to God for *our* sanctification by His Spirit.

Both Paul and Peter also discuss this sanctification thus:

"...we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the *sanctifying work of the Spirit* and through belief in the truth."<sup>17</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:1-17

<sup>2</sup> John 8:10-11

<sup>3</sup> Romans 6:1-3

<sup>4</sup> Colossians 3:1-5

<sup>5</sup> Titus 2:11

<sup>6</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

<sup>7</sup> Luke 10:1-23

<sup>8</sup> Luke 19

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 25

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 28:18-20

“...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”<sup>18</sup>

“And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”<sup>19</sup>

These verses tell us that the sanctifying (and cleansing) work is by the Holy Spirit, not our feeble effort. That means we must let the Holy Spirit to constantly renew our mind and transform us more and more into God’s likeness.

*When does this sanctification begin and end? Sanctification starts with the believer’s justification - when he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal saviour - and ends with his glorification - when he is resurrected (raised) from death or at Christ’s second coming.*

### Glorification

Glorification refers to a believer’s permanently changed state - from dishonour to honour, from imperfection to perfection, from physical to spiritual, from mortality to immortality.

Jesus, as last Adam representing humanity, prayed for his followers’ glorification:

“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”<sup>20</sup>

“Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.”<sup>21</sup>

Paul makes reference to this glorification thus:

“We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup>

*How does the believer’s glorified state look like?* In our glorified state, we will look like the risen, ascended and glorified Jesus. In our perfected state, we will have no desire to sin or do evil. Everything we do will be motivated by God’s love indwelling us. Our glorified bodies will also not be subject to time and space. We will not be limited by time and space. That means, we will not age, fall sick or die. We can also be here and there at the same time. We will be truly free to live our God-designed life for us.

*When does this glorification occur? Glorification occurs at the believer’s resurrection from death or at Christ’s second coming.*

### Our complete salvation

Let’s make it plain and simple. Our salvation comes in two phases – objectively through Christ’s redemptive work and subjectively by the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work in our lives.

*Objectively speaking*, Jesus, through His life, death, resurrection and ascension has secured salvation for all people. Coming as the last Adam, representing humanity, Jesus has justified, sanctified and glorified all people. It’s a done deal. He did that single-handedly - all by Himself. That is the first phase of our salvation. It is solely by grace.

However, to benefit from this freely given salvation, we must receive and experience it subjectively. This is the second phase of our salvation. Our salvation will be complete only if we appropriate these gifts (justification, sanctification and glorification) and experience our new life in Christ. That calls for our participation in Christ’s life by his Holy Spirit.

The Bible sometimes uses different tenses to differentiate/distinguish these phases of our salvation. For example, it uses: past tense like saved (justified, sanctified, glorified) to refer to the objective truth (predestination); present continuous tense like being saved (justified, sanctified, glorified) to refer to our subjective experience (sanctification); and future tense like will be saved (justified, sanctified, glorified) referring to our perfected state (glorification).

### Let’s summarize:

God offers salvation freely to all people – all are invited to participate in His life as His children. That is the life God predestined for us. Because of sin we lost knowledge of God and His true purpose for us. Jesus, through his life, death, resurrection and ascension, has secured our salvation.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our personal savior and receive His Holy Spirit, we are freely justified and have right standing with God. This gives us the right and privilege to call God Abba Father, call Jesus as Lord, Savior, Friend and Elder Brother, and call the Holy Spirit as Comforter, Confidant, Helper and Advocate. As the Holy Spirit renews our mind and transforms us more and more into God’s likeness, we are being sanctified. At death or at the second coming of Christ, the Spirit raises us to immortal life with a glorified body.

That’s the life God is offering you and me and it is absolutely gratis - free! Why wait?

*Prayer: Father God, thank you for your great love for us. Thank you for creating and adopting us as your children through your son Jesus and by your Spirit. Lord Jesus, thank you for assuming our sinful nature and reconciling it to God, and sanctifying and glorifying it by your Spirit. Lord Holy Spirit, thank you for accomplishing in us what Christ has accomplished for us through his life, death and resurrection. Lord God, help us to more fully participate and experience this new life in Christ. Amen. ☐*

- 1 Romans 8:28-30
- 2 1 Thessalonians 5:23
- 3 Ephesians 1:4-6
- 4 Ephesians 1:11
- 5 Romans 8:28
- 6 2 Peter 3:9
- 7 Romans 3:24
- 8 Romans 3:28
- 9 Galatians 3:11
- 10 Galatians 5:4
- 11 Galatians 2:16
- 12 Galatians 3:8
- 13 Romans 5:1
- 14 Romans 5:9
- 15 Titus 3:7
- 16 John 17:19
- 17 2 Thessalonians 2:13
- 18 1 Peter 1:2
- 19 1 Corinthians 6:11
- 20 John 12:23
- 21 John 13:31
- 22 2 Thessalonians 1:12

# A Tender Trap

I have never thought of myself as an escapist, but I confess to switching to the animal channels when the news gets too heavy to bear and the movies too banal to bother with.

There's something really therapeutic about watching game wardens capturing wild animals when necessary, sometimes to give medical attention, and sometimes to move whole herds to another area where the environment is to their benefit. Often these guardians of the wild put their own lives at risk, anaesthetising lions, hippos and even rhinos. Of course they work in teams, and every move is planned and provided with the necessary equipment. But sometimes it's touch and go as to whether the operation is successful.

One program I remember was particularly well planned and successful. A team of experts set a 'trap' for a herd of eland, which had to be moved to a different area. This was to effect better grazing and better genetic blend with another herd. But what really caught my attention was to see how they managed to coax a herd of strong, wild, fast running animals into a couple of waiting trucks. They did this by erecting barriers of canvass held together by poles and slowly closing in on the animals until they were all gently forced into the waiting trucks. A few of them proved difficult to catch, but the men persisted until they were all safely in the truck. The rewarding part was when they were released into the designated area, free to live a better life, even though they were unaware of this.

I couldn't help seeing the similarity between the men saving these animals and how our Creator gently guides us in the way of His perfect, eternal salvation. But unlike the eland in the game reserve, we are fully aware of God's blessings in this life as well as the promise of eternal life.

The prophet Isaiah laments the ignorance of God's people in the first chapter of his book. The ox, he says, knows its master, and the donkey his owner's manger, but God's own people do not know or understand. Perhaps this is why the Bible so often refers to us as sheep, and sheep it seems, are not the most intelligent of animals. They often wander off on their own, seeking better pastures, while the shepherd, who knows best, takes them to the best grazing. Some sheep apparently choose a comfortable soft spot to lie down, even hollowing the ground and then getting stuck there, unable to get up on their feet. No wonder the same prophet says in chapter 53:6, "We all like sheep have gone astray..."

by  
Hilary Jacobs

## Exactly What We Need

Jesus refers to Himself as the 'Good Shepherd' in John 10:11, 14. In the parable of the lost sheep He pictures the shepherd returning with lost sheep on his shoulders, rejoicing in the recovery. Our Good Shepherd doesn't pounce on us when we do sheep-like things, but by the firm gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit, brings us back on track.

How merciful He was to Peter, who denied Him three times. "Feed my lambs," He said, and "feed my sheep." He invited Thomas, the doubting disciple, to "put your finger here; see my hands...stop doubting and believe." No sharp words or scolding, just a gesture of forgiveness, plus irrefutable proof of His resurrection. That was exactly what Thomas needed.

The same Good Shepherd knows exactly what we need to stay in His good pasture and He forgives us over and over when we make the same silly mistakes. He loves us no matter where we wander, but allows us to learn the lessons we desperately need. Sometimes the lessons are painful, but He never gives up on us.



In the beginning of creation, God intended for humans to have dominion over all the animal life on the planet. But as we know, our first parents chose their own way, so we do not yet see everything under human control.

When Jesus returns to restore all things, humans will have the control God intended in the first place.

The game wardens in the TV program had a genuine desire to improve the life of those wild animals. It took some ingenuity to find a way of rounding them up without harming them, and the obvious joy and satisfaction they experienced when the operation was over, showed in their smiles and handshakes.

But can this compare to the joy and sheer happiness when Jesus, the Good Shepherd completes 'Operation Salvation' in His Kingdom? Can the rehabilitation of a few eland for a few years ever compare to the saving of zillions of humans for all eternity? No way! ☐

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 1:3

<sup>2</sup> Luke 15

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26

<sup>4</sup> Hebrews 2:8

# The End of Grace?

The Palm/Passion Sunday, which begins Holy Week, includes Good Friday when we focus on the crucifixion of Jesus. As we do, there is a question that may rise up in our souls: *Does God's grace come to an end on the cross?* And if Jesus is the Son of God, what assurance do we have that God's grace will not at some point come to an end for us? During Holy Week, headed toward Easter, let's ask and answer an important question: *Is there an end to grace?*

One of the Scripture readings for Palm Sunday is Psalm 31, which helps answer our question. This was a Psalm Jesus must have been praying during his crucifixion—the language clearly mirrors his own experience. The language also mirrors our experience as we find our need for deliverance from sin, death and darkness. As Jesus hung on the cross, he quoted Psalm 31:5, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." So if this Psalm was on Jesus' lips and heart on the cross, what answer do we see the Father giving to the prayer in Psalm 31:9, "Be gracious to me, O LORD..."? Was God gracious to Jesus on the cross? As Jesus identifies with us as our brother, the answer he receives from the Father is the same answer spoken to us. So again, *is there an end to grace?*

As we read further in the Psalm, we find a running list of all that Jesus was seeking grace in, including relief from distress, grief, sorrow, sighing, weakness, misery, sickness, death, being unknown, emptiness, hearing words that tear us down, and fear. Reading this Psalm, it doesn't take long for our souls to say *amen* to Jesus' experience on the cross. His prayer is also ours. "Lord," we pray, "be gracious to us in the time of our suffering."

How will God answer that prayer? Is there an *end* to his grace?

After making this list of our sufferings, we long to hear the answer to Jesus' prayer for grace. Our souls and body call out for deliverance from the mess we find ourselves in. We are wrapped up in the cross with Jesus and we know that if grace runs out for him, certainly we are without hope. So we wait and listen. Then Jesus breathes his last.

After all the suffering, sorrow and scorn, praying for deliverance, praying for grace, the answer to Jesus' prayer was resounding *silence*.

Jesus died. Is there thus an end to grace? The answer is

by  
Lance McKinnon

clear. *YES!* But if our ears are sinking at that answer, let me explain.

Think about a woman who has just delivered her baby. Referring to her situation, we might say, "Ah, the end of labor!" By that we mean that the pain of her labor in childbirth had ceased. But what if we were to take that baby in our arms and lifting her high in the air exclaim: "Ah, the end of labor!" By saying that we would not be referring to the cessation of pain, but to the goal—the final result of her labor, the new born baby!

This is what we see at the cross. Was there an end to God's grace there? Absolutely—not that his grace ran out there, but that the goal of his grace was fulfilled. At the cross, God was gracious to his Son, and through his son, to us.



The "endgame" of grace was the death on the cross of the list of sufferings articulated in the Psalm that Jesus quoted. The end—the outcome—of grace was deliverance from our distress and grief. The end of grace was the wiping away of our sorrow and sighing, replacing our weakness and misery with Jesus' own strength and joy. The end of grace was to restore us from sickness and death. The end of grace is for us to be known and filled, hearing words of affirmation from the Father of his great love for us, setting us free from all fear.

The ultimate end of grace is found in the final verses of our passage. "But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'"<sup>1</sup> Also, "Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love."<sup>2</sup> This was the endgame of the Father, Son and Spirit on the cross. Jesus took all that stood in the way of our face-to-face trust relationship with the Father and utterly destroyed it on the cross. His death was the death of all sin, death and darkness. The cross can be seen as the mighty "NO" of grace the Father speaks to all that is against us. It is on Easter, with the resurrection of Jesus, that we hear the thunderous roar of God's definitive "YES" to all that he created us for. Yes, there is an endgame of God's grace. And to that we say, *hallelujah!* □

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 31:14

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 31:16



# Blown away by kindness

**H**ave you ever been blown away by the kindness of someone when you least expected it? Quite recently three friends and I had just such a 'wow' experience.

We four ladies are all old age pensioners and I have the privilege of using a car which belongs to my daughter. I pay for the petrol, but she pays the upkeep. This is a blessing for us all as we travel together on various occasions. At age seventy four, I still have an added income by doing deliveries and collections for my daughter.

The eldest among us lives in an old age home and seldom has the opportunity to go out. She has the least but always wants to share what little she has. Less than five feet tall, she is hard of hearing, with more than her share of aches and pains. Despite her eighty nine years and having to hold onto a little push cart that she also uses as a chair whenever necessary, she still has a lot of spunk!

The second eldest of our group is a diabetic with very poor eyesight. She also suffers from bad circulation and has undergone a series of operations to speed up the healing of her foot, so she was still limping a bit. She also gives without hesitation.

I am the third eldest. Of the four of us I think I have been in the wrong queue as far as having a giving spirit is concerned. I have prayed about it often but many times have felt rotten when I don't respond so freely and immediately as others. This reminds me of what CS Lewis said in his book Mere Christianity. The one thing he realised was that nine times out of ten it would be charity that tripped him up and he struggled with that the most. I could relate to that. However, the youngest of the four of us has such a compassion and heart for others that I feel inspired and humbled.

Well for once I decided not to look at my budget and suggested to the other two that we visit the 89 year old and take her for a drive around Camps Bay and Llandudno. This is a spectacular scenic drive on the west side of the Cape Peninsula. It was a beautiful day and we stopped for a while at Llandudno so she could sit outside and enjoy the fresh air and sunshine. It was such a pleasure to see her enjoying it so much.

We realised it was getting late and decided to return. We soon learnt everybody else had the same idea as we travelled for the last few kilometres into Camps Bay at about five km per hour.

I spotted a Primi Piatì Restaurant, overlooking the sea and at the same time saw a parking spot which I turned into immediately. While the others waited in the car, I went in to see whether there was a table available for us. It was around five o'clock

by  
**Arnolda de Greeff**

and fortunately most of the tables were empty.

Normally I would pay for everything and we would sort out the money matters afterwards.

The eldest lady was enjoying the view and her ice cream so much that it was a pleasure just to watch her. I can't recall what we talked about but it was very likely about faith and food, particularly the price of food. We sometimes had to raise our voices so she could join in the conversation.

I asked Nigel our waiter, to bring me the tab which he did. Before I could write, still trying to figure out the gratuity, he took it back and said, "No you don't have to pay, this is on me." In spite of my objections, he was adamant that we were not going to pay. The youngest lady jumped up and said, "Do you mind if I give you a hug?" I also hugged him, because we were all so overwhelmed by his generosity.

The staff helped the four of us down the steps and out by the door.

On the way back we couldn't stop talking about what happened. I was once again given a lesson in giving! ☐



# The Day I Lost My Wedding Ring

I never thought it would happen to me, but yes, I lost my wedding ring. It only took approximately 17 years and six months to happen. I seldom take it off and so I was convinced I would never lose it. I had heard strange stories about other people losing their wedding rings, but not me.

Then it happened. I was exercising at the gym and my wedding ring, actually a wedding band, was hurting me as I lifted weights. Not that I lift anything significant. So, against my better judgement, I took it off and put it with my car keys by hooking it onto the foot of my fluffy zebra key ring that my daughter gave me. I was the only one in the gym and there was no way I was going to forget it with my car keys. My wife was busy doing aerobics in the hall next door. As we rode off back home I suddenly realised with horror that my ring was not on my finger or on my car keys. We turned back, but I was not too worried because I was the only one in the gym and I could trace my steps quite easily.

## Still Lost And Not Found

So there I was, along with my wife and the gym instructor, on our hands and knees searching the gym floor. I thought of the Bible parable in Luke 15 where the widow loses her coin and searches the whole house and finds it. I was convinced that at any moment either I would see a literal glitter of gold amongst the cold, grey steel of the gym weights, or someone would shout, "Found it." But no such luck. We kept on searching. Again and again I would check places I had already checked. I started to think about the parable of the lost coin and how it illustrates Jesus having found the 'lost'. The song Amazing Grace started playing in my head, "I once was lost, but now am found."

Two hours later my ring was still lost and not found. I started to reason with myself that it wasn't a very expensive wedding band. I could probably go out right now and buy an even better, more expensive one without the blink of an eye. Yet, it would never be my wedding ring. After two and a half hours I stood up off the floor. I had given up, my ring was lost.

My wife and I drove home, the whole way I was figuratively kicking myself. How could I have been so stupid? My wife reassured me that it was only a ring, but I kept on thinking about the parable of the lost coin, as well as the parable about the lost sheep, which is also found in Luke 15. I wondered how long would God search for me if I were lost? Two and a half

by  
Johannes Maree

hours? Maybe two and a half days? Would He give up and say to Jesus that it's of no use, that this one is truly lost so let's just call it quits? An interesting side thought is that if something is 'lost' it implies it must have a home. 'Home' does not imply a 'homeless' person, but that they belong somewhere.

We serve an all-mighty and all-loving God. It is not by chance that He says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."<sup>1</sup> It is a sure promise that cannot be broken, when God promises that He will cover you with His feathers and keep you safe under His wings.<sup>2</sup> Just before His crucifixion, when Jesus was praying to God the Father, He says that those disciples the Father gave Him, He has looked after and has lost none.<sup>3</sup>

## Our Destiny In God's Hands

We all at some time or another go through periods in our lives where we think we are lost, or are not going to make it. Or we might think that because a friend has turned their back on God that there is no more hope for them. A little while ago I was speaking to a pastor who believes that we can literally be responsible for someone being lost. That somehow other people's eternal lives are in our hands. I prefer to believe, as per the scriptures, that our destiny, along with that of the entire universe, is held tightly in the hands of the Almighty God. True, we are sometimes guilty of chasing people out of the church, or deeply offending people so that they never set a foot in a church again. But thankfully, it is the all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, all-forgiving, Shepherd that goes and finds that lost sheep and lovingly puts it on his shoulders and carries it back to the fold. In fact, it is not 'that' sheep, but 'my' sheep and 'my' coin and 'my' son. That is precisely what God says to us, "You are mine!"<sup>4</sup> "You are my son, my daughter."<sup>5</sup>

I have often heard sermons about Jesus standing outside the door of our heart and knocking, waiting patiently for us to open up and let Him in. This may be true, but I personally like the image where Jesus deliberately goes out and finds us. This imagery is very powerful in the parable of the Prodigal Son,<sup>6</sup> where God the Father, seeing his son (you and me) afar off, doesn't patiently wait but runs to meet us and hug us and embrace us. Also in the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin both the woman and the shepherd don't waste any time. They use their initiative and immediately go in search of that which they have lost. And, more importantly, they don't give up until they have found what was lost.



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# Have you tasted real freedom?

**A**t no time in history has society enjoyed such a high standard of living with facilities that are just taken for granted. We live in an age where technology has become so advanced that through the use of smartphones we can remain connected with our loved ones wherever we may be travelling in the world. Our smartphones enable us to be connected through various apps that are easily available plus even video calls that enable us to have direct contact with family members and friends at any time. How would you feel if all this is taken away and you are kept confined all by yourself in a tiny cell with no means of contact with anyone? Such is the case of prisoners who are kept confined in their prison cells. In the United States there exist prisons called Supermax prisons, specially designed for the most dangerous criminals where inmates are placed in single cell confinement. They spend 23 hours in the cell with one hour to walk and exercise outside. However, even out in the open, these inmates can only exercise inside large cages by themselves. They are totally cut off from everyone and have no access to any sort of freedom. What would you say if told you that humanity is in such a prison and there is no way to get out?

That imprisonment is not in the physical body but is in the mind. Our minds have been imprisoned and denied access to the knowledge and relationship with the creator. Even with all our belief systems, customs, traditions and worldly knowledge we remain imprisoned. In fact technology may have actually put us deeper in solitary confinement. We have no way to get ourselves out. This imprisonment has made us suffer deep mental loneliness and stress even with our involvement in society. We can only get out from our prison when someone opens the mental locks and lets us out. There is only one person who holds the keys to these locks that imprison us – Jesus Christ.

It is only contact with Jesus Christ that can pave the way for us to realize and experience our purpose for existence. In the Gospel of Luke we read of the time when Jesus entered a synagogue and proclaimed that an ancient prophecy of a coming Messiah was fulfilled through him. Jesus proclaimed himself as the one who was sent to heal the brokenhearted, release the captives, open the eyes of the spiritually blind and free the downtrodden from their oppressors.<sup>1</sup> Jesus also



by  
Devaraj Ramoo

proclaimed himself as being the way, the truth and the life.<sup>2</sup> True freedom comes not through riches, power, status and fame. It comes when our minds are opened to the true purpose of our existence. When this truth is revealed and realized in the depths of our soul we taste true freedom.<sup>3</sup>

When we taste true freedom, what exactly are we freed from? Firstly, we are freed from the consequences of sin. Sin leads to eternal death. With sin in us we also carry the burden of guilt. Humanity seeks various ways to be free from the guilt of sin that causes emptiness in our hearts. No matter how wealthy and privileged one is, the emptiness in the heart remains. Penance, pilgrimages, works of charity and philanthropy may give temporary relief, but the emptiness remains. It is the blood of Christ shed at the cross and the death

and resurrection of Christ that can set us free from the wages of sin.<sup>4</sup> This is the grace we receive when we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Saviour. All our sins are forgiven. The burden and emptiness that we carried will vanish and we begin a transformed life with direct contact with our creator.

Secondly, we are set free from selfish desires that bring misery and suffering upon us. Many are emotionally slaves to selfish desires. When we receive Jesus Christ, a transformation occurs in our hearts where our priority is to please God and to live by his direction in our lives.<sup>5</sup> We begin to understand what a fulfilled life is, when God becomes our focus and our soul yearns to follow him. We are given a wisdom and clarity that transcends human reasoning. We begin to see things from a godly perspective that is deeply rewarding. A way of life begins where we are no longer slaves to lust, greed, envy, hate, impurity and addictions that bring untold suffering. Many receive release

from fears, worry, insecurity and deception. There is also release from burdens and fears that arise as a result of involvement with the occult.

Today, let Jesus unlock the doors of the prison that has kept you confined all these years. Come and taste a renewed life in Jesus. Receive him as your Lord and savior and experience true freedom. ☐

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 61:1-2/  
Luke 4:18-19

<sup>2</sup> John 14:6

<sup>3</sup> John 8: 31-32

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 1:7-8

<sup>5</sup> Romans 6:12-14



# Real News

It seems like everywhere we look these days, we're hearing about fake news. And while the idea of "fake news" may not be surprising to younger generations who grew up with the Internet, it sure is to a Baby Boomer like me! I grew up watching Walter Cronkite pass on Edward R. Murrow's legacy of unflinching journalistic integrity to my generation of anchors. For decades, journalism as a profession has been trusted to deliver the truth. So the idea that not only does fake news exist, but that it's so widely available and so easily believed, is a bit of a shock to me. But as I was thinking about it the other day, it reminded me of something: the opposite of fake news – real news. And of course, I immediately thought of the one piece of real news that matters most: the Good News, the gospel of Jesus Christ.



by Dr. Joseph Tkach

living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:16).

Think about that for a second. Those who haven't yet heard the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection are described as "living in the land of the shadow of death." It doesn't get much worse than that! But the Good News of Jesus is that this death sentence has been lifted—there's new life available in a restored relationship with God through Christ and by his Word and Spirit. And not just for an extra day, an extra week, or even an extra year. Forever! As Jesus himself said,

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).



This is why the gospel is described as good news: it literally means life! And in a world where "fake news" is something we might worry about, I'm so happy that the best piece of news I've ever heard, is also the one I can put my absolute faith in. Aren't you?

As followers of Christ, I think that we hear the gospel so often that sometimes we can forget its impact. But in case we have forgotten, here is how this Good News is described in the book of Matthew:

"...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those

Continued from page 18

Here the word 'until' is very important and implies 'unwearing persistence, perseverance.'<sup>7</sup>

We misunderstand true grace and misrepresent the loving Triune God when we think God is out to get us, or He can't save someone, or that maybe my sin is just too big for even Jesus' sacrifice to cover and pardon.

### Found

A few days after I lost my wedding ring I received a phone call from the gym instructor. Someone had found my ring. It is difficult to explain in words how absolutely thrilled I was. I had offered a reward and initially the person did not want to take it, but what price could I truly place on my wedding ring? She had found it in the grass just outside of the front door. In a similar, but much greater sense God paid the greatest ransom, or reward, everything He had, to buy us back.

The other day, my wife and I were driving in the open countryside far from anywhere, with my ring snugly back on my finger. We stopped on the side of the road to swap drivers. As we walked behind the car a glint of gold caught my eye. There in the dusty, gravel next to the road lay a wedding ring. It seemed weird, especially

after my ordeal, but this one had a less happy ending. The gold band was badly damaged and the setting for a big diamond was empty. I don't know the story of that lost ring, but God does. In the same way He intimately knows each and every detail of our story. He knows where we are, if we are damaged and how to polish us up so that we once again shine brightly.

It has been said that nearly all of the gold throughout mankind's history is still in circulation. You may be wearing a gold ring, that four hundred years ago, was gold in a nobleman's chain. Gold, although it will take a very long time, will eventually stain, perish or just simply be lost, but not the gold (you and me) that is in the crown of the King of Heaven. He loves us too deeply and we are too valuable to Him. He will never take you off His finger even for the briefest of moments.☐

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:5

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 91:4

<sup>3</sup> John 17:12

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 43:1

<sup>5</sup> 1 Peter 2:9-10

<sup>6</sup> Luke 15

<sup>7</sup> Luke 15:4, 8



# The Visible and the Invisible

Some of you may remember I began a decluttering project last year. Actually it's been ongoing for most of my adult life, but that's a part of my psyche we don't need to analyse right now. I cleaned out a couple of dresser drawers the other day and felt really good I have only the items I wear in them, instead of those I should have thrown out a long time ago.

As I reflected on and enjoyed my accomplishment, my mind turned to all the remaining clutter. I really should have tackled a more visible area, especially when I remembered we have company coming in a couple of months. What I had worked on was an invisible part of my house, at least invisible to anyone but me. I didn't regret it, but I had a feeling I should have left it for another time.

As usual, my mind turned to the parallel between cleaning and life. Here I was thinking the visible should have been my priority, as the visible always seems to be more urgent. We make sure our homes are clean and neat, especially when others will see. We spend time making sure we look good—hair, makeup, clean clothes, appropriate shoes and often, perfume to enhance our appearance. This is natural, as we don't want to neglect hygiene and, of course, we have to wear clothing!

But it's infinitely more important to take care of the invisible part of our lives—our inner being, heart, mind and soul. The outside can look fabulous but if the inside is a mess, all the glitz and glamour in the world won't help.

Why is it though, that we'll spend lots of time on outside appearances but when it comes to the inside, we often skimp? And sometimes we even feel guilty because we aren't tackling our to-do list. In our society's overachiever mentality, sitting in a chair, reading, thinking and praying may look like we're doing nothing, but just being with God is doing what's most important!

It's really nothing new—Martha struggled with this when Mary sat at Jesus' feet, but she (and we) learned what Mary did was what was most important after all. Dishes, cooking, cleaning and decluttering come and go and never seem to end, but our relationship with Jesus lasts forever.

If you find yourself rushing through your quiet, feed-your-soul time (I know I sometimes do) because you know that list is waiting for you, push the pause button. Take a moment and remember what it felt like to be a child, lying in the grass watching the clouds. Think of Mary, sitting at Jesus' feet, seemingly doing nothing, but in reality, soaking up every word, drinking in Jesus and not only cementing her place in history, but also cementing her relationship with her Savior. □

by  
Tammy Tkach



# Christ and the wonderful exchange

## A review of James B. Torrance's book: *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*

James B. Torrance (JB) is adamant in his assertion that in approaching worship (and all aspects of theology), before we ask any *how* or *why* questions, we must first ask the essential *Who* question: “*Who is God? Who is Jesus Christ?*” JB illustrates this principle by discussing the two sacraments of the church. Last time we noted what he says about baptism; now we’ll look at his comments about the Lord’s Supper.

At the Lord’s Table we encounter Jesus Christ, who through his life of communion with the Father, in the Spirit, gives himself to the Father on behalf of all people in all times.<sup>1</sup> This self-giving, which culminated at the Cross, continues with Jesus’ ministry as High Priest,<sup>2</sup> making continual intercession for us<sup>3</sup> as one of us (Jesus remains both fully God and fully human - now a glorified man.)<sup>4</sup> As High Priest, Jesus performs his mediatorial work in order that we, his beloved sisters and brothers, might be accepted by our Father as daughters and sons with all the blessings that status confers upon us.<sup>5</sup>

As our High Priest, Jesus is continuously drawing us “into his life of communion with the Father by the Spirit, putting his prayer ‘Father’ on our lips, sharing his Sonship with us.” In this way, we are “graciously given the gift of worshiping the Father, in and through the Son, in the communion of the Holy Spirit.” Rather than being something we do on our own, our worship is *participation*, by the Spirit, in the ongoing worship of Jesus. That participation is for us an act of *memory*—a memorializing of what Jesus did in the past for us, as one of us. But this memorial is not just about looking back at what Jesus did, it also points forward to our future, to our destiny as children of God.

Therefore, in celebrating the Lord’s Supper, we both remember Jesus’ passion and look forward to what he will yet do as “our ever-living and ever-present Lord, who, in his own person, is our memorial in the presence of the Father”. At the Table, we thus encounter not an “absent Christ” but the living Lord who “is present in the power of the Spirit to bring the things we celebrate to our remembrance in an act of communion,” which “lifts up our hearts and minds” into the Lord’s own “communion with the Father”. Who do we encounter at the Lord’s Table? JB comments:

We encounter the whole Christ, the God-man, in whom and through whom God and humanity are reconciled. God and humanity are one in him, [he is] our mediator, who summons us to be reconciled to one another and who sends us out in mission to be ambassadors of the gospel of reconciliation to the ends of the earth and to the end of the age.

As JB notes, at the Table, the Holy Spirit is also actively present and involved in our worship, leading us to

by  
Ted Johnston

“participate in the person and ministry of Christ” who in his ascended humanity is our God-given response of worship to the Father. This point is vital to keep in mind, lest we “obscure or forget the God-given response made for us by Jesus Christ”. JB elaborates:

It is possible for us to obtrude [impose] our own offering of praise [in such a way] that we lose sight of the one true offering of praise made for us<sup>6</sup> .... *God does not throw us back upon ourselves to make our response to the Word in our own strength*. But graciously he helps our infirmities by giving us Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to make the appropriate response for us and in us. Can we not adapt Galatians 2:20 and say, “We pray, and yet it is not we who pray, but Christ who prays for us and in us; and the prayers which we now offer in the flesh, we offer by the faithfulness of the one who loves us and offered himself for us”?

Through what the early church fathers called *the wonderful exchange*, Christ’s worship of the Father becomes our worship as he, through the Spirit, lifts us up to God into a life of “wonderful communion”. This wonderful exchange is the heart of the Lord’s Supper (as well as baptism), in that it celebrates and recapitulates what Jesus has done in taking what was ours, and, in exchange, giving us what is his. Referencing the writings of Calvin on this point, JB makes this comment:

[Jesus] takes our broken sinful humanity and cleanses it by his self-sanctifying life of communion with the Father, his obedience, death and resurrection. And now he comes back to us in the power of the Spirit to give himself to us in an act where he gives us back our humanity, now renewed in him, saying: “Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you.” Our reception of Christ is our grateful acknowledgement of this wonderful exchange. The body on which we feed is the body which he assumed for our sakes, that in our worship we might be sanctified by the once and for all self-offering of Christ. In the communion of the Spirit, in virtue of this exchange, we know that his humanity is our humanity, so graciously assumed, his death our death which we show forth, his life our life till he comes, his self-offering our offering, his communion with the Father our communion into which he lifts us up by his Spirit. The Lord’s Supper, as an evangelical ordinance, enshrines very vividly the inner meaning of the gospel.

In the classic order of Christian worship, the Word (via the sermon) is proclaimed, then comes a consecration of the elements and of ourselves to God followed by the Lord’s Supper. Concerning the consecration, JB suggests another paraphrase of Galatians 2:20:

“We offer ourselves to the Lord, and yet it is not we who offer, but Christ who has offered himself for us and who is our offering, and the offering which we now

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# Sayings by Richard Rohr

The cross solved our problem by first revealing our real problem, our universal pattern of scapegoating and sacrificing others. The cross exposes forever the scene of our crime.

The most amazing fact about Jesus, unlike almost any other religious founder, is that he found God in disorder and imperfection—and told us that we must do the same or we would never be content on this earth.

Prayer is not about changing God, but being willing to let God change us.

There is nothing to prove and nothing to protect. I am who I am and it's enough.

The ego hates losing – even to God.

It is at the bottom where we find grace; for like water, grace seeks the lowest place and there it pools up.

Let's state it clearly: One great idea of the biblical revelation is that God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in the concrete incarnations of life, and not through purity codes and moral achievement contests, which are seldom achieved anyway.

That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody.

The most common one-liner in the Bible is, "Do not be afraid." Someone counted, and it occurs 365 times.

It's a gift to joyfully recognize and accept our own smallness and ordinariness. Then you are free with nothing to live up to, nothing to prove, and nothing to protect. Such freedom is my best description of Christian maturity, because once you know that your "I" is great and one with God, you can ironically be quite content with a small and ordinary "I." No grandstanding is necessary. Any question of your own importance or dignity has already been resolved once and for all and forever.

Until we learn to love others as ourselves, it's difficult to blame broken people who desperately try to affirm themselves when no one else will.

Faith is not for overcoming obstacles; it is for experiencing them—all the way through!

When you get your, 'Who am I?', question right, all of your, 'What should I do?' questions tend to take care of themselves.

Regardless of the cause, the dark night is an opportunity to look for and find God—in different forms and ways than we've become accustomed.

Through darkness and doubt often come the greatest creativity and faith. Our faith is strengthened every time we go through a period of questioning.

Most people confuse their life situation with their actual life, which is an underlying flow beneath the everyday events.

Thomas Merton, the American monk, pointed out that we may spend our whole life climbing the ladder of success, only to find when we get to the top that our ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.

There is a part of you that is Love itself, and that is what we must fall into. It is already there. Once you move your identity to that level of deep inner contentment, you will realize you are drawing upon a Life that is much larger than your own and from a deeper abundance.

The morning glories and the sunflowers turn naturally toward the light, but we have to be taught, it seems.

God is always bigger than the boxes we build for God, so we should not waste too much time protecting the boxes. Once you experience being loved when you are unworthy, being forgiven when you did something wrong, that moves you into non-dual thinking. You move from what I call meritocracy, quid pro quo thinking, to the huge ocean of grace, where you stop counting or calculating.

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make in the flesh we make by the faithfulness of him who loved us and gave himself for us."

It is our offering, yet not ours, but Christ's. This gospel formulation is beautifully summarized in Paul's basic gospel-logic of "I, yet not I, but Christ," which speaks to the *wonderful exchange* that we celebrate at the Table where we encounter not an «absent Christ,» but Christ's «real presence.» AS JB notes, the focus of the Lord's Supper is not «a mere memorial of the death of Christ, as a past event.» Instead, at the Table we commune with «the whole Christ... not with a naked Christ...[or with] a divine Christ shorn of his humanity.» No, we commune with the living incarnate Lord--- the Son of God who remains forever, son of man, our

<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 10:4

<sup>2</sup> Hebrews 4:14

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:34

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 2:5

<sup>5</sup> Ephesians 2:13; 1 Timothy 2:1-6; Hebrews 4:14, 7:25, 9:24

<sup>6</sup> Hebrews 2:12

High Priest. As the «one true worshiper,» Jesus «is truly present [at the Table] in the power of the Spirit to feed us and unite us with himself in his communion with the Father in his heavenly intercessions».

And so we are reminded of the vital principle, that in theology (including our understanding of worship) we must always begin our with the *Who* question ("Who is God? Who is Jesus Christ?") before addressing any of the *how* questions.

*Lord, help us to do so at all times. In your name. Amen.* ☐

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