

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Apr-Jun 2010

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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A new look at passion week

I have a confession to make. For years Passion Week, or Holy Week, depressed me. It seemed my pastor would always put the main emphasis on Jesus' pain and suffering. We would read Isaiah 52 and 53 and parallel those passages with the Gospel accounts of Passion Week and then focus on how badly Jesus was treated in an effort to make us feel more guilty.

But one day my whole approach to Passion Week changed. I suddenly realised that Jesus didn't want us to focus on His pain, but on His love.

It happened in the days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks as I read story after story of firefighters and other heroes who died saving the lives of others. These men and women were being remembered for what they did—saved lives—not for the suffering they went through as they died.

In September 2009, Muelmar Magallanes, an 18-year-old construction worker in the Philippines, rescued more than 30 people in a raging flood before losing his own life when he went back into the waters to save two more people. Family members and those he saved called him a hero as they gathered at his funeral. One woman whose baby he saved said, "I will never forget his sacrifice."

Those he saved will continue to give praise for his sacrifice, focusing on what he accomplished, not on the terrors of drowning.

I went back and read Isaiah 52 and 53 again. The passage that parallels Jesus' struggling begins with these words: "How beautiful is the person who comes over the mountains to bring good news, who announces peace and brings good news, who announces salvation and says to Jerusalem, 'Your God is King.'" (Isaiah 52:7, New Century Version throughout)

Isaiah 53 ends by telling us: "He willingly gave His life and was treated like a criminal. But He carried away the sins of many people and asked forgiveness

by
**Rick
Shallenberger**

for those who sinned." This is reason to rejoice! We don't rejoice in the excruciating details of how Jesus died, but in the fact that in undying love He willingly gave Himself for us. He took our suffering, our pain, our wrong, and our evil¹ in order to "make many people right with God".²

This is why the Lord's Supper is a time of celebration. The sacrifice of Jesus gives us reason to rejoice.

The message of Passion Week is good news! It's a message of joy, triumph and glory, not a message of sadness and guilt.

My pastor believed he was doing right by helping us feel all the more guilty about our sins by focusing on all the gory details of death by crucifixion. He believed he could motivate us to follow God through guilt. But

guilt wasn't the approach Jesus used.

Knowing I have a Saviour, I don't need to wallow in guilt. Instead, I follow and I worship my Saviour in joy, praise and adoration as I join Him on His journey of sharing His love and life with others.

Passion Week is a reminder that Jesus, who is in perfect communion with the Father, wants

every one of us to share in that joyous relationship. He became sin for us, bearing our burdens, so that we could become righteous, bearing His perfection. He is the one who reminds us that nothing can ever snatch us out of His hands.

Paul put it this way in Romans 8:38–39, "I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor ruling spirits, nothing now, nothing in the future, no powers, nothing above us, nothing below us, nor anything else in the whole world will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Passion Week is no time to bathe in guilt; it's time for celebration. He died for us all, but now He is risen, He is risen indeed! □



¹ Isaiah 53:4–6

² Isaiah 53:11

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What our readers say:

The Plain Truth is very informative as it helps us to live our catholic lives and become better children of God.

Joseph Lam
Ipoh

The articles help me to understand the Word of God better and its relevance to our daily living.

Kathryn Ooi Choo Lian
Singapore

The Plain Truth is good reading material. I wish it can be published monthly and readers will be able to contribute to sustain it. The magazine provides spiritual knowledge and helps us in our everyday life.

Joseph Wong
Sg Pelek

Ed.: We are happy to hear that you like the magazine. While we appreciate your suggestion, we cannot publish it monthly as our resources are limited.

The articles are interesting, relevant and important.

Natalie Fay Robert
Sipitang

Enclosed please find my cheque for RM100 to help defray your printing and other expenses. May I take this opportunity to wish you a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

Alice Ooi
Petaling Jaya

Ed.: Thank you for your support. It sure helps others who are unable to contribute to receive this magazine.

The Plain Truth helps me to interact in my small group meetings in my church. It is helping me to be more polite towards people and be obedient to my parents.

Jagdeesh Sandhu
Klang

Ed.: We are happy to hear that this magazine is benefitting young people.

It contains information that helps me in my daily life as it gives me strength when I am weak. I love the Plain Truth as it speaks the truth. I hope this magazine is accessible to all people.

Lordkennylist
Tuaran

Ed: The Plain Truth is accessible via [http://](http://www.wcg-klang.net/publications.html)

www.wcg-klang.net/publications.html

The articles (with bible references) are very good and useful for today's living. They discuss current happenings such as earthquake, tsunami, wars and more with spiritual eyes. The messages shared by the writers are from their own life experiences, so they give me new hope for living.

Abraham Lincoln
Sungai Siput

The Plain Truth has filled my spiritual needs. It provides spiritual truths and practical Christian principles. It is informative, relevant, and thought-provoking. It helps me to become more knowledgeable and mature in understanding the Word of God. It helps me to grow in faith in God and teaches me to look to the Almighty Lord in times of pain and suffering.

Rayappan Joseph
Ipoh

The Plain Truth is interesting and is of very high standard.

Wong Har
Penang

Ed.: Thank you for your compliment. Just to let you know, each issue goes through a rigorous process of review, scrutiny of doctrinal accuracy, editing, copy-editing and design work. Even then, we occasionally slip and do make mistakes.

It changes my way of thinking and enhances my faith in God. May God's showers of blessing be with all you faithful servants of God.

Francis Tan
Singapore

The Plain Truth, as the name implies, is just that—the plain Gospel Truth! A very attractive and readable magazine, the articles are presented clearly and concisely, emphasising the need to live our lives based on the Word of God, the foundation for Christian living. Keep shining!
God bless you.

Eric Benjamin Rajendram
Subang Jaya

The Plain Truth is easy to read and understand. It has strengthened my faith.

I like to thank all the staff for being so generous in giving it free. The Lord has blessed me through this magazine. It is a wonderful thing to share the Gospel. May God bless your ministry. Please continue the good work. Once again, thank you.

Ruth Fredrick Arokiam
Ipoh

As a Christian, I am learning more about God, the church, and moral values. Some of the articles are very touching and I gain a lot from them. I pass the magazine to others so they too can read it. I am making a small contribution of RM100. Hope it helps. God bless the Plain Truth ministry.

Looi Chun Cheong
Taiping

Ed: We are happy to hear that this magazine is helping you. That certainly encourages us. Thank you for your generous contribution.

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 2 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.

“With what body are the dead raised?”

—Corinthian believers, around A.D. 51–55

The resurrection of believers to immortality at Christ’s appearing is the hope of all Christians. It’s not surprising, then, that when the apostle Paul heard some members of the church in Corinth were denying the resurrection, he challenged their misperceptions in 1 Corinthians, chapter 15.

Paul first rehearsed the gospel message, which they believed, that Christ had been resurrected. Paul reviewed how the crucified Jesus was laid in the tomb a dead corpse, but three days later was bodily resurrected to glory.¹ He then explained that Christ was raised to life as our forerunner—pointing the way to our future resurrection at His appearing.²

Christ resurrected

Paul validated the truth of Christ’s resurrection by referring to more than 500 witnesses to whom Jesus appeared after He rose to life. Most of the witnesses were still alive when he wrote his letter.³ Christ had also appeared to the apostles and to Paul himself.⁴ The fact that so many people saw Jesus at the side of His grave in material form confirmed He had been raised bodily, though Paul didn’t make an issue of this in the chapter.

But, he did tell the Corinthians it was plain foolishness—with absurd consequences for Christian faith—to doubt a future resurrection of believers, since they *did believe* Christ had been raised from the grave. To disbelieve in a resurrection was to logically deny that Christ Himself had been resurrected. If Christ had not been resurrected, believers would not have any hope. That Christ was resurrected guarantees

by
Paul Kroll

believers will also be resurrected, Paul told them.

Paul’s message about the resurrection of believers is thoroughly Christ-centred. He explains that the work of God through Christ in his life, death and raising him to life makes the future resurrection of believers possible, leading to God’s ultimate defeat of death itself.⁵

Paul had steadfastly preached this good news—that Christ had been raised to life and that believers would also be resurrected at His appearing. In an earlier letter, Paul wrote: “We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.”⁶ Such a promise was, said Paul, “according to the Lord’s word.”⁷

The church, following the hope and promise of Jesus in the Scriptures, has taught a belief in the resurrection throughout its history. The Nicene Creed of A.D. 381 says, “We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life to come.” The Apostle’s Creed of around A.D. 750 says, “I believe in... the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.”

Resurrection body question

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul responded to the Corinthians’ specific disbelief of and mistaken view about the bodily resurrection: “But someone will ask, ‘How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they

come?’”⁸ The issue was how the resurrection would work, namely what kind of body, if any, would those raised to life receive. The Corinthians wrongly thought Paul was teaching it was the same kind of mortal, sinful body they possessed in this life.



What need of a body in the resurrection, they wondered, especially the present corrupt body? Had they not already achieved the goal of spiritual salvation and actually needed to get rid of their body? In the words of theologian Gordon D. Fee: “The Corinthians are convinced that by the gift of the Spirit, and especially the manifestation of tongues, they have already entered into the spiritual, ‘heavenly’ existence that is to be. Only the body to be sloughed off at death,

the plant that grows from it. The seed may “die” or cease to exist, but the body—the plant—that comes from it is much more magnificent.

“When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else,”¹⁰ Paul wrote. We can’t predict what our resurrection body will be like by pointing to our present physical body’s characteristics, but we know that it will be of vastly greater glory, as is the oak tree in

Is Our Brain All There Is to Who We Are?

Nobel Laureate Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of the DNA molecule, has written that we “are in fact no more than the behavior of a vast assembly of nerve cells and their associated molecules... nothing but a pack of neurons.”^a

Vilayanor S. Ramachandran, a renowned neuroscientist, claims: “All the richness of our mental life—all our feelings, our emotions, our thoughts...our religious sentiments... [our] own intimate private self—is simply the activity of...our brains. There is nothing else.”^b

Neuroscientists do not find evidence of a distinct mind or “soul” when they do their research. They only witness “brain work”—the firing of neurons when we think, emote or are engaged in a creative activity. Further, when a person’s brain is injured, his or her ability to reason, relate to others and create can be impaired, depending on the injury. On such visible evidence, scientists and philosophers naturally conclude that this is all there is to who we are—brain, neurons and body.

Christians believe that the essence of what a human being is—call it mind, self, being or “soul”—survives the death of the body and brain. Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul,”^c thereby distinguishing between physical body (including the brain, obviously) and the essence of personhood—our conscious being.

Radios, computers and DVD players

Scientists such as Gerald L. Schroeder (*God According to God*) and best-selling author on Christian topics, Dinesh D’Souza (*Life After Death: The Evidence* and *What’s So Great About Christianity*), provide a number of analogies to help us think outside the box about a parallel existence of both brain and mind—our consciousness.

Think of the brain as the radio receiver and radio waves as the mind. If the radio is turned off, one might conclude that radio waves don’t exist. But turn on the radio and tune it to a station, perhaps playing a piece of music, and the existence of radio waves suddenly becomes evident.

For the radio waves to be manifest, we must turn on the radio receiver. Turn the radio off or smash it, and there is only silence. Now, the radio waves appear not to exist. The radio doesn’t create the radio waves, but they can’t be played for us to hear without it being turned on and in working order.

Let’s look at the analogy of a DVD of a movie. For the contents of the DVD to be seen, it must be played through a computer’s hardware or DVD player. Smash the computer or player and the movie disappears as though it doesn’t exist. But the DVD contents do still exist and can be played on another computer or DVD player.

In a similar way, the mind is impaired if the brain is impaired, and the mind disappears from our view if the brain dies and decays. But it is not hard to see that a mind could be “played” again if given a different body by the God who created us in the first place.

Dr. Schroeder explains what the real conundrum is about the mind-brain connection: “The puzzle of the mind-brain interface is not in the recording and biochemical storage of the incoming sensory data. That is brainwork... The puzzle is in the replay. There is no hint in the brain of how you hear or see what you have heard or seen... The location of that perception is the puzzle.”^d

The promise of Christ in the Scriptures is that a person’s mind or soul will be “brought back” by the power of God, despite the death and decay of the present physical body. God will provide a new and glorious body for us in the resurrection.

^a Crick, Francis. *The Astonishing Hypothesis: The Scientific Search for the Soul*. New York: Touchstone, 1994, p. 3.

^b Ramachandran, V.S. *A Brief Tour of Human Consciousness*. New York: Pearson Education, 2004, p. 3.

^c Matthew 10:28

^d Schroeder, Gerald. *God According to God: A Physicist Proves We’ve Been Wrong About God All Along*. New York: Harper One, 2009, pp. 151–152.

lies between them and their ultimate spirituality.”⁹

The Corinthians had failed to understand that the resurrection body would be of a higher and different order than the present physical body. This new “spiritual” body would be necessary for life with God in the kingdom.

Paul used a farming example to point to the greater glory of the resurrection body over our present physical body, appealing to the difference between a seed and

comparison to its seed, the acorn.

We can have faith that the resurrection body, having glorious life without end, will make our eternal life much more splendid than our present physical life. Paul wrote: “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.”¹¹

The resurrection body will not be a clone or exact

replica of our physical body, Paul is saying. Nor is the body we receive at the resurrection composed of the identical atoms of the physical body we had in this earthly life, which decayed or was destroyed at death. (Besides, which body would we receive if that were so: our body at age 2, 20, 45, or 75?) The two kinds of bodies will be as different in quality and glory as is the beautiful butterfly that emerges from the cocoon that previously housed a lowly worm.

Natural and spiritual bodies

There is no use to speculate on exactly what our resurrection body or immortal life will look like. We may, however, say some general things about the major difference between the two types of bodies.

Our present bodies are physical like an animal's, subject to decay and death, and sinful. The resurrection body will possess a different order of life—immortal and imperishable. In Paul's words, "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body"¹²—not a "spirit" body, but a spiritual body in the sense of being appropriate for the life of the age to come. The believers' new body in the resurrection will be "spiritual", not immaterial, but spiritual in the sense of having been created by God to bear the likeness of Christ's glorified body, transformed and "adapted to the life of the Spirit in the coming age."¹³ The new body will be utterly real; believers will not be bodiless ghosts or specters.

Paul contrasts Adam and Jesus to underscore the difference between our present body and our resurrection body. "As was the earthly man [Adam], so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man [Jesus], so also are those who are of heaven."¹⁴

Those who are in Christ when He appears will have a resurrection body and life in Jesus', not Adam's form and being. "Just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man."¹⁵ The Lord, said Paul, "will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."¹⁶

Not subject to death

This means our resurrection body will not be perishable flesh and blood as we know it now—not dependent on food, oxygen, and water for life. Paul was adamant: "I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable."¹⁷

At the Lord's appearing, our mortal bodies will be transformed into immortal bodies that are eternal and not subject to death and decay. Hear Paul as he tells the Corinthians: "I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet [a metaphor signaling the future appearing of Christ]. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed."¹⁸

Our being raised *bodily* to immortality is our joyous and sustaining hope as Christians. In Paul's words: "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality," at the appearing of Christ, "then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'"¹⁹ □

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:3–4

² 1 Corinthians 15:4, 20–23

³ 1 Corinthians 15:5–7

⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:8

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:22–26; 54–57

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:14

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:15

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:35

⁹ Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 778.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:37

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:42–43

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:44

¹³ Fee, Gordon. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, p. 778.

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:48

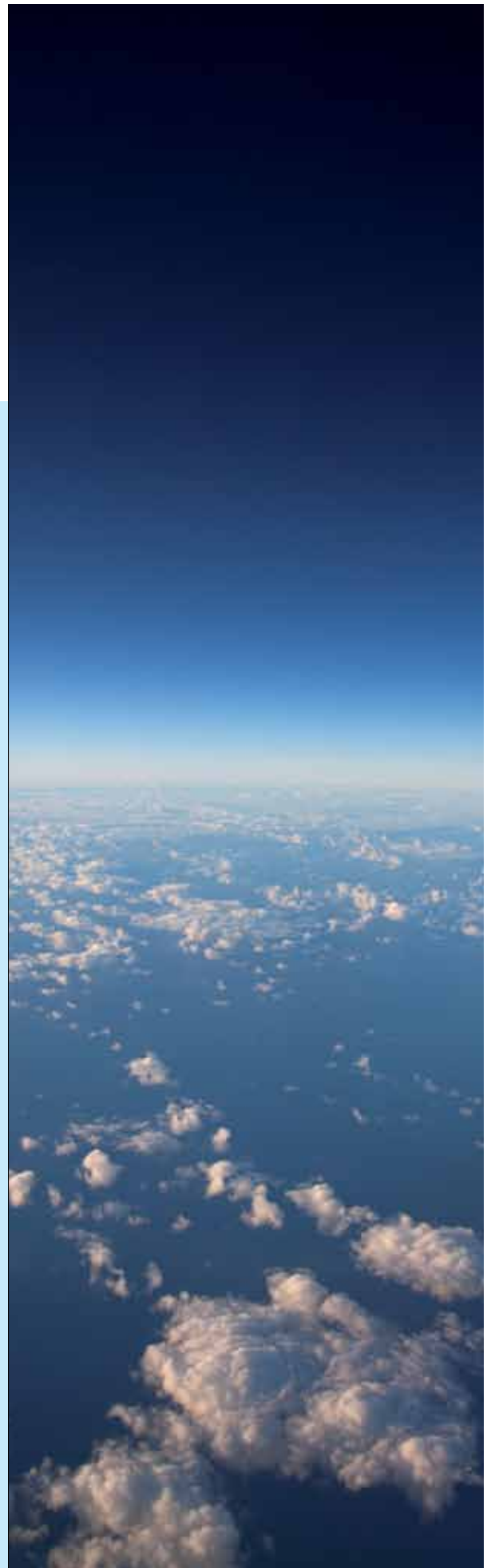
¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:49

¹⁶ Philippians 3:21

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:50

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:51–52

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:54



To be loved

What does it require genuinely to be loved?

By its nature, love exists only in relationship. This is the clue! Our search for love lies in a relationship which is just genuine love—a relationship which itself is love. As we shall see, if only we would search, we'll find we don't have to look far!

God's purpose for us

The Bible teaches that God is love. It also shows that God exists as Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an eternal relationship of joyful, intimate, unreserved self-giving and accepting, in absolute trust and agreement. This totally mutual indwelling of the Father, Son and Spirit results in not three but one God in joyful, dynamic completeness. Theologian Baxter C. Kruger describes this life as the dynamic, joyfully intimate Great Dance!

Ephesians 1:4–6 says that this divine Dynamic Life (God) purposed to have human beings as His adopted children, to join Him, to enter into Him in order to participate in the life of the loving communion of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This has been the plan from the beginning. God knows us intimately. In vain can we seek to hide our flaws from Him. With His full knowledge of our ugliness, spiritually

speaking, still He loves us. Still He loves us sufficiently to do everything that needs to be done so that we can successfully come to Him. With convincing biblical statements like these, it can mean nothing less than that we were created, brought into existence in the first place, in order to be loved. As theologian Karl Barth so wonderfully expresses it: God doesn't want to be God without us!

Because of who God is, we are loved by Him; and even if we don't want to, we cannot escape from being loved by God! There's nothing we can do to earn his love, or change his love for us. There are things, however, that we can do to enhance or help us to experience this great love God has for us. Jesus teaches how: "Repent and believe this good news!" Comforting, reassuring words. And Philip Yancey, the theologian writer, sums it up for us: It is in choosing to believe that we believe.

by
**Mak Chew
Yeng**

What we can do

"To repent and to believe" means that we turn away from all known sins and now commit to trusting and relying on Him to live His way of love. We have consciously, decisively, to make the change—one decision at a time, one day at a time. This change frees us up to a whole new way of life and community. There are some things we need to stop doing (sins of commission) and some things we need to start doing (sins of omission). It's vital to make these changes; and equally so to remember that these changes in no way earn God's love for us, and neither do they make us more qualified for it. God doesn't require these changes in us before He will love us. He already loves us. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we need to make these changes in us so that we can experience His love for us. Sin holds us back from entering into this new life



in Him. Yes, the fact is: we do sin, even after we have chosen to change—but now there's an all-important difference. Now, opposition to sin is the guiding principle in our lives. We don't toy with sin anymore. So, whenever we do sin, we grieve, confess to God and rely on Him for forgiveness and power to continue to pursue this new way of life.

What we cannot do

Those of us who have the will and self discipline to want to make something of ourselves, need a reminder. What we do—the successes we have achieved (be they financial, intellectual, artistic, athletic, moral or [dare we say it?] spiritual success)—do not make God love us more! Our achievements bring with them a list of benefits for us, but as to making us more qualified for more of God's love, this is not one of them. He already loves us, before we even take our first step. It has been said:

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more.

There is nothing we can do to make God love us less. There is nothing we can do to make God start loving us.

There is nothing we can do to make God stop loving us.

What we are required to do

There is, however, one thing we can do with this love

from God. We have the choice whether to accept His love and to be thankful for it, or to reject and despise it. We have the choice whether to join Him in His Great Dance, to choose heaven. Or we have the choice to choose hell, which is to cut ourselves off from Him and His love, and to have nothing to do with His way of life. In this we have the choice.

Why?

Why do we have to choose between these two?

The reason

God is love. Whether or not we know who God is, doesn't change who He is; and even if we don't believe what He says doesn't change what He does. Because He is genuinely in love with us He will not force Himself on us. He respects and relentlessly courts us. He has declared His love for us, proven His love for us—and now He waits (for our response). Too often many of us can only respond with grudging obedience, dutiful allegiance or, worse, dreadful fear. This is far from the response God wants; yet He still loves. He waits patiently. No wonder AW Tozer says that God waits to be wanted! When finally we allow ourselves to be loved by Him and we experience that great love for us, then our hearts cannot fail to be won over by our Lover. It is then that with the Son's love in us, we can reciprocate God's love in kind, through His Spirit. This

way, God's love has resulted in a free relationship—and the love becomes mutual. Only when there is mutual indwelling love between God and us are we enabled to join in the Great Dance, and reflect His eternal being of the communion of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Would we want Him? Would we come and join Him in His way of life? Now that we understand, why wouldn't we want to come and join Him in His way of life? Really, He has done everything necessary to make it possible for us to join Him.

So, "What does it require to be genuinely loved?" Nothing. The eternal almighty God of the Bible is the source of love, and we are not required to give or do anything to deserve to be loved by Him. All we can do is to thank Him and rest in His love. Already we are inside His love embrace. In fact, through Zephaniah, God ardently, passionately declares His great delight in us, that He loudly sings His love over us! God does not lie. So, it's all right to imagine His singing over us:

You can never stop Me loving you

You can never stop the way that My heart's beating too

You can never stop Me loving you

That's one thing you never do...

A divine version, of course! ☐

Emmanuel, God with us

Anyone who has been to my home knows I love flowers. They are everywhere—in the backyard, in the front yard and in pots wherever I can find space. I love everything about them from planting them, watching them grow, and enjoying their fragrances and colours, to how they attract butterflies and hummingbirds. I wait all year for spring bulbs and I'm sad when they finish blooming. When a piece of a plant breaks off, instead of throwing it out I stick it in dirt and hope it grows. I talk to my roses.

I've always thought my love of flowers was genetic as my parents came from farming backgrounds. My dad was an avid gardener who also loved flowers. My mom's yard is full of them and she loves them as much as me, or rather, as much as I do. I read a booklet by Baxter Kruger that changed my perspective on my passion for flowers, as well as my other hobbies and predilections. The booklet (available in e-book form on his website, www.perichoresis.org) is titled *The Secret*, not to be confused with the new age book of the same name.

Kruger tells the story of his encounter on a plane with a biologist. This man was enthusiastic about plants, so much so Kruger received an impromptu botany lesson. That prompted him to ask the biologist where he got his passion for plants. The man said he'd not really thought about it, so Kruger showed him a diagram depicting Father, Son and Holy Spirit and explained that his

by
Tammy Tkach

passion came from God's passion. He didn't say what the biologist thought, but I know what my reaction was: Aha!

That's why I love flowers so much! That's why artists paint, musicians play, singers sing, architects build, athletes play and compete, writers write and pilots fly. Our passion and creativity come from the passion and creativity of God, through the Son, in and through the Spirit. I was right, my love of flowers is genetic, but it's DNA passed on to me through the shared life of Father, Son and Spirit.

So when the biologist who loves plants goes on a research trip or I plant yet another bulb or a poet writes a poem, we are expressing the image of God. Why is this important? It means, as many of us have suspected, our lives are not separate from God. As Paul said in Acts 17:28, "In Him we live and move and have our being" (NIV). In Christ, all of life is shared life with the Trinity.

As I write, occasionally looking out the window at my flowers and fruit trees (and running out to chase the birds away), I am living "in the circle of the Triune life of God" (*The Secret*). All people, as we live out our passions or dream of living them, participate with God as He lives in us. He is Emmanuel. Our lives are in Him. He is with us in everything we do. I think I'll go plant something in celebration of God with us! ☐

Who is this ‘Holy Bird’?

God the Father I understand. God the Son I understand. But who is this Holy Bird? These were the words, I am told, of a puzzled new Chinese Christian. He must have heard the story of the baptism of Jesus and of the way in which the Holy Spirit descended upon Him ‘like a dove’.¹

The Christian Faith gives three answers to the question What is God like? The first two are comparatively easy to understand. God is like the very best human father there could be. God is also like Jesus. But God is also like the ‘Holy Bird’ who descended on Jesus at His baptism. So who indeed is this Holy Bird?

It is the teaching of the Christian Faith that we can sometimes see something of God in each other.

Think for a moment of the finest people you have ever known. I find myself thinking of a missionary doctor, called Noel Fletcher, who worked in the North of India, but stayed in our home for a while when she was on leave in England. I think also of a former colleague, George Hoare, who was a dear friend for many years. When I remember Noel and George, I find that I love them not just for themselves but for the way in which God Himself shone out of them. What I saw in them was the ‘Holy Bird’ Himself, the third person of the Trinity—God the Holy Spirit.

Not everybody will find the symbol of a bird helpful and so it is good to find that the Bible has other ways too of describing the Holy Spirit, like the life-giving breath of God, the wind of God, and the fire of God. But underlying all is the conviction that God has not only shown Himself in His fatherly acts of creation and in the gift of His son Jesus, but also in the impact He has on all people who give Him genuine access to their lives.

Are you and I among them? Do we want to be among them? If so, there are three basic facts we need to know about the Holy Spirit.

There for the asking

The first is that God the Holy Spirit is truly available to all those who want Him. Jesus Himself has guaranteed this. He promises: ‘The Father *will* give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.’² In fact from the beginning

by
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of creation the gift of the Holy Spirit has been God’s purpose for us. In the amazing words of St Athanasius, ‘God has shared our humanity that we might share His divinity’. Jesus promised His followers: ‘The Holy Spirit will be in you.’³ You and I can claim this promise.

If we do so, what will happen? Here we come to the second fact about the Holy Spirit, which is that His coming is never a non-event. It is not that the Holy Spirit will make us less ‘ourselves’. On the contrary, it is the Holy Spirit’s work to help us to be our deepest and best and truest selves, the selves which God designed us to be.

In the words of the Nicene Creed, the Holy Spirit is ‘the Lord and giver of life’. Most of us are much less alive than we might be. It is the nature of the Holy Spirit

to make us more whole at every level of our being, whether physical, mental or spiritual. Usually this is a gentle process, but in some cases the intervention of the Spirit can be dramatic and spectacular. I think of an ex-UVF terrorist, whom I met on a visit to Belfast. When he became a committed Christian, he became a totally new man. St Paul, who had an equally spectacular conversion, says that whether it is a gentle or dramatic process, in either case ‘the Spirit gives life’.⁴

In scripture, when the apostles received the Holy Spirit in Acts, Chapter 2, one of the effects upon them was that they totally lost the fearfulness, which had dogged them up to that

point. In the case of St Paul, although beforehand he had been a narrow and vicious fanatic, he found that the impact of the Spirit involved a new understanding of love. We can see this from his wonderful hymn on love in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 13.

Working ‘through’ us

Moreover the Holy Spirit not only does things *to* us, but if we let Him loose in our lives, then inevitably He starts to do things *through* us. This is the third thing which we need to know about Him. The ex-UVF terrorist whom I met in Belfast had 12 names on his death list, when he became a Christian. He told me that they would all have been dead by now, if the Holy Spirit had not changed him from a man of death into a man of life. Much the same could be said of St Paul. The great thing

“...the Holy Spirit not only does things to us, but if we let Him loose in our lives, then inevitably He starts to do things through us.”

about the work of the Spirit is that it really does work! 'The Spirit gives life' in a very literal sense. Even in my own little life I can see what the Spirit has done both to me and through me.

There is a prayer which Frank Sargeant, the former Bishop of Stockport, loved to use. It went like this: 'Lord, make me a channel—not a bucket!' Do you see the point? If the Christian faith is true and we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives, then we will receive many good things in consequence. But they are all for sharing. A bucket receives and then holds, but a channel receives and passes on all that it has received. This is how the Holy Spirit would have us be. The new wholeness which we receive from Him is meant to be infectious.

Spirit-filled Christians are meant to touch the world for healing. The Christian's prayer each morning should always be, 'Holy Spirit, show me what you and I are going to do together in the world today.'

These three truths about God the Holy Spirit can be put in a nutshell by saying first that the Holy Spirit is *available to us*, secondly that He will be *active in us*, and thirdly that His will is to be *at work in the world through us*. It has been suggested that the New Testament book entitled The Acts of the Apostles should actually be called *The Acts of the Holy Spirit*, because all that the early church achieved depended upon the power of the Holy Spirit. There is a real sense in which the motto of the Apostles was 'It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.'⁵

So what about you and me? Are we prepared to be available to the Spirit, recipients of the Spirit, and active agents of the Spirit in this world which—though it does not know it—is in desperate need of the 'Holy Bird'?

If so, remember the prayer which I have suggested for the beginning of each day. In fact, here are a sequence of prayers which you may like to tuck into your devotions each morning as you seek to be at home with the third person of the Holy Trinity:

Holy Spirit of God, graciously look upon us and for our hallowing send us thoughts that will pass into prayer, and prayers that will pass into love and love that will pass into life with you for ever.

Amen

God of love, fill your children with all joy and peace in believing, that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Christ, my guide, be with me on my journey through life. When I falter, encourage me. When I stumble, steady me. When I fall, pick me up. Help me to become, step by step, more truly myself, and remind me that Jesus has travelled this way before me. In His name.

Amen

And finally:

Holy Spirit, show me what you and I are going to do together in the world today.

Amen. □



¹ Matthew 3:16

² Luke 11:13

³ John 14:17

⁴ 2 Corinthians

3:6

⁵ Acts 15:28

Your complete spir

Many normal-looking men and women, both young and old, spend considerable sums of money to do makeovers. Why? Just to look a bit more attractive physically. But what happens is that the glow soon fades away leaving them rather disappointed.

This let-down happens not only to our physical appearance, but also to our spiritual appearance or performance. This malady strikes many Christians. After their initial conversion and zeal to overcome every sin—anger, temper, lust, selfishness, pride, bad thoughts and attitudes—they soon realise that they still have a long way to go. The same sins keep on resurfacing and new hidden ones pop up rearing their ugly heads. Despite their sincere and diligent efforts to overcome their sin, they know they are nowhere near perfection. So they get upset and disappointed. All Christians, if they are honest with themselves, face this real dilemma.

Is God going to zap them or cast them into hell fire? If He does, no one will be saved. Thank God, God is a God of love. He will never let that happen to His dear children—us. So how does God solve our 'sin' problem?

The answer is: God has *already* solved it in and through Jesus Christ. This article explains how He has done it. But first, let's counter several heresies or misconceptions that have been floating around.

Misconceptions

These misconceptions are pantheism, deism, docetism and adoptionism.

Pantheism teaches that human beings will ultimately be *absorbed* into God. It implies that they will have no separate or individual identities—no uniqueness or distinctiveness. But the scripture tells us that we each will have a distinct and unique existence.

Deism teaches that God and human beings are *not* connected. It implies that humans will eventually die and vanish. But the scripture shows us that we will have eternal life in Christ.¹

Docetism teaches that Jesus didn't really appear in a *physical* body. His body was merely an *illusion* as was His crucifixion. He only *appeared* to have a physical body and only *appeared* to have died physically, but in reality He was spirit—ethereal. The problem with this teaching is that it implies that Jesus was never tempted and He didn't suffer or die. But this contradicts the scripture which says that Jesus came in the *flesh*² and was *tempted* at all points like us, *suffered* and *died* physically.

Adoptionism teaches that Jesus was born human but later *became* divine through His sinless, perfect obedience and thereby became a perfect sacrifice to redeem humanity. The problem with this view is that it implies that Jesus was *not God* in the flesh. But the scripture indicates that He was God.³ It also implies that if human beings work hard and long at



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overcoming their sin, they too can attain the divine status and save themselves. Again, this contradicts the scripture which affirms that all men have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.⁴

So these misconceptions are simply that—misconceptions, misrepresentations. So what is the truth?

Jesus came as God incarnate

Jesus came as God incarnate or God in the flesh. The Word (Jesus) became flesh.⁵ Jesus was both God and Man. He was *fully* God and *fully* man, not half-god and half-man. Jesus had *two* different natures within Himself. His divine nature came from God through the Holy Spirit while His human nature came from His human mother Mary.

Jesus' divine nature was certainly divine, but what kind of human nature did He take? Was it a *neutral* human nature that Adam had *before* he sinned or a *sinful* human nature he had *after* he sinned? The term 'flesh' as used in the scripture refers to our fallen or sinful human nature. Jesus assumed our *sinful* human nature, a nature that *could* sin. But of course we know that Jesus *never* sinned.

Some Christians believe that it was impossible for Jesus to sin. But, does a Jesus, who simply could not sin truly have a genuine humanity? Scripture tells otherwise. For example:

"Therefore, in all things He had to be made *like* His brethren, that He might be a *merciful and faithful High Priest* in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has *suffered, being tempted*, He is able to aid those who are tempted."⁶

"...who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered



itual makeover gift



up prayers and supplications, with *vehement cries and tears* to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He *learned* obedience by the things which He suffered. *And having been perfected*, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, called by God as High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”⁷

“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot *sympathize* with our weaknesses, but was *in all points* tempted as we are, *yet* without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”⁸

The plain truth is: Jesus was tempted at all points (like us), day and night, at every stage of His human life on earth from birth to death. He had to make *moment-by-moment choices* like us. His perfection *grew* through His obedience, often made in the face of intense spiritual opposition. He *cried with tears* and *sweated blood* in the garden of Gethsemane. Jesus could sin, but He steadfastly resisted it. He hated sin and loved righteousness.⁹

Jesus destroyed our sinful nature

But how did Jesus destroy *our* sinful nature? He did this by taking our sinful nature *into* Himself and destroying it from *within* Himself. Remember, Jesus assumed our sinful human nature from His human mother, Mary, who came from a long line of *sinners* (Adam, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, Ruth, David, etc.), both Jews and Gentiles.

Jesus came not only to destroy our *sin*, but also our *sinful human nature*. It is not enough just to destroy our sin; our sinful nature too must be destroyed. If our sinful nature is not destroyed, we will continue sinning and the sin problem will never be solved. It will be like trimming the ‘lalang’ grass from above the ground leaving its roots intact. *Jesus came to attack the root of the problem and dig it out.*

That’s why Jesus had to *assume* our sinful human nature. If He hadn’t, He *wouldn’t* be able to heal and reconcile us. Our sinful nature would be *untouched* by His work and our *unassumed nature will be unredeemed.*

What Jesus did was: He assumed our sinful nature and *from there—from the depth of our stinking pit—He overcame and destroyed every trace of our sinful nature* in His perfect obedience to God. That’s why the scripture says *‘after having been perfected.’*¹⁰

Jesus took our sinful nature into Himself, *resisted* it at every single turn, day in and day out throughout His 33 years of life on earth, *not* just during the last few hours of His death on the cross. Jesus attacked all our sins—greed, lust, vanity, selfishness, deceit, adultery, boasting, stubbornness, pride—head on. He destroyed them utterly, blow by blow, at every stage of His human life from birth to death. That was how He overcame

and defeated our sinful nature *for us, with us* (as human), and *in us* (through the Spirit).

Jesus overcame every temptation that was thrown at Him by the devil, by the religious authorities, by the rulers, and even by His own disciples. He destroyed our sinful condition *utterly* so we could be *free* to commune and participate in God's life.

It is important to note that Jesus overcame and destroyed our sinful nature from *within* Himself (*internally*). He didn't enter our individual lives (*externally*) to destroy our sinful nature. True, He gives us the Holy Spirit to help us overcome our sin, but we know too well that we still have a sinful nature which sins. Jesus didn't wait for us to co-operate with Him so He could come in and destroy our sinful nature from within us. He didn't depend on us to redeem us. *What Jesus did was: He took our sinful nature into Himself and defeated it from within Himself.* In short, *He destroyed utterly both our sin and our sinful nature—everything that alienated us from God.*

In doing so, Jesus took our sinful nature and *recreated* it *within* Himself. That is why we say He *is* our perfect humanity; He *is* in Adam's place; in Israel's place; in our place. That's why the scripture says: "*when He died, we died; when He rose, we rose; and when He ascended we ascended.*"¹¹ Jesus *is* our *vicarious* humanity (in *our* place). He *is* our resurrection, He *is* our life, He *is* our hope, and He *is* our all. *In Him, we live, move and have our being.*¹² But of course we don't see this clearly yet, but we will when Jesus is revealed to us at His second coming.

Jesus has *united* us to God through His *vicarious* humanity. He is the only one who lived a perfectly obedient and sinless life. As our Creator, He has taken us *into* Himself and *bound* us tightly to Himself and will never let us go.¹³ This is how Jesus has *united* us to God.

Jesus exchanged place with us

In the incarnation, Jesus *exchanged* place with us. He *exchanged* our broken, sinful humanity with His perfect humanity. He exchanged our sinful nature with His holy nature. He did this by taking our sinful nature into Himself and overcoming and destroying it from within Himself and by giving us His *perfect life*.

Jesus did this *for us, with us, and in our place* through His *vicarious* humanity. That is why we say He *is* in *our place*, He *is* our perfect humanity, He *is* our holiness and righteousness, He *is* our resurrection, He *is* our life, He *is* our hope, and He *is* our all. That is how we are *perfectly* united to God, and that is how we enter into God's eternal life.

Incarnation—God's genius plan

If Jesus was only human as *adoptionism* teaches, He could not save us. Only God can forgive our sin and save us. If Jesus was only God and not human as well, according to the teachings of *docetism* and *deism*, He also could not save us. Left to ourselves, we will eventually die and vanish. But by becoming *the* God-Man (representing all humanity), Jesus has *united* us to Himself and Himself to us, and *in and through* Him, He has *united* us to the Triune God.

Being united to God does not mean that we are *absorbed into* God as *pantheism* teaches. No, we will not be absorbed into God; we will continue to retain our *distinct* or *unique* identities. There will be *unity in diversity*—we will be united to God (in and through

Jesus) and still retain our unique identities. We will be *one* with God and with one another, and at the same time, retain our distinct identities. You will be you, and I will be me. Every one will be *distinct* and yet united as *one*, just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are distinct and yet united as one. St. John records this wonderful truth in this way: "I am *in* My Father, and you *in* Me, and I *in* you"¹⁴...that they all may be *one*, as You, Father, are *in* Me, and I *in* You; that they also may be *one in* Us...that they may be *one* just as We are *one*: I in them, and You *in* Me; that they may be made perfect in *one*."¹⁵

Already made over spiritually

In and through Jesus, God has already made you over spiritually. You don't have to go for expensive spiritual makeovers (following endless religious rituals and rules) to appear good. You don't have to worry whether you have attained the 'holy, righteous and blameless' character that God requires of you. God has *already* made you holy and righteous *in* Jesus. That doesn't mean that you can now go and sin so that "grace may abound". Certainly not, for that would be like a dog returning to its vomit¹⁶—inviting spiritual misery.

Jesus is your complete spiritual makeover gift. He has already done that for you. So what else is there for you to do?

Participate in Jesus' ministry

Now that you are spiritually clean, go tell others that they too have access to *free* makeovers. You can also *shine* your makeover glow—the light of Jesus—wherever you go and whomever you meet. You can reflect it in your thoughts, attitudes and actions. As you do this, you will be informing others that they too are welcomed to the free spiritual makeovers.

Just as Jesus participates in His Father's ministry, we too want to participate in Jesus' ministry. Jesus is involved in preaching the gospel, so we too join Him in preaching the gospel. Jesus cares for the poor and the needy, so we too care for them. Jesus forgives people, so we too forgive those who offend us. Jesus gives us hope, so we too give hope to those who live in hopeless situations.

Jesus loves His Father, so we too love our heavenly Father. Jesus obeys and worships His Father, so we too obey and worship our Father. What Jesus does, we do. We participate in His ministry.

God loves us immensely. He didn't withhold anything—not even His own dear Son Jesus—to redeem and include us in His life of love. Through Jesus, He has poured out His life for us. God has sent Jesus and His Spirit to unite us to Himself so we could participate in His abundant life. He wants to share with us all that He *is* and *has*—*everything*. And He has done *everything* needed to be done to make it a reality.

Jesus *willingly* became one of us—a fellow human and elder Brother—for our sake so we could be with God as His own beloved children.

How would you respond to such a magnificent spiritual makeover gift? □

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⁵ John 1:14

⁶ Hebrews 2:17–18

⁷ Hebrews 5:7–10

⁸ Hebrews 4: 15–16

⁹ Hebrews 1:9

¹⁰ Hebrews 5:9

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

¹² Acts 17:28

¹³ Colossians 1:17

¹⁴ John 14:20

¹⁵ John 17:20–23

¹⁶ 2 Peter 2:22

Our Martha syndrome

At work, I'm one who needs to get everything done on time, and it must be done well. To achieve this I work at the required task or multiple tasks day and night until they are finished. For the past three months I had to complete some important assignments related to examinations and also prepare the strategic plan necessary for my teaching for the new year. This is a vital job requirement and as usual I applied myself to the task diligently, and ended up working late, sometimes until two or three in the morning. In between this workload, other tasks were placed upon me and I kept working on them too. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months. I kept at it as I normally would.

I attended an important meeting during this time and realised that a friend who was always there every year was not around. I inquired about him and found out that he had suffered a heart attack and had undergone

urgent bypass surgery. I managed to get him on the phone and in a calm voice he told me how he had been working himself into the ground, meeting deadlines and trying to please everyone who expected something from him. In

the process he had seriously neglected his health. I got the message. I was on the same road.

What is it about us that we need to please everyone who assumes that they have the right to use us to get work done for them? Often these people are 'little bosses' who need to furnish the 'bigger bosses' with reports and presentations, who in turn answer to the 'almighty head' who expects the completed assignment on his table on a particular day and no excuses are entertained. Orders are sent out, and warnings are given of dire consequences if the work is not completed. Fear of having to answer to a highly displeased boss who doesn't accept any excuses is in the background as we toil on. I realised that if I became sick or dropped dead I would be replaced immediately. There's always someone to take over our job.

We don't need to do this. We don't need to work



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till we drop just to please someone who demands it. Sincere and dedicated work is always appreciated and those who value us will understand if we need more time to complete a task or take some rest in between our busy schedule. We major on the minors and fail to consider what is really important in life. Before we know it we are trapped in the Martha syndrome.

The Martha syndrome

The Bible tells us of a time when Jesus visited two sisters, Martha and Mary, at her home, Martha was so involved in the preparations that she chided Mary her sister who was seated next to Jesus, listening to Him as He taught. But Jesus corrected her. He told her that she was worried and upset over many things but had forgotten what was really important.¹ Just as I had,

I had forgotten that my God who had fed 5,000

hungry people who were listening to Him could easily take care of all my family needs if I had my ears and mind tuned to Him.² I had forgotten that my Saviour Jesus Christ had died on the cross so that my sins could be removed and I can



spend eternity with Him. I had forgotten to set my thoughts on Him and trust Him for He would direct my paths if I acknowledged Him.³ Instead I was worried and worked up about so many things, and I was trying to please too many people. I have a little daughter who needs my attention, and I had been neglecting my wife who has been most understanding as I kept working continuously.

I'm going to make it a point to pause in my busy schedule from now on. I'm going to first spend time in prayer for there's a lot that I've neglected telling God. I hope that you too will do the same. The workload is never ending—but it can wait. □

¹ Luke 10:38–42

² Matthew 14:14–21

³ Proverbs 3:5–6

An anchor for life

Have you ever felt that you needed an anchor for your life? That the storms of life were trying to smash you on the rocks? For some people, it might be family problems. For others, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or a serious illness.

Such trials can overwhelm us like a wave that crashes upon a ship. Gone are the memories of peaceful sailing on smooth seas—all we can think of for the moment is the trial we are in right now. Will we survive, or will we sink? And sometimes the turmoil is so great that sinking doesn't seem that bad of an option!

To weather the storms of life, we need an anchor to keep us in place, to keep us from being swept toward the rocky shore, to keep us from capsizing and sinking. What is our anchor?

Hebrews 6:18–19 tells us that we have an anchor—the sure hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the hope set before us, the hope that greatly encourages us. “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

Verse 20 tells us that this hope enters the presence of God in heaven, where Jesus is already helping us. Our hope of eternal life is anchored in heaven, where the storms of this life can never sink our ship! Our salvation is safe and secure.

The storms still come, though, and rage around us. The waves beat on us, but we need not fear—our anchor is in the unsinkable heavens. Our lives are safeguarded by Jesus Himself. Our anchor will keep our lives safe—as long as life itself will last. That means forever! We have an anchor for life, a point of stability when life gets rough. Don't wait for the storms to begin—anchor your life in Jesus now!

Parable of stability

Jesus taught something similar in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”¹

Jesus describes two groups of people: those who

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follow Him, and those who don't. Both types of people build good-looking houses. Both types of people can appear to have their lives in order. But the storms of life strike them both, and the houses are tested not so much for how they look on the outside, but how well they are built underneath.

Listening to Jesus does not prevent the rain, water and wind—the problems of life—but it does prevent collapse. When the storms of life beat upon us, we need some solid foundations to keep us steady.

Jesus advises us to build our lives not just on hearing His words, but on putting them into practice. We need more than the name of Jesus—we need a willingness to do what He says, to trust Him not just with the future, but to trust Him in life right now.

If we hear the words but do not obey what Jesus says, our lives might look good on the surface. But eventually the trials come, and our lives can fall apart, or become unravelled or capsize—choose whichever metaphor you want. The point is that life works best when we do what Jesus says.

Jesus does not force us to obey, but He gives us a choice. He tells us what will happen if we don't. Our behaviour shows whether we believe Him, and whether we trust Him.

Seeking a foundation

If we want a basis of stability in times of trouble, then we need to consult the teachings of Jesus. We should not wait for the storms to begin—we should get right habits right now.

But how do we do that? Wait for Jesus to pop down in our home to tell us what we ought to do? Of course not—in most cases the words of Jesus are already in our homes. What we need to do is to take the initiative to learn what they are,

and to do what He says. Don't assume you know, just because you read it a few years ago. If you really want a stable foundation, you need to read it again. You can't build on the right foundation unless you know what it is.

What you learned a few years ago may have been good enough for then, but you have probably forgotten a few things, and you might learn even more, now that you have some more life experience. I encourage you: Keep learning—keep growing—keep strengthening your connection with the true foundation of life. No one else can do it for you. □

¹ Matthew 7:24–27



Drawing first blood

I'd like to say that I finally overcame my lifelong fear of donating blood, but that wouldn't be quite true. The truth is, I volunteered to write an article about the American Red Cross for a local magazine. I could have chosen a simple approach, such as the history of the Red Cross, but I knew deep down that it would promote a worthy cause if I, gulp, wrote a first-person article about giving blood. I never dreamed that I would meet Jesus at the blood drive that day.

It happened to be 9/11/09, Patriot Day, as it's now called, a day when Americans are encouraged to do something sacrificial. I hadn't thought of that when I decided to make my way to the blood drive, but I liked the idea of being part of something that honoured the nearly 3,000 people who had died that day in the World Trade Center eight years earlier.

The blood drive was busy that day, so in the hour that I waited, I talked to other potential donors about their experiences in giving blood and why they did it. One 20-something woman, with piercings and tattoos, told me she donated blood to honour her dear grandmother, a loyal Red Cross volunteer, who had recently passed away. I saw Jesus in the love and honour that this young person was bestowing on her grandma's memory.

I chatted with a middle-aged mother, and found that she had nearly died in childbirth many years ago. Had it not been for four units of blood, she wouldn't have been talking to me. I saw Jesus looking out for her through the simple sacrifice of a blood donor, and I saw Jesus in her, looking out for the future recipient of her donated blood.

As I was giving my pint of blood, Jesus ministered to me through the loving care shown by the Red Cross nursing staff. Through their experience and expertise, He soothed my discomfort and His peace filled my heart and calmed any fears.

Story after story affirmed the presence of Jesus in this simple group of local people doing something good for their community. Almost all the folks I talked to acted as if giving blood were no big deal. They weren't looking for praise or even a pat on the back. To me, it

by
Nan Kuhlman

was evidence of the Holy Spirit moving each of us to do something small so that synergistically we could do something big.

The ancient Christian hymn by St. Patrick, known as "St. Patrick's Breastplate", is a good reminder of how Christ ministers to us and through us, even in the most unlikely places:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
I bind unto myself the Name,
The strong Name of the Trinity;
By invocation of the same.
The Three in One, and One in Three,
of Whom all nature hath creation,
Eternal Father, Spirit, Word:
Praise to the Lord of my salvation,
Salvation is of Christ the Lord.

On my way out of the door, the local co-ordinator of the blood drive reminded me that by giving a pint of blood that day, I had saved three lives. I thought about that for a while, and concluded that Jesus' blood is the real life-saver. He conquered sin and death once and for all at Calvary, and today He works through each of us, inviting us to participate in our small way as He ministers to the vast sea of humanity He calls His brothers and sisters.

Whether it takes the form of rescuing others from a collapsing building, a kind word to a harried checkout clerk, or a simple donation of a pint of blood, Jesus is at work in every act—big and small—of courage, concern and care in every corner of our darkened world. □



One or two marshmallows?

In the 1960s a psychology researcher did an experiment with a classroom of four-year-old children. He placed one marshmallow in front of each child and told them if they would refrain from eating it while he went on an errand, they would receive another marshmallow. But if they ate their one marshmallow during the few minutes' wait they would only have the one marshmallow.

He then left the children alone, returning after twenty minutes. About one-third of the children had quickly eaten their only marshmallow. Another third had waited a while, but had yielded to the temptation of immediate gratification and had eaten their marshmallow. The other third had waited patiently, and enjoyed two marshmallows.

This study followed these same children into adulthood. Those individuals who had been able to wait for 20 minutes generally were more successful in life, with happier marriages, higher incomes, greater career satisfaction and better health than the others. In contrast, those who were unable to wait typically were experiencing more difficult and frustrating lives.

This study and others like it show the value of delaying gratification in order to achieve more-satisfying long-term goals.

Scripture has much to say about patience, often using other terms such as “long suffering”, “perseverance”, “endurance”, and “steadfastness”. It can be difficult to be patient when we must wait for something we desire! As adults we too have become accustomed to immediate gratification. Human nature speaks to us, saying “Why wait?” But good things come to us when we practise patience in all of life’s endeavours. More successful careers come to us when we patiently complete our education or job training. We have happier marriages when we patiently prepare ourselves financially and refrain from sexual gratification until after the wedding ceremony. We gain financial advantages by patiently saving money for possessions rather than unwisely purchasing too much on credit.

In our Christian walk we also need patience, or we can yield to worldly temptations and bring troubles upon ourselves and others.

We too can lose patience

The children who could not wait patiently for twenty minutes focused their attention on the delicacy in front of them. Likewise, if we become enticed by worldly comforts and pleasures, we too can let down spiritually and fall short of being all that we can be.

It is easy for us to become overly troubled by all the sufferings in the world. We may wonder why God doesn’t intervene and put a stop to the unending sufferings of humanity. Or, as we grow older we may become physically worn out or spiritually fatigued. There are many influences in our world that can destroy our patience, weaken us spiritually and cause



by
Paul Hailey

us to compromise our Christian way of life.

Our Christian reward is far greater than another marshmallow. We await the second coming of Jesus, who will give us everlasting life, and reward us for any good works we may do. But our patience can be wearied by trials or unanswered prayer. We may be weakened by the moral decline in our world, and be tempted to gratify our desires in the wrong way.

The Apostle Paul predicted an attitude that fits our world today. He described an unthankful society that seeks self-gratification and pleasure.¹ Through Paul’s writings, our Lord warns us, His followers, to be vigilant, lest we too be influenced by the world around us. As Christians seeking future heavenly blessings, we are to persevere with patience.

Patience in well-doing

Yes, we can get impatient with ourselves, with circumstances, with other people, and even with God when we think He should intervene in this ungodly world. But the waiting problem is not with God. He is still working out His great plan here below with perfect Godly patience. King David gave us wise advice when he wrote: “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.”²

We need to be strong and “wait for the Lord.”³ But what does it mean to “wait for the Lord”? It doesn’t mean that we live a leisurely life doing nothing. As the writer of Hebrews wrote, “You need to persevere so that when *you have done the will of God*, you will receive what He has promised.”⁴

The key to Christian patience is to keep busy doing the will of God—doing those things that are pleasing to Him. The Apostle Paul encouraged the Christians in Rome to persist in doing good.⁵ Whatever that translates into in our individual lives—prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, community service—let’s continue serving Him.

It is not God’s wish that we become tired, weary, or impatient. “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”⁶ And let us pray for continuing patience in our lives.

The children who were able to wait patiently were motivated by the promise of a reward. As God’s children, let us patiently look forward to the bountiful harvest of blessings that will come with the return of the Lord. In due time He will return, and reward us for being patient. □

¹ 2 Timothy 3:1–5

² Psalm 37:7

³ Psalm 27:14

⁴ Hebrews 10:36

⁵ Romans 2:7

⁶ Galatians 6:9–10

Who's to blame?

A few years ago the movie *The Passion of the Christ* sparked renewed debate over whether Jews should be held responsible for the death of Jesus. Sadly, from the days of the first century there have been professing Christians who have promoted the idea that Jews should be punished for Jesus' crucifixion.

That idea has been responsible for much anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews through the centuries. And it is based on utter ignorance of who Jesus was and why He came, and it is totally contrary to everything Jesus taught and stood for.

Jesus said of His life in John 10:18: "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father"

Jesus' crucifixion was God's will. It was Jesus' will. John 3:16 tells us that God loved the world—Jews and gentiles alike—so much, that He sent His Son to save the world by dying and rising from the dead.

The Jesus who cried out from the cross, "Father, forgive them; they don't know what they are doing," is the same Jesus who rose in glory and is our Advocate with the Father. He is the same Jesus whose Spirit moves us to love one another as He commanded.

Blame the Jews, or blame anyone, for killing Jesus? Nothing could be farther from the heart of Jesus than setting blame, because all humanity is to blame, but in Jesus, all humanity is forever forgiven for all sin.

God chose the Jews to do what had to be done for the sake of all humanity. All humans are sinners and rebel against God. All humans would have done away with Jesus, given the opportunity. But God chose Israel to be His people—the people *through whom* the Messiah would come, and the people *to whom* the Messiah would come. And God did it for the sake of the whole world, so that through Israel, all humanity would come to know Him.

Would Christians who "blame" Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus prefer that Jesus not have been crucified? Would they prefer that He not have shed His blood for the sins of humanity and been raised from the dead?

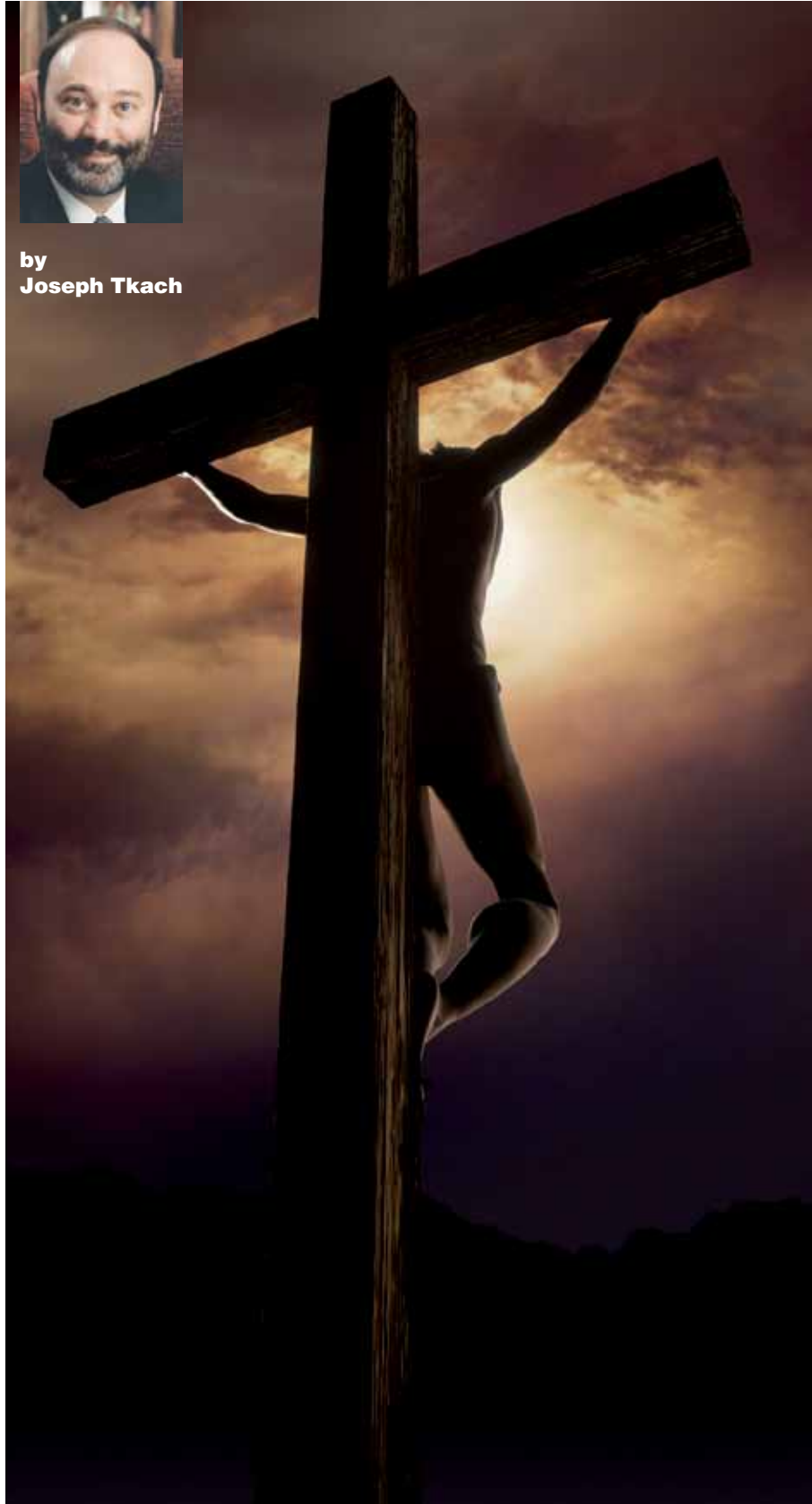
Every human is to "blame" for the crucifixion of Jesus, because every human has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God as St. Paul tells us in Romans 3:23. But Jesus gave Himself freely, not because anyone made Him, or because He had to. He did it because He loves humanity. For this purpose He came, and for this purpose He lives that we all, Jews and gentiles alike, might live in Him, blameless before God.

It was God's free grace toward undeserving sinners that led to Jesus' crucifixion—undeserving sinners like you and me. The crowd that shouted, "Crucify Him!" were no bigger sinners than those of us who sing "That Old Rugged Cross" on Easter morning.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them..." And the Father did. □



by
Joseph Tkach



The Sword

Tears of relief flooded my eyes when Joseph of Arimathea was allowed to remove my son, Jesus, from His execution cross. How gently Joseph and a friend, Nicodemus, handled His torn and tortured body—such a contrast with the violent and cruel treatment He had just suffered. I had ached to comfort Him in His agony, and when I was finally able to touch His life-less form, I didn't know what to do. He was unrecognisable, His entire body bruised, covered with blood and dirt, His wounds deep and swollen. The grief and pain that welled up inside me exploded in groans of mourning I did not know were possible. This was the dreaded sword that was to pierce my soul that had been prophesied by old Simeon when Jesus was a newborn. Never, ever, had I imagined it could be so devastating, so cruel, so unjustified.

Kneeling beside Jesus' body, I caressed His wounded hands, remembering how I had kissed those tiny fingers when He was a child. I remembered His laughter as He played with His younger brothers and sisters, His sunny disposition and bright inquisitive mind. Everyone loved Him and wanted to be around Him, even when He was an adult. He was a generous, engaging young man, destined to become the Messiah, the salvation of all people, the light to the Gentiles, a glory to Israel.

Jesus' ministry reflected Him. It was filled with hope, forgiveness and healing. But at times, my heart pounded with fear for Him. His merciful approach was

by
**Joyce
Catherwood**

unorthodox, and it angered some. In our own home town, people were initially amazed at His gracious words. But in the end He was run out of the synagogue and a mob tried to kill Him.

Bewildered by these malicious outbursts against Him, we, His human family, became protective of Him. It made me wish He had never left home. Once, when He was overwhelmed by the needs of the multitude and had no time to eat, we tried to rescue Him and take charge of things. We thought He might have gone off the deep end from hunger and exhaustion. Another time His brothers and I found Him, wanting to talk to Him, but He was again surrounded by a great crowd. We were worried sick and didn't understand why He would not take refuge more often with His family He loved so much.

When it all ended so brutally, it did indeed feel as though a sword had pierced my very being. Only later, when Jesus was raised in glory, was my wounded soul healed. And you can imagine, what a jubilant family reunion we had with our beloved Jesus, the risen Son of God! Humbled and grateful to be able to express how deeply sorry we were that we had not been more supportive of His earthly mission, we very quickly became His ardent and faithful servants. □

References

Luke 2:25–39; 4:16–30; 8:19

Mark 3:20–21; 31–35; 15:42–47

Saying from Zimbabwe: *Izandla ziya gezana*

I enjoy watching people at airports and bus stations. Someone is reading a book. A few people are reading newspapers and magazines. Over there, a lady is cleaning her eyeglasses. Then a young man sits down to eat a quick meal. All the busy people are using their hands!

There is a wonderful saying about hands in the Ndebele language of the Nguni people of Matabeleland Province, Zimbabwe. The saying is *Izandla ziya gezana*. Taken literally, it states the obvious: "It takes one hand to wash the other."

Izandla ziya gezana, however, is used to refer to a number of social situations. For example, it refers to the expectation that people in communities should help each other. When one neighbour helps another, the one who is helped will go and help yet another. One act of kindness spreads to others. It takes love to help another.

Another application is when everyone comes together

by
**Kalengule
Kaoma**

to rally behind a community member who is in need. In times of grief, disaster, wedding, or celebration, the Ngunis come together to support one another. They say *Izandla ziya gezana*, with the meaning, "We are all in this together."

Just as hands work together for a common purpose, the Nguni people believe that working together will accomplish much. *Izandla ziya gezana* encourages people to join hands with others in order to produce bigger results. There are many things that need our attention in the communities where we live.

Why not look around and find something to do for your neighbour? There is wisdom in the saying. We can do a lot more if we work together. After all, as one hand washes another, both are connected to the same body. In the same way, all humans beings are connected to one another in Jesus Christ, in whom we all live and move and have our being. □

Mankind will not admit that they are flesh standing under judgment and can live only by grace... Humanity resents that utter reliance on God; men and women want at least to co-operate with God in saving their lives—but that is the very way to lose their lives for by that very process sin is not really acknowledged, and its judgment and condemnation in the flesh are not really accepted.

Thomas Torrance

The Triune God (Father, Son and Spirit) exists in a love relationship within His own being. And He wants to share this relationship with us in our marriage, in our family, in our church and in our community life.

Anonymous

God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist.

Augustine of Hippo

The call to follow Jesus costs all that we are and everything we have because the life Jesus gives is a life without reservation, a life that refuses to withhold the self.

Michael Jinkins

We ought to give thanks for all fortune: if it is good, because it is good, if bad, because it works in us patience, humility and the contempt of this world and the hope of our eternal country.

G. S. Lewis

A true faith in Jesus Christ will not suffer us to be idle. No, it

is an active, lively, restless principle; it fills the heart, so that it cannot be easy till it is doing something for Jesus Christ.

George Whitefield

God loves us not because of who we are, but because of who He is.

God tries our faith so that we may try His faithfulness.

Sometimes the Lord calms the storm; sometimes He lets the storm rage and calms His child.

Anonymous

A truly humble man is sensible of his natural distance from God; of his dependence on Him; of the insufficiency of his own power and wisdom; and that it is by God's power that he is upheld and provided for, and that he needs God's wisdom to lead and guide him, and His might to enable him to do what he ought to do for Him.

Jonathan Edwards

Give according to your income, lest God make your income according to your giving.

One of the marks of spiritual maturity is the quiet confidence that God is in control—without the need to understand why He does what He does.

Anonymous

In all of life we have our dealings with God.

John Calvin

When we have seen Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have looked into the very heart of God.

Christian Fathers

Revelation is a divine activity; not, therefore, a human achievement.

Revelation is not the same thing as discovery or the dawning of insight, or the emerging of a bright idea. Revelation does not mean man finding God, but God finding man, God sharing His secrets with us, God showing us Himself.

J. I. Packer

Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction.

Blaise Pascal

If any man ascribes anything of salvation, even the very least thing, to the free will of man, he knows nothing of grace, and he has not learned Jesus Christ rightly.

Martin Luther

Confession of sin is not an admission of weakness, but a sign of strength.

The Bible is not meant merely to inform, but to transform.

If you keep in step with God, you'll be out of step with the world.

God's work must be done in God's way. Worship reminds us of values the world makes us forget.

Life is fragile ... handle with prayer.

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers, but to be fearless in facing them.

Anonymous

True knowledge of God is born out of obedience.

John Calvin

“Truth is not simply a proposition or a set of statements but a Person. We have a bundle of beliefs, mostly passed on to us by parents and family and friends and church. And with this bundle of frequently unexamined beliefs, we do what we do, we talk as we talk and live as we live. And every once in a while we hit a bump of some sort, and we have to reflect on this belief or that one. Then we say, Wow! Why do I believe that? It doesn't fit what I have experienced or what Jim says or what Christians in Latin America are saying.

Truth demands that we surrender ourselves (our values, our self-understanding, our past and future, our concerns and our aspirations) not merely to a statement or philosophical position that we hold as true but to the God who is Himself true... Truth does set us free, but only in as much as we give ourselves to it.”

“Christian theology shapes its discipline around the possibility that something new has happened in the midst of the old, and this something new demands of us new ways of thinking because it refuses to be captured within our prior categories. Christian theology is an attempt to reflect on the meaning of all reality from the perspective of the God who is revealed in Jesus of Nazareth.

I believe in God. That is, I give myself away, not to my beliefs but to this God. And this God is not captive to my ideas about God. Indeed, this God is a very real threat to my ideas about God, even to my most treasured ideas about God.”

“The meaning and shape of our life together as a community of persons is grounded in the inner life of God, the Trinity, and has been revealed to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The God who has His being in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit has made Himself known to humanity in the person of Jesus, who lived in utter dependence on the Father through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Michael Jinkins

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The transfiguration: Sneak

The disciples are discouraged—even dismayed. They thought they were following a Messiah into a glorious kingdom. But then Jesus told them that He was going to His death.

Where was the glory they hoped for, the kingdom that Jesus seemed to promise? Jesus needed to offer the disciples some hope for the future, and this is what comes next in the story.

The kingdom in power and glory¹

Jesus told His disciples, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” Jesus assures them that the glory of the kingdom will indeed come—and it will be seen before the disciples die.

The disciples had already seen some of the power of God’s kingdom. Whenever Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick, the power of the kingdom was at work.² The disciples saw the power of the kingdom on the day of Pentecost.³ They saw it in miracles, and in the spread of the gospel all the way to Rome.

But Jesus is referring to something else. His promise is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in each account, it is immediately followed by the Transfiguration, in which three disciples had the privilege of seeing Jesus in a special glory. In all three Gospels, we are told that the Transfiguration happened about a week after the prediction—the saying and the fulfilment are tied together by this literary technique.

After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. Tradition says that this was Mount Tabor, but that is only 2,000 feet high. Mt. Hermon is a better candidate, since it is the tallest mountain in the area (9,000 feet), and Caesarea Philippi is at the base of Mt. Hermon.

Peter, James and John were the disciples closest to Jesus. They also seem to have been the most ambitious—Peter was the most outspoken, and James and John wanted positions of honour when Jesus came in His glory.⁴ These three may have needed the most reassurance that something better would come after the persecution.

And they saw it: There He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

Were Elijah and Moses resurrected, or was this just an “appearance”? Matthew 17:2 says that Jesus’ face “shone like the sun”. Was it a vision, or was Jesus really changed? We do not know. Why Moses and Elijah? That is more easily answered. Jews respected both of them highly, and they represent high points in Israelite history, corresponding to the Law and the Prophets.

What were they talking about? Luke 9:31 says that they were discussing Jesus’ “departure which He was

by
Paul Kroll

about to bring to fulfilment at Jerusalem”. They were talking about His death. Did Elijah and Moses know the manner and purpose of Jesus’ death, or were they asking Jesus to explain it to them? Apparently it is not important that we know.

Listen to Jesus⁵

If we had been there, we probably would not have understood it any better than Peter did. Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)

A week earlier, Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah. Now, he uses the lesser title “Rabbi.” Which title is most appropriate? We will soon have an authoritative answer!

Why did Peter talk about shelters? In a state of glory, why would anyone need a shelter? Perhaps Peter was thinking of the Festival of Tabernacles, which many Jews associated with the arrival of the kingdom. Perhaps the shelters were an invitation for the prophets to stay a while.

Something even more astounding happened next. Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!” The cloud was not just above them—it “covered them” in the sense of covering them up, as a dense fog, blocking their view.

And God tells us what is important: Jesus is the Son of God, loved by God, speaking the words of God. Even when the greatest prophets from Israel’s history are present, the disciples should listen to Jesus. Jesus is greater even than Moses and Elijah, and therefore greater than the Law and the Prophets. If He says that He is going to be their Messiah by dying in Jerusalem, then they should pay attention to what He says.

Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. Peter had hoped to prolong the moment, but it was over. The event was not to get them in touch with past prophets, but for them to be more dedicated to the leader they had, because He was more than a prophet—He was the Son of God, and God had just validated the path that Jesus was on.

The glory they saw in Jesus no doubt encouraged them that the glorious kingdom would be a reality. But it was not just a future reality. Jesus had been the beloved Son of God all along, and His disciples should accept His teachings, even if they are the opposite of what they wanted and expected. Since He is the beloved Son of God, the disciples could be sure that glory would follow, even if dark days lay in the immediate future.

The Transfiguration also shows that God’s kingdom transcends human kingdoms. God’s reign is not just a bigger and better empire, and the leaders in the

Take a peek at the resurrection



kingdom are not just kinder and stronger versions of Roman or Judean kings. The transformed face and clothes of Jesus show that it is *far different*; it is not just a continuation of normal history.

Indeed, when the disciples catch even a small glimpse of the glory, they are frightened and don't even know how to speak intelligently. They had only a glimmer of understanding of what the kingdom really is.

So what should the disciples do?

They should listen to Jesus, get behind Jesus and follow Him. They should not take matters into their own hands, because their efforts are as useless as making shelters for glorified beings.

But what about Elijah?⁶

"You had to be there," the saying goes. But in this case, it didn't do a lot of good to "be there". As they were

coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what "rising from the dead" meant.

Jesus had predicted His own death and resurrection, but the truth was so contrary to what the disciples expected that they couldn't understand the plainest of words. It was only after Jesus rose from the dead that they could begin to understand—but until that understanding came, they would not be able to tell the story right. So Jesus told them to keep it a secret until the time was right.

The Transfiguration gave them a glimpse of the glory that Jesus had, and the glory that He would share with all who took up the cross to follow Jesus into the valley of the shadow of death. □

¹ Mark 9:1–4

² Matthew 12:28

³ Acts 2:1–4

⁴ Mark 10:37

⁵ Mark 9:5–8

⁶ Mark 9:9–13

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