

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

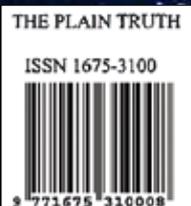
Oct - Dec 2018



Jesus
a Promise
Fulfilled. P.6

Reconciling
God's Love
with Our Pain.
P.16

God
cares.
P.19



PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

The humanity of Jesus

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus – an event that happened 2000 years ago.

In Old Testament times, God revealed himself in human-like form temporarily on various occasions. However, in New Testament times, Jesus did not just appear as man, but *became* a human - like us.

In this article, we will explore the implications of Jesus' humanity before and after his resurrection (and ascension).

Jesus' humanity during his earthy ministry

Jesus came as man 2000 years ago. He entered our broken, sinful world and experienced the effects of sin. By doing so, he fully identified with us.

Several scriptures affirm Jesus' humanity:

"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favour with God. You will conceive and *give birth to a son*, and you are to call him Jesus."¹

"*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*"²

"...when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law..."³

"...who [Jesus], being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, *taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man*, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the *death* of the cross."⁴

"...*he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest* in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people."⁵

Jesus was human like us in every way

Jesus had a human body (like us). He grew, got hungry, tired and thirsty, became weak, died, and rose as a human.

Jesus had a human mind. As man, Jesus didn't know all things. He grew in wisdom, stature and favour with man and God.⁶ When asked about his second coming, he confessed that he didn't know.

Jesus had a human heart. He marvelled at the centurion's faith.⁸ He wept with Mary and Martha when Lazarus died. Fearing the cross, he cried out, "Father, if it is possible, *may this cup be taken from me*. Yet *not as I will*, but as you will."⁹ Again, he cried out, "Father, save me from this hour."¹⁰ He offered up prayers and petitions with fervent *cries* and *tears* to the one who could save him.¹¹

Jesus had a human will. He told the Pharisees, "For I have come down from heaven *not to do my will* but



by
Dr. P. Sellappan

to do the will of him who sent me."¹² He prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet *not as I will*, but as you will. He totally *submitted to his Father's will*.

*Jesus was human like us in every way (but without sin). He completely identified with our humanity, so he can save us completely.*¹³ He heals and saves what he assumes (becomes).

Was Jesus also divine?

Absolutely! Jesus was both human and divine. When he humanity, he *voluntarily* laid aside his divine powers and privileges. All the miracles he performed, he did only *by the power of the Holy Spirit and with the express permission of the Father*. He could do no miracles on his own. He plainly confessed: "*By myself I can do nothing.*"¹⁴

During his 33½ years on earth, Jesus was limited like us by time and space. He could not be here and there simultaneously.

Is Jesus still human – post-resurrection?



What our readers say:

Shalom! I'm so glad for having the Plain Truth Magazine as one of my reading tools to deepen my understanding of the Bible! I believe it is not a coincidence that one of my church elders introduced me this wonderful Christian magazine! This is absolutely a must-read magazine for all Christians!

PS: I think it is more suitable to use the capitalized pronoun for Lord Jesus Christ. For example, it is more suitable to use 'He' instead of 'he' as Lord Jesus Christ is divine just like the Father and Holy Spirit.

Sylvester Judin
Sabah

Ed: Glad to hear that you like the Plain Truth magazine. We thank God for His guidance and inspiration. We also want to thank all our readers for their prayers and support. Thank you for your feedback and suggestion.

I have found the real God through The Plain Truth magazine. Besides, it has taught me many things. It equips me with a positive mind-set and helps me to love the Lord more deeply. I love the magazine and wish to keep on receiving. Thank you.

Leong Sim Yee
Butterworth

The Plain Truth magazine has broadened my knowledge of the bible. It has been the favourite reading material for my family and we eagerly await each issue. Thanks for the great job.

Edditha Samuel
Kota Marudu

The Plain Truth is very special to me. Before I received it, I seldom go to church. Now I am very active in the church. It is a very good magazine to read. I love it very much. Thank you for your kindness for sending it to me.

Jeffrey
Kuching

The Plain Truth enhances my spiritual life and strengthens my faith in Christianity. The articles also help me cope with problems that come my way.

Steve Ong Siang Chai
Kuala Lumpur

The Plain Truth is thought-provoking and the articles are relevant to the modern time.

Ting Kim Yong
Johor Bharu

I have been a regular reader of The Plain Truth for many years. My whole family have

learned a lot about Christianity by reading the articles. We have since followed the faith and got baptised recently.

Reader

The Plain Truth is a reader-friendly publication and presents the gospel message clearly and simply. I look forward to seeing the magazine to break through the Christian market and eventually the secular market. We need a positive, Spirit-led mind-set in this highly materialistic society. I believe the magazine plays an important role in shaping our conscience. I pray for your ministry and may God bless the fruits of your labour.

Robert Kee
Klang

After all these years you still remember to send me the magazine - that's simply awesome! Needless to say, your magazine is most alive and spiritually enlightening. I enclose a small token sum to support your good work.

Albert Ng
Alor Star, Kedah

I enclose herewith a donation of RM 25.00 for the excellent work you are doing, not just for believers but for everyone. Many thanks.

Victor E Jesudoss
Kuala Lumpur

Congratulations. This is the only reading material I read for peace of mind. Every article is read and pondered upon leisurely. As an appreciation, I would like to donate a token sum towards the cost of my yearly subscription and also for one more person.

Reader

It was a great surprise to see the Plain Truth magazine again! I really appreciate your thoughtfulness in sending the magazine. The Plain Truth is a universal teacher of Christian values. I have already retired but am very happy to send \$20.00 as a token of my appreciation. Thanks.

Lee Khon Yin
Kuala Lumpur

Ed: Thank you for your donation; your financial support is greatly appreciated. It will certainly help us to keep sending the magazine to those who request it.

The Plain Truth is thought-provoking and the articles are relevant to the modern time.

Ting Kim Yong
Johor Bharu

The Plain Truth provides spiritual truths not necessarily available in my church. It also provides practical Christian living principles.

Timothy Ley
Singapore

The Plain Truth is inspiring, enlightening and brings me closer to God and fellow Christians in this challenging yet interesting Christian journey. The articles are thought-provoking, simple to read and understand. Thank you so much for making it possible. God bless you and your team to reach those need this knowledge. Keep up the excellent work.

Chang Mee Yan
Ipoh

The Plain Truth explains the purpose and meaning of life clearly. I pray the Lord will bless your team in continuing the good work.

Roland Foo Fai Teck
Singapore

I have learned so many good things from The Plain Truth. My friends are also reading and enjoying it. Keep up your good works!

Thangaloo
Sandakan

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 Incarnation: The Greatest Miracle

Which is the greatest miracle of all? Many Christians would point to the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross. The crucifixion-resurrection event is, after all, the basis for our salvation. But why would we consider the death and resurrection of Jesus so great an event? After all, others have died and risen again. Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, Eutychus. Why is the resurrection of Jesus a greater event than the raising of Lazarus from the dead?

Make no mistake, Jesus' resurrection is a greater event than the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus eventually died again, but Jesus rose to eternal life and glory. When Lazarus rose, a great deal changed for him, but little changed for the world. But when Jesus rose, everything changed.

What was so different about Jesus' resurrection? The key lies in who died and rose. In the case of Lazarus, a human died and rose again to continue a mortal life. But in the case of Jesus, someone much more than a human died and rose again. Jesus was human, but not just a human. He was both God and human — God in the flesh, God incarnate, both divine and human.

The reason his death and resurrection have such power is not because death and resurrection are the greatest miracle. Rather, it is because his death and resurrection had been preceded by the miracle that truly is the greatest of all: the miracle of the incarnation. Billions will eventually die and be resurrected into eternal life and glory; the incarnation, however, will remain unique.

C.S. Lewis called the incarnation "the Grand Miracle." He wrote: "The central miracle asserted by Christians is the Incarnation.... Every other miracle prepares for this, or exhibits this, or results from this.... It was the central event in the history of the Earth—the very thing that the whole story has been about." (Miracles, chapter 14).

By a miracle that passes human comprehension, the Creator entered his creation, the Eternal entered time, God became human—in order to die and rise again for the salvation of all people. "He comes down; down from the heights of absolute being into time and space,

by
**Grace
Communion
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down into humanity; down further still ... (to) the womb ... down to the very roots and sea-bed of the Nature He has created. But He goes down to come up again and bring the whole ruined world up with Him."

The greatest miracle of all is that wonderful, incomprehensible act by which God became a human, and was born to a young Jewish girl named Mary, in a stable in Bethlehem, about 2,000 years ago during the reign of Herod the Great. The power of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ does not lie in the events themselves. The power of the events derives from the person of Jesus himself: who and what he was and is. His words have power and authority because they are the words of God incarnate. His life has power because it is the life of God incarnate. His death and resurrection have power because they are the death and resurrection of God incarnate.

Is it any surprise then that three of the four Gospels begin their record of Jesus' work by emphasizing the wonder of his incarnation? Matthew records how Jesus was miraculously conceived in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit, and that he was "God with us." Luke made it clear that Jesus was the Son of God. John described how the Eternal Word, who is God, had become flesh as Jesus Christ to dwell among us.

The real surprise is that some Christians take so little notice of this greatest of all miracles. A spirit of commercialism has become attached to the Christmas season. Disturbed by these things, some avoid the festival. But too often, they also forget to dedicate time to think about the message Christmas was intended to remind us of: the message of God's greatest miracle. What a pity that, as a result, some forgot to rejoice in this greatest of all miracles, the birth of Jesus.

Let us not miss the opportunity to celebrate the great miracle: to come in wonder and worship before the One who humbled himself to become a baby, a child, a human; who descended into his own creation so that by ascending again he might lift it up with him from decay and bondage into glory and freedom.

Jesus, a Promise Fulfilled

As we come to the close of the celebration of Advent and look forward to Christmas, we continue to look back and also forward to the overwhelming significance of what the Incarnation of the Son of God means to us as human beings. From Genesis on, the Scriptures point to the fulfillment of the promise that God would send a Messiah to save his people. God promised both Abraham and later David that the Messiah would come from their descendants.

Promises fulfilled

God made many promises concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament. In 2 Samuel, God told No when David wanted to build a house for him. Instead, God would make David a house—a lineage that would include the Savior of the world.

The Gospel of Luke reminds us that when the young virgin, Mary, was approached by the angel Gabriel, she already knew what was prophesied in the Scriptures. Though she was shocked at the appearance and words of the angel (and who wouldn't be!), she had been told about God's promises to Abraham and to David. She knew a Messiah would come, and he would be from the line of Judah, of the house of David. What she didn't imagine was that God would actually choose her, from a God-fearing but humble family to be the mother of the Savior. She expressed her sense of joy at being the one chosen to bear the long promised Messiah in a poem called the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55).

The significance of Christmas

In this harried season, filled with frenzied consumers who, in many cases, dread Christmas, if we're not careful, we can be caught up in the commercialism of the holiday. We can overlook the significance of what we are supposed to be celebrating. All the decorations, some beautiful and some not so much, don't begin to express the joy we should feel about Christmas.

We are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ into this world, our world. God came to earth to become one of us so we could be reconciled to the Father! So we could be saved from our sins! So we could live with him for eternity!

How great is that!

Arguments over whether or not "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" should appear in stores and on other types of greetings can steer our minds away from the momentous truth that God has come down to earth to be born as a human to dwell among us and to lead the way for us to have an eternal relationship with him. But, how is it possible that God, who is spirit, could become human? It's a question that's been asked and argued about over the centuries.

Mary's role

Let's look at Mary's important role in God's plan of salvation. We don't learn a lot in the Bible about the girl God chose to be the mother of his Son. She was, most likely, betrothed to Joseph at a young age. The Jewish

by
Sheila Graham

custom was for girls to marry as young teens. Mary may have become a mother as early as age 14.

Mary, we are told, was God-fearing and trusted God with her life. She could have been a candidate for stoning for being pregnant outside of marriage. And, even if that didn't happen, she would (and did) have to suffer rumors that Jesus was illegitimate. Yet she agreed to be the mother of the Messiah.

Some think Mary had no choice, but that isn't true. Maybe you've noticed in the Bible that angels are rather abrupt when they bring messages from God. There's no "if you agree" or "if you feel like doing this" in their proclamations. But the Scriptures also show there's room for negotiation. Think Abraham and Gideon. Both negotiated with God. Mary had a choice.

Did you notice the difference in the way Gabriel treated Mary as opposed to how he treated Zechariah? When Gabriel told Zechariah that his wife Elizabeth would become pregnant with John, and Zechariah asked how that could be, Gabriel punished his lack of belief by making him unable to speak. But when Mary asked basically the same question, Gabriel patiently answered her. Perhaps there was a difference in attitude. It seemed he decided to treat this young girl with more patience than he did an old priest who should have known better than to question God's abilities. Zechariah's time of silence helped emphasize how his child was special; Mary's role was already difficult enough.

When Mary affirms that she is willing to bear the Christ child, she becomes the first disciple of Jesus. How? Listen to this; it's important: She received Jesus from the Holy Spirit by responding in faith, not through any other actions on her part. Further, even the faith to do so came from God. Contrary to what some teach, she wasn't perfect—she had not earned the right to have a Savior, much less to give him birth.

Mary's response to God, despite her imperfections, is a model for us. She was a human being like you and me. When we come to Christ, we come as imperfect sinners, with empty hands. We have nothing to give to show we are worthy of him. Like Mary, we respond to Christ by faith, by the Holy Spirit, and then—and right now would be a good time to shout Hallelujah, praise God—we are *in Christ and Christ is in us!*

Mary's reaction to the shepherds' words and Simeon's prophecy and her response to her own son's words when she finds him in the Temple, continue to show she was a believing disciple of Jesus:

- She knew Jesus could perform miracles before he had publicly done so.

- She was totally confident he could take care of the embarrassing lack of wine at the wedding feast.
- Though she and her family sometimes wondered about and questioned what Jesus was doing, they eventually understood.

Though some in past centuries have gone overboard and even come to worship Mary, we shouldn't shy away from honoring the mother of our Savior. Her role was significant.

The promises are for all

Mary was an Israelite. The prophecies were written that the Messiah would come to Israel. In Romans, the apostle Paul also refers to the Old Testament prophecies of a Messiah, a Savior, but he shows the promises go beyond the nation of Israel and the house of Judah to include the gentiles. Now, not only Israel but also the gentiles (that's most of us, folks) are blessed to understand, through Jesus Christ, what God had planned from eternity, to make salvation available to all humankind. At the close of the book of Romans, Paul writes:

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, NRSV)

Paul speaks of messianic prophecies not even the prophets themselves fully understood at the time they were given. Only through the life, death and resurrection of Christ could these mysterious prophecies be understood.

God is God of both the Jews and the gentiles. His purpose for all eternity has now been revealed through

his Son. God's plan of redemption includes all humankind. A sense of wonderment and joyful praise fuel Paul's words.

By faith, not works

Now, through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, our obedience is through faith, not works. And salvation through Christ has come to the whole human race, both Jew and gentile. We can say with Paul, "through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever!" Praise God for his love and mercy!

Speaking biologically, you can't explain the incarnation of Jesus the Son of God as a human being apart from any male involvement, any more than you can explain the creation of Adam without any female involvement. Jesus' birth as a human being was a new creative act of God.

Death came through Adam's and Eve's sin, and God's incarnation as Jesus conquered sin and death and saved the whole of humanity—both male and female. Thomas F. Torrance in *The Ministry of Women* writes that the incarnation was "the healing of our complete human nature."

Let's summarize: The significance of the virgin birth of Jesus, of the Incarnation in which God became human (adding our humanity to his divinity), cannot be overestimated. As noted by the apostle Paul, from the beginning, from Genesis to Revelation in God's Word and through Jesus Christ, who is also God's Word, God promised a redeemer, a savior of humankind. God did not create us and then abandon us. In the first Adam we disobeyed and abandoned him. But in the birth, life, resurrection and ascension of the second/last Adam, Jesus Christ, through his grace and mercy and love, God made a way for us—all of us, Jew and gentile—to be reunited to him for eternity.

Worth celebrating? I should say so.

Merry Christmas!☑

Continued from page 2

Jesus' humanity continues on

Jesus *didn't* shed his humanity after his resurrection. His humanity continues on into eternity.

However, there is a difference between his *pre-resurrection* and *post-resurrection* body. His pre-resurrection body was like ours - weak and limited. But his post-resurrection body was *glorious* - not subject to space-time limitation. He could be here and there and appear and disappear at will. This is the kind of body we will have at our resurrection.

Several scriptures affirm Jesus' *continuing humanity*:

"Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this *Man* [Jesus] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses."¹⁵

"For just as through the disobedience of the one man [Adam] the many were made sinners, so also through

- 1 Luke 1:31
- 2 John 1:14
- 3 Galatians 4:4-5
- 4 Philippians 2:6-8
- 5 Hebrews 2:17
- 6 Luke 2:5
- 7 Mark 13:32
- 8 Matthew 8:10
- 9 Matthew 26:38
- 10 John 12:27
- 11 Hebrews 5:7
- 12 John 6:38
- 13 Hebrews 7:25
- 14 John 5:30
- 15 Acts 13:38-39
- 16 Romans 5:19

the obedience of the *one man* [*last Adam*] the many will be made righteous."¹⁶

"As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the *heavenly man*, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the *heavenly man*.

"But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God."

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the *man* Christ Jesus."

Let's summarize this Christmas reality: *Jesus' (glorified) humanity continues on. This is important; otherwise we have no high priest, no mediator, no intercessor, no salvation, and no hope! Jesus has freely given us his perfect humanity. That gift alone makes us holy and righteous. We are saved to participate in Jesus' perfect and glorified humanity - now and forever.*☑

A Father's Sacrifice

by
Sondra Peters

Here in the U.S. we celebrate fathers with a whole day in June. It's a day when we thank them with a cheesy card and a tie or a tool for all they do for the family. A good father sacrifices his wants for the needs of his family. Unfortunately, not all fathers put their families' needs before their own, but I know of three fathers who have.

Years ago, our roof had a leak. Today, we would fix the problem by whipping out our checkbook and hiring a professional. Back when we were younger and poorer, though, we took care of as many problems as we could ourselves.

For this chore, my husband Ed had to climb a ladder up to the roof and crawl up to straddle the ridge of our house, which is situated on a steep hill with the back of the house built into the hill. The backside of our house appears to be only one story, but from the front, it is two stories, and from our rooftop, you can see for miles. Sitting on the ridge of our house, Ed was a lot closer to the tree tops than the ground.

Have I mentioned Ed is not fond of heights? He has been on a few amusement park thrill rides but *only* for the sake of our son, Will, who loves scary rides. This death crawl up our steep roof was yet another sacrifice he made for the family.

Ed girded his loins (mentally speaking) and climbed up the ladder. Will, who was 12 at the time, and I were on the ground offering moral support and holding the ladder. Ed climbed the ladder until he reached the shingle portion of the roof. You could see him pause and take a breath before he transitioned from the ladder to the roof.

Climbing the ladder was the easy part. Transitioning from the security of the ladder to the roof was not, and it got progressively harder as he slowly scooted up the steep roof.

Ed finally made it to the peak and straddled the ridge. As he settled in, he paused to calm his nerves. He briefly looked out over the world—the tree tops, the valley and the river beyond—and then looked at the job at hand. And that's when he realized he's missing his tools—and supplies. He was so anxious about getting up there he didn't take anything with him.

This should have occurred to his ground crew *before* he got all the way up, but he says we were too busy laughing at him. Not true. We were nervous for him. It was, however, really hard not to laugh once the *oops* was discovered. I truly had empathy for Ed, because I'm even more afraid of heights than he is, but I don't care what you say, it was funny!

Feeling a little guilty, I ran into the house and grabbed what was handy: a lightweight basket and some yarn because, as everyone knows, yarn will not break—not when you're trying to break it anyway. I put his equipment in the basket, tied one end of the yarn to the handle and wrapped the other end around a hefty stick. I thought my idea was ingenious, but to this day, I don't believe I've been given credit for my stroke of brilliance.

I managed to throw the stick with the yarn attached up to Ed. Unbelievably (because I'm a terrible thrower), it only took three tries before I got it close enough for Ed to catch it. Ed started to pull the basket up and the yarn broke. I retied the yarn, he pulled at the basket and it broke again.

There was a lot of tension, and I'm not talking about the yarn. After several tries, we managed to get the basket up to Ed and he was quickly able to make the repairs. Piece of cake! As Ed made his way back down the roof, I quietly told Will this was between us and I made the universal signal of zipping my lips.

Fast forward a dozen years, and for the first time ever, I brought up this story to get Ed's permission to retell it. He can laugh about it now, but it was not a laughing matter back then.

This story reminds me of three things. The first is the value of laughing at yourself—it's a sweet sound. The second is that God must get so much amusement out of our blunders. God doesn't make blunders, so he can't laugh at himself, but he sure has plenty of opportunities to laugh at us! And the third is a father's sacrifices. Many a father has endured a job he didn't enjoy or ridden a roller coaster with his child because he was too young to go alone or fixed a leak on a steep roof—all for the sake of his family.

My own father made sacrifices too. He has passed on, but I remember how hard he worked. He went to his 8-to-5 job, then worked with his cattle or in our huge garden until it was dark. He could have stayed in the house and relaxed and sent us to do the chores, but he did the chores with us to set an example.



Continued on page 9

Jesus: Lamb and Shepherd

When Jesus was born, God told Joseph to name him “Jesus,” which means “Savior.” It was a common name in the first century, and at that time most people had only one name. To identify Jesus from others with the same name, he was known as “Jesus, the son of Joseph”, “Jesus of Nazareth”, or “Jesus, the carpenter.”

Scripture includes many other names that symbolically refer to his character and role as our savior, including: “the lion of the tribe of Judah,” “root of David,” “bread of life,” “light of the world,” “captain of salvation,” “chief cornerstone,” and “prince of peace.”

He was also known as “the lamb of God,” and as our “shepherd.” We may ask, how can Jesus be both a lamb and a shepherd? At first glance, it doesn’t make sense, so let’s look further.

Jesus, the Lamb of God

The Old Covenant required Israelite priests to offer daily offerings and sacrifices, including lambs to atone, or make amends, for the sins of the people. The sacrificial lambs were to be male, without spot or blemish—picturing the future once-for-all sacrifice of the sinless Jesus.

Lambs are gentle, harmless, defenseless animals. The term “lamb” is appropriately applied to Jesus as expressing his innocence and his willingness to be the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of the world.¹

When John the Baptist was preaching the need for repentance, and baptizing people in the Jordan River, he saw Jesus approaching. “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.’”

In being our sacrificial lamb, he sacrificed his own human life, reconciling us to God once for all. Thank you, Jesus!

Jesus, the Shepherd

The lamb of God became our shepherd when he ascended to heaven, now sitting at the right hand of the Father. The Apostle John described a vision of the heavenly throne, “For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”²

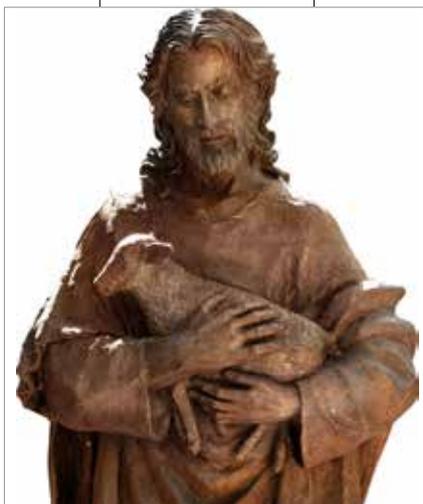
Continued from page 8

I can’t help but think of another father who made a sacrifice. He knew before he ever had children that he would need to rescue them and sacrifice one son to save all his other sons and daughters. He and that one Son gladly made the sacrifice. Some might say only the Son made the sacrifice, but as a parent I think it must have been even harder on the Father.

And the sacrifice wasn’t “one and done”! That Father has to sit on his hands, knowing he could easily fix his



by
Paul Hailey



Shepherds watch over herds of sheep, guarding them from harm, preventing them from wandering off, leading them to food and water. Jesus appropriately referred to himself, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”³ Jesus is the shepherd of the Christian church, leading us into the green pastures and living waters of everlasting life.

Pastors of Christian churches are often referred to as “shepherds”, but they serve under Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. When Peter, gave some instructions to church leaders, he referred to them as “shepherds,” but then continued, “And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”⁴

Jesus is the real head, the real Shepherd, of the Christian church.

We are his sheep

“Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of His pasture.”⁵

What is our role as his sheep? Simply put, we should follow the lead of our Shepherd, Jesus. “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”⁶ We follow Jesus when we do what he did—serving and loving others and telling of the way to salvation. It is vital that we pray, asking for guidance in our lives, and in studying Scripture in order to stay familiar with his thoughts, words, and actions.

When we yield our lives to him, he will guide us in the way we should go. “...for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”⁷

We also should seek out churches with human pastors who teach and care for those under their care.

Ultimately, as King David said, our Chief Shepherd will lead us into the luxurious pastures of heaven.

“May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing His will, and may He work in us what is pleasing to Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”⁸ □

- ¹ John 1:29
- ² Revelation 7:17
- ³ John 10:11
- ⁴ 1 Peter 5:4
- ⁵ Psalm 100:3
- ⁶ John 10:27
- ⁷ Philippians 2:13
- ⁸ Hebrews 13:20, 21

children’s problems if they would only come to him for help. He knows if he forced his help on them, the fix would be temporary. That, too, is a sacrifice!

To the fathers in my life, Ed, my dad and God the Father, and to all the fathers who give themselves for their families, thank you. □

Jesus: The Unexpected Messiah

Why didn't Jesus go down in history as a failure? In fact, why did he go down in history at all?

He lived on earth at a time when his people were expecting a Messiah to deliver them from the Roman occupation. It seems there were many zealots and fanatics eager to appoint themselves to that position. Some even gained a following, but their efforts came to nothing. Most died unknown, and even those we know about are just footnotes in history. However, Jesus is not a footnote in history. He is considered one of the most influential, if not *the* most influential, human being who has ever lived.

When he was crucified 2,000 years ago, his followers were left in confusion. Most were expecting the Messiah to be a royal military leader who would overthrow the enemies of Israel and be honored by the Jewish religious leaders as king. This would be the proof of his Messiahship, and this is what they expected Jesus would do.

Just a few days earlier, he had entered Jerusalem to the acclaim of the crowds. At last, it seemed, he was going to make his move and lead them in a war of liberation against the Romans. Then he would establish his kingdom, restoring the fortunes of his people. Those who had followed him would be given key positions. But before the week was over he was dead – executed like the worst criminal, rejected by the religious leaders, and his followers went into hiding.

No one (except for Jesus) expected this to happen. Although there were different ideas among the Jews about what the Messiah would do, there were some common themes. Being crucified was not one of them. In fact, coming to such an end would have been high on the list of events proving someone was *not* the Messiah. So why did his followers continue to believe in a Messiah who, instead of leading them to victory, only seemed to have brought ignominy and suffering on himself?

Let's look at it from the disciples' point of view. Jesus did not fulfill any of those common expectations for the Jews of his day. Instead of routing the Romans, he came as the Prince of Peace, not even carrying a weapon. He was born in a rented stable and buried in a borrowed tomb. He was executed in mid-life by a method reserved for slaves and rebels. So, why would his followers maintain that he was the Messiah? Why would they not just cut their losses after his death and move on? Why would they even be willing to be killed themselves for this Messiah? New Testament scholar N.T. Wright explains it well:

There were, to be sure, ways of coping with the death of a teacher, or even a leader. The picture of Socrates was available, in the wider world, as a model of unjust death nobly borne. The category of "martyr" was available, within Judaism, for someone who stood up to pagans... The category of failed but still revered Messiah, however, did not exist. A Messiah who died at the hands of the pagans, instead of winning [God's] battle against them, was a deceiver...

Why then did people go on talking about Jesus

by
**Grace
Communion
International**

of Nazareth, except as a remarkable but tragic memory? The obvious answer is that...Jesus was raised from the dead.

Suffering would not have been necessary for the kind of Messiah the people of his time were expecting. He could have lived to a ripe old age, and then have been enshrined in legend and history like David, Joshua, or Gideon. Even if he had lost his life in a struggle against the Romans, he could have had a place of honor. But to live in relative obscurity and then die in disgrace – what kind of a Messiah is that?

But Jesus was so much more than a military hero. He had come, not just to deliver Israel from the Romans, but to rescue all humanity from captivity to evil and death, and reconcile humanity to God. To do that, he had to suffer and die. On the very day that Jesus rose from the dead, he spoke of himself: "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?"¹

The full glory of the Messiah is seen on the cross. This was an important point that Jesus' disciples had missed until after his resurrection. Many still miss this point today. The glory of Jesus as our Savior was not shown only through his power and resurrection, though it could have been. His glory certainly was not shown through any status or position he had on earth. Rather, his glory was also shown in the incredible suffering he willingly endured as an expression of his immeasurable love for those he came to save.

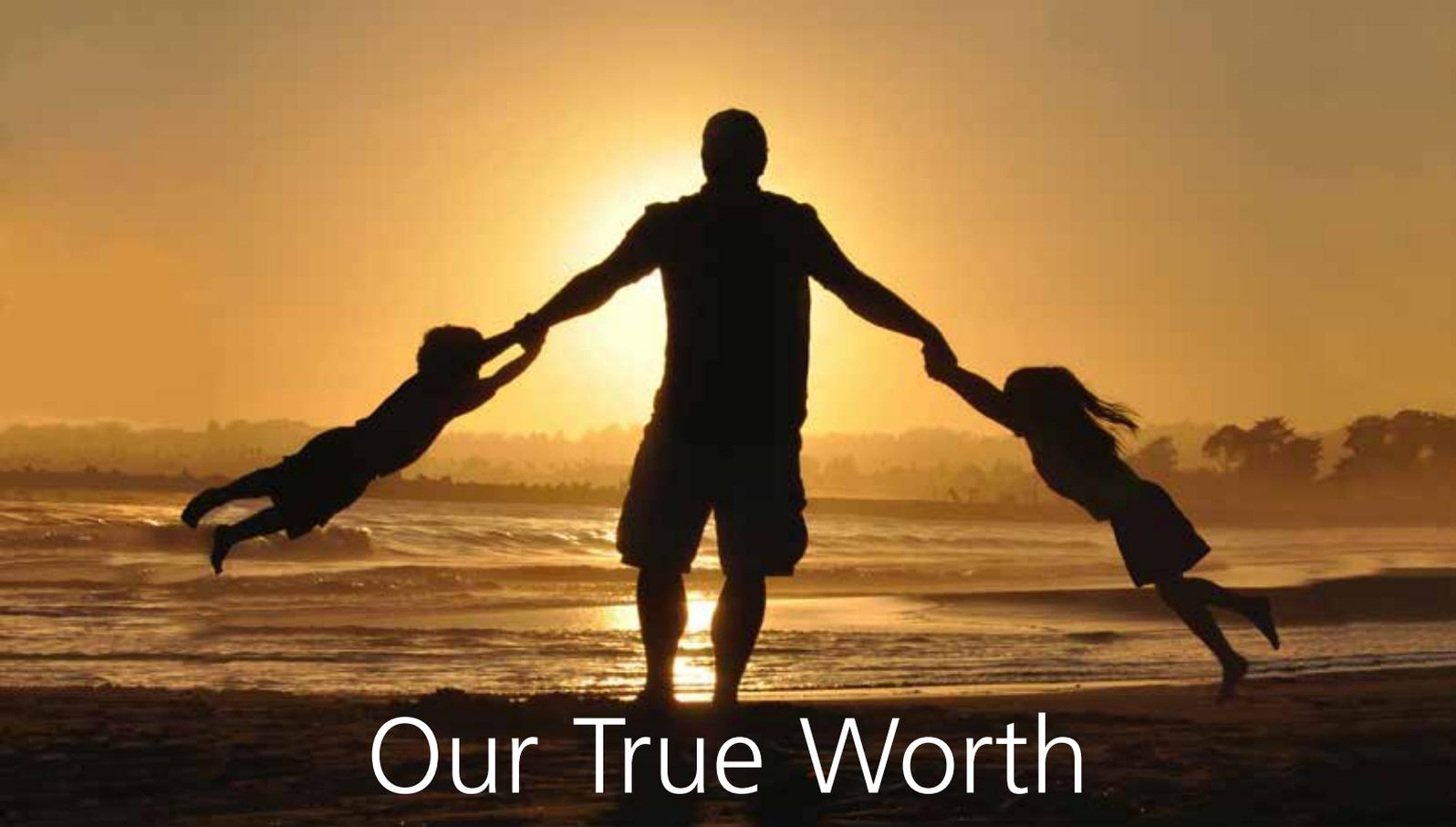
As Paul wrote to the church at Philippi:

[Jesus] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!²

After his resurrection, the full realization of who Jesus was, and what he had come to do, began to sink in. As his followers absorbed the wonder, grace and glory of his crucifixion and resurrection, they were transformed. Led by the Holy Spirit, only then did they begin to fulfill his "Great Commission," taking his message of forgiveness of sin, victory over evil and death, and of salvation to the whole world.

Convinced of the truth and reality of who Jesus was and what he had accomplished, not even the suffering of hardships, persecution and, for some, execution could stop their proclamation reaching "to the uttermost parts of the earth." We today are the beneficiaries of their mission and ministry that was handed on to others who were also faithful channels of God's own reconciling and renewing work down through the generations.

Continued on page 15



Our True Worth

Years ago, the McDonalds corporation conducted an advertising campaign that declared in no uncertain terms, *YOU DESERVE A BREAK TODAY!* We've all seen ads like that—ones proclaiming that we deserve to own or consume a particular product. Many companies use this marketing approach to get us to buy their coffee, hamburgers, hair products, even toilet tissue. It's not that I'm against buying nice things—recently I bought a dark chocolate, caramel and peanut-covered apple. My wife and I definitely enjoyed it! But let me ask you this: Is our worth as human beings really about the things we own and the products we consume?

Advertising campaigns like the one described above are designed to get us to view ourselves more highly than we ought so that we'll reward ourselves by buying the advertiser's product. Sadly, that scheme works because our fallen humanity is subject to flattery.¹ We see that in the case of Adam and Eve (our first representatives), who rejected God's good purposes for humanity. The distortion of human nature resulted, though God did not give up on us. He went to work advancing his purpose to bring many sons and daughters to glory.² In doing so, God does not give us a slick sales pitch appealing to our distorted sense of self-worth. Rather, he invites us to trust in and follow his Son, the second Adam, who took on himself our fallen human nature and restored it to what God intended so that in him and by his Spirit, God's eternal purpose for us would be realized.³

Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus gave humanity a worth that far exceeds what we could ever deserve, earn or even imagine. The apostle Paul put it this way: "Yea doubtless... I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."⁴ Paul knew that a living, deep relationship with God through Christ has infinite worth—inestimable value—compared to what any finite source could possibly



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

provide. He reached that conclusion by examining his own spiritual heritage, no doubt recalling the words of Psalm 8:4: "What is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?"

Have you ever wondered why God came in the person of Jesus the way he did? Couldn't he have come with angelic hosts displaying power and glory? Couldn't he have come as a talking animal, or like a Marvel Comics superhero? But as we know, Jesus came in the humblest manner—a helpless infant. His plan was to be put to death in a horrible manner. He did this because he was mindful of us. I cannot help but be encouraged when I remind myself of the amazing truth that though he did not need us, he came anyway. We have nothing to give him except honor, love and appreciation.

Since God does not need us, it prompts the question of our worth. In crass material terms, we're worth relatively little. The value of the chemicals that compose our body is about \$160.00. If we were to sell the bone marrow, DNA and organs in our body, the price might go up to millions of dollars. But that price does not begin to compare to our true worth. In Jesus, we have inestimable worth as new creations. Jesus is the source of that worth—the worth of a life lived in relationship with God. The triune God brought us into existence from nothing in order that we would be eternally in perfect holy and loving relationship with him. That relationship is a union and communion in which we freely and gladly receive all God gives us. In return, we entrust to him all we are and have.

Christian thinkers over the centuries have expressed the glory of this relationship of love in various ways: Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." French scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal said, "This infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words, by God himself." C.S. Lewis said that, "No one who has experienced [the joy of knowing

Continued on page 13

Partnering

God created humans for adoption¹ into his family as his children. As his children, what will we be doing – tomorrow, ten years from now, and through all eternity?

Are we going to be passive, doing nothing? Or will we be busy partnering and participating in God's creative works? If so, how will our participation look like? Will he give us a list of tasks to do and ask us to meticulously follow through to achieve his purpose? Or will he give us some freedom how we might achieve those tasks?

This article will attempt to answer these and other questions – albeit very briefly.

God created the universe

All Christians believe God created the universe and they quote scriptures like the ones below to prove it.

Genesis 1:1 - "In the beginning *God created the heavens and the earth.*"

John 1:1-3 - "In the beginning was the Word [Son of God], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*"

Colossians 1:16 - "*For in him [Christ] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.*"

While Christians agree that God created the universe, they don't necessarily agree on *how* he created it. Some say God created the universe in six *literal* days, but others (especially Christian scientists as well as theologians like Fr. Richard Rohr and Dr. N. T. Wright say he created the earth by an evolutionary process. They say the six days is not literal but figurative/metaphorical, each day corresponding to millions of years.

They say the universe began with a big bang, starting from a tiny universe and gradually expanding (through a series of physical, chemical and biological reactions) to what it is now. They also say the universe it is still expanding and growing. The universe according to them is approximately 20 billion years old; the earth, 4.5 billion years old; the early life forms, 4 billion years old; and human life, a few thousand years old.

The *earth's* temperature was initially too hot to support life, but approximately 4 billion years ago the temperature gradually dropped (because of prolonged torrential rains) to support living things. Through a series of complex physical, chemical and biological reactions, living things began to emerge – vegetation on the 'third day', sea creatures and birds on the 'fifth day', and land creatures and man on the 'sixth day'.

Genesis 1:26 tells God created man in his image and likeness and Genesis 2:7 tells he created man from the



by
Dr. P. Sellappan

dust of the ground (could it imply evolution?). While early life forms appeared around 4 billion years ago, humans came on the scene only a few thousand years ago. That's briefly how God created life on earth.

Some don't accept the idea that God created living things from physical, chemical and biological substances. Yet God tells us that he fashioned man from the *dust of the ground*. And Jesus told the Jews that God can raise children from stones.² Jesus himself gave life to dead corpses. With God all things are possible.

God gives creation freedom

God truly values freedom. He doesn't coerce, control and manipulate his creation to achieve his purpose without its willing participation. He invites his creation



to partner with him. Apostle Paul tells us that it is for *freedom* that Christ has set us *free*.³

We see this freedom in action when God renewed the face of the earth:

In Genesis 1:11-13: God tells the land, "Land, produce vegetation - grass, herbs, fruit trees - and fill the earth" and it was so. It was the third day and God saw that it was good.

In Genesis 1:20-21: God tells the sea, "Sea, produce sea creatures and birds and fill the waters below and the waters above (sky)" and it was so. It was the fifth day and God saw that it was good.

In Genesis 1:24-25: God tells the land, "Land, produce all types of land creatures and fill the earth" and it was so. It was the sixth day and God saw that it was good.

with God

In Genesis 1:27-31: *God tells himself*, "Let us make man in our image and likeness." So he makes man and woman in his image and likeness and asks them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and have dominion over the earth.

In Genesis 1:26-31; 2:16-17: *God invited Adam* and Eve to partner with him. He hoped they would obey him, but they failed, and the result was bad. But God didn't abandon them; he worked with them to ultimately bless him.

Isn't that how God works with us today? He allows us to make decisions – even bad decisions – but works with us to bless us.

When creation aligns *itself to God's will (purpose)*, good things happen. If not, bad things happen. Irrespective of the outcome, God still *renews (reworks)* with his creation to bless them.



For example: God's Spirit renewed the face of the *formless and empty and dark earth*⁴ so that it could support life. This is an example of *recreation*.

That is also true of us. While we were yet sinners, God sent his son Jesus to redeem and save us. He sends us his Spirit to renew our minds daily so we can be transformed more and more into his image and likeness. Paul calls this renewal *new creation*.⁵

Current state of creation

In this long evolutionary process, certain species like the dinosaurs became extinct, presumably because of extreme environmental conditions. This happened long before humans came on the scene. Human history is only a few thousand years old compared to the history of the universe and earth which is 20 and 4.5 billion years respectively.

Apostle Paul describes the *current state of the universe like this*: "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration (*futility/held back*), not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay* and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that *the whole creation has been groaning* as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved."⁶

This tells that the current state of creation is not at their best or ideal state yet. That means it can be renewed to make it better and more glorious. And that is precisely what God is doing now and will continue to do in the future.

God's plan for creation

Through Prophet Jeremiah God told his plans for his people [Ancient Israel] thus: "For I know the plans I have for you...*plans to prosper you* and not to harm you, *plans to give you hope and a future*."⁷

Paul likewise echoes God's desire for us: "And we know that *in all things God works for the good of those who love him*, who have been called according to his purpose."⁸

Jesus, through his life, death, resurrection and ascension, came to restore all things.⁹ As we have seen earlier, the present state of creation is not at its best. God intends to renew and make it more glorious. And he doesn't want to do that all by himself - he wants us to be involved! He wants *to restore us first, and then undertake this massive restoration project*.

Called to participate

How does God work with his creation? Does he tell his creation to meticulously follow his wish list and then control and manipulate to make them happen - without any participation from his creation? If that was the case, creation would be mere automatons.

If that was the case, there would be no extinct species; no volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis; and no human suffering. But we know that's not true – we still have natural calamities and much human tragedies.

Does God chart our whole future – what we will do tomorrow, ten years from now, or through all eternity - without our participation or involvement? I think not. He gives us liberty to make choices but works with the choices we have made, even if choices are not good. That's the price of freedom, but without it we would be mere machines, not children of God.

Matthew 19:26 tells us: "With God all things are possible." God can work with the choices we make and still bless us. If we had made bad choices, he can help us change course. *As we partner with God and seek his*

guidance, he will bless us. After all, we are his children and he wants the best for us.

God calls us to participate in his creative works. He called Adam to name the animals and tend the garden. He told Noah to build the ark, Moses to lead the Israelites, and the disciples to baptise believers,¹⁰ preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons.¹¹

As we participate in God's mission we experience his joy, passion, excitement and fulfilment. God doesn't call us to a passive, mundane and boring life. The Master in the Parable of talents rebuked the servant with one talent for not participating in his business.¹²

The risen Jesus is calling his people to participate in his mission – preach the gospel and make disciples, love one another, forgive one another, bear with one another, and live peaceably with all.

Jesus sets the example for us. He participated in his Father's mission and did his Father's will and became our Saviour.

The *Holy Communion* we partake pictures our *participation* in Jesus' life - in his baptism, in his obedience and overcoming, in his worship. We cannot experience his abundant life unless we participate in his life. Jesus tells us, "Unless you abide in me, you can bear no fruits, you can do nothing."¹³

When we accept Jesus as our personal Saviour, we become partners with him:

"In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of *your partnership in the gospel* from the first day until now, being confident of this, that *he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus."¹⁴

"For we have become *partakers* of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end."¹⁵

"For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become

¹ Romans 8:23, Ephesians 1:5

² Matthew 3:9

³ Galatians 5:1

⁴ Genesis 1:1

⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁶ Romans 8:19-24

⁷ Jeremiah 29:11

⁸ Romans 8:28

⁹ Acts 3:21

¹⁰ John 4:2

¹¹ Luke 10:1-2

¹² Matthew 25:18, 24-27

¹³ John 15:4-5

¹⁴ Philippians 1:4-6

¹⁵ Hebrews 3:14

¹⁶ 2 Peter 1:4

¹⁷ Isaiah 61:3

¹⁸ Revelation 21:5

partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.¹⁶

Renewal is evolutionary

Creation is not a one-time event – rather, it is evolutionary as the following scripture suggests:

- God created the earth, then when it was *formless, void and dark* he renewed it and made it good – made it fit for life.

- God created man, and when he fell, he sent his son Jesus to renew/recreate us so we might live satisfying lives.

- God regenerates our lives and gives us *beauty for ashes, oil of joy for mourning, and garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness and makes us righteousness*.¹⁷

- God tells us, "I am making all things new!" The word making implies continuous, not presto change. As we partner with God, he takes us from glory to greater glory.

Fruits of participation

God made this awesome universe with billions of galaxies, milky ways, stars and planets. And he also made the earth with myriad living things – plants, birds, land and sea creatures, and man.

The whole creation is *awaiting* renewal - recreation. First, God renewed the face of the earth and made it to support life. Now, he is transforming us from our fallen state to his image and likeness. As we participate in his life, we get to experience his *kind of life* – his love, joy, peace, contentment, passion, fulfilment, and friendship. This renewal starts with us - now. At resurrection, God will give us a glorified body (not subject to time-space constrain) which will enable us to participate in God's massive universe-wide restoration works. Wow - what a privilege we have!

This is the life God is offering to us. May *God give us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to fathom the length and breadth and depth and height of his love for us*. Amen.☐

Continued from page 11

God] would ever exchange it for all the happiness in the world." He also said that we humans were made to "run on God."

God created all that is (including us) because, as the apostle John put it, "God is love." God's love is the supreme reality—the basis of all created reality. His love is of infinite value and it is his redeeming and transforming love expressed toward us that gives us our true worth.

Dear friends, let us never lose sight of the reality of God's love for us. When we have pain, whether physical or emotional, let us remember that God loves us, and will, in his timing, take all pain away. When we have sorrow, loss and grieving, let us remember that God loves us and will, one day, wipe away all tears.

¹ Psalm 5:9;

Romans 16:18

² Hebrews 2:10

³ Ephesians 1:3-14

⁴ Philippians 3:8

Let me conclude with an analogy that I hope and pray resonates with you. When my children were young, they asked me why I love them. My answer was not that they were good kids who were good looking (which they were, and still are). It was not that they were honor roll students (which they were). Instead, my answer was that I loved them BECAUSE THEY WERE MINE! That is no mere marketing slogan—it speaks to the core reason of why God loves us: We belong to him, and that makes us more valuable than we can possibly imagine. Let us never forget that!☐

Don't Clash

During the riots in LA in 1992, we were under a curfew. The tension in Southern California had been high for days and it was deemed dangerous to be out after dark. I had not experienced such a situation and it was a little bit scary.

My daughter almost added to the tension shortly after the riots ended when we ate at a restaurant to celebrate our freedom from the curfew. As we walked among the tables on our way out, my then 4-year-old daughter stopped at a table of African Americans and asked a woman if she was black.

Everyone in the whole restaurant seemed to hold their breath before she replied, "Yes, I am." Stephanie told her, "You have really pretty hair." The sigh of relief was audible.

"Can we all get along?" is the question Rodney King asked on the third day of the rioting. Indeed. What would life be like if we all could get along with each other?

The Bible has a lot to say about getting along with our fellow human beings and on the surface, it might seem it's not so difficult. Just love each other, think better of others than you do yourself, put others' needs first, be patient, kind. We are all familiar with these "one another" statements but they aren't so easy to fulfill. Some days we do better than others but getting along can seem impossible at times.

One day I came across one of these passages in 1 Peter. I have been reading in *The Message* just to get a different perspective. It's fun and makes some parts more interesting. Sometimes I check other versions as some verses don't resemble the translations I've read all my life.

1 Peter 3:8-12: "Summing up: Be agreeable, be sympathetic, be loving, be compassionate, be humble. That goes for all of you, no exceptions. No retaliation.

by
Tammy Tkach

No sharp-tongued sarcasm. Instead, bless—that's your job, to bless. You'll be a blessing and also get a blessing."

I wanted to remember this but found it difficult to keep the five words straight in my mind, so I switched them around and came up with the acronym CLASH.

I found simply keeping the word *clash* in my mind helps me at those times when my natural, carnal reaction is to clash with people, rather than be Compassionate, Loving, Agreeable, Sympathetic and Humble.

Getting along with others, just like following all the admonitions in the Bible, isn't something we can do perfectly on our own. The Holy Spirit is the one who transforms us, but we can and should cooperate with him in the process. Reminding ourselves to clash, or rather, not to clash, is one way to help it along. □



Continued from page 10

As Paul put it in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Let's renew our own sense of wonder and commitment, as we each do our part in carrying on the Great Commission. It is a message this world needs. It has been well said, "He may not have been the Messiah all had hoped for, but he is indeed the Messiah of great hope for all."

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¹ Luke 24:26

² Philippians 2:6-8



Reconciling **God's Love** with Our Pain

When life is easy and carefree, then its purpose either seems irrelevant or obvious. Life is good. There is no need to worry about why... just enjoy it. But when life becomes tumultuous—which it will eventually—when the sun has become darkened by the turbulent clouds of pain and suffering, then the question of “why” becomes all too relevant and not the least bit obvious.

For as long as I can remember, I have needed to understand the purpose of life and living. Even as a child I found life to be so perplexing that I couldn't just go through it without asking why. Life to me felt much more futile than productive and happiness was all too elusive to be trusted.

Maybe it depends on how many sunny days we get to experience against the cloudy ones that push us toward a quest to find meaning in our pain. Maybe it exists entirely in the person we are and what we believe will fill our life with something more than the unexpected, unwelcomed and inexplicable chaos that intrudes our joy. Unfortunately, the tragedies that eventually find us are as much a part of life as the joys we chase after. And when they come all we are left with is to wonder what the purpose of it might be...if there is any purpose to it at all.

Yet it seems that in the midst of our confusion, a far deeper anguish plagues our soul... our inability to reconcile a God who is love, with the outrageous and unthinkable agony pain can produce. Believers and non-believers alike find little comfort in a God who can allow such pain to exist. And even worse, to know He has the power to prevent or stop it and yet often does neither.

But are we asking the wrong questions? Have we

by
Trish Clauson

simply made a god in the image of who we feel He should be, while missing the truth of Who He really is? Is it possible that His love is somehow intrinsically tied to our pain? Scripture is very straightforward when it says that God is love. However, because there are no promises that He will always deliver us, but will more often walk with us instead, we struggle to understand what kind of love, God's love is. When we try to reconcile what we believe love should look like, with what we are experiencing within the context of pain, we can only imagine one or the other. To us love and pain are mutually exclusive.

So now I wonder...is the true meaning of life, of living through all the phenomenal joys and unconscionable sorrows meant to give us the one thing we need most — glimpses of who God “really” is? Would the greatest blessing we could ever experience be the knowledge of God's presence, not only in our sunny days, or in moments of miraculous deliverance, but with even more depth of conviction within the midst of our deepest sorrows, our greatest losses, and our most ominous storms? Is there an understanding of God's love that can only be revealed to us there? Is the true purpose of life and living, not *freedom from pain* but a *peace that passes understanding* in the midst of it? Can we say “it is well with my soul” when our soul is being threatened to be or is already quite unwell? Is it possible, as Laura Story sings in her song, “Blessings”...that our trials are really God's mercies in disguise?

Yet, in the midst of these possibilities, don't we

Continued on page 18

What is the kingdom of God?

When Jesus began preaching, he said, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel".¹ What is this Kingdom of God? What has it got to do with believing in the gospel? Throughout the gospels the Kingdom of God or Heaven is often mentioned by Jesus. On one occasion he even stressed that one has to be childlike in attitude in order to enter it.² Is the Kingdom some real reigning empire related to God? Is it a spiritual state of being which we need to enter? Is it heaven? Can we ever know for sure?

The word "Kingdom" is translated from the Greek word 'basileia'. In Hebrew the term is 'Malkuth' whose meaning is deeper than 'kingdom', 'empire' or 'government'. It includes the concept of 'reigning' or 'sovereignty'. In other words it indicates the idea of God being sovereign over humanity. This is not the way the world thinks and moves in this present day and age. The nations of this world go blindly on, believing that power and glory is in their hands. They war against each other causing such intense suffering and pain. National glory is the only thing that counts among nations of this world. They are unable to see or accept the fact that there is an eternal Hand working behind the scenes which determines the destiny and fate of every nation. Yet God makes it clear in the Bible that He does reign over the world.

When Jesus came on the scene two thousand years ago many of his disciples thought that as the Messiah Jesus was going to take over the nation and rule as king. But that was not the reason Jesus was born. The plan of God to send his only begotten Son encompassed more than kingship. The entire existence of man was hinged on Christ being born here on earth.

Through Jesus is the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God. The prophet Isaiah prophesied about Jesus and the Kingdom when he said, "For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."³ This verse tells us that a Prince of Peace who is divine will have rule over a government on the earth. However, reality tells us that no such government is ruling nations of the earth today. Therefore, is the verse meaningless? Not so, you see the Prince of Peace is not going to establish a kingdom through conquest by war. In fact the Kingdom will be established by the most peaceful and divinely inspired way. It begins with the transformation of the individual.

When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about the kingdom, he declared that the "kingdom is within you"⁴ Jesus also declared that no one can see the kingdom unless they are born again.⁵ A change must occur first in the individual where a realization occurs in the mind



by
Devaraj Ramoo

and heart of a person as to who Jesus really is. Jesus is the eternal Word who existed with God the Father. His purpose to be born on earth is to bring mankind out of the mire of the consequence of sin which is death. In other words, Jesus came to save mankind by being the sacrificial Lamb of God, whose blood shed on the cross would free mankind from eternal death. When we accept the sacrifice of Christ and Him as our personal savior, a new birth occurs in the depths of our soul thereby bringing us into a real relationship with the eternal God. We then belong to Jesus. This is the first step into attaining citizenship in the Kingdom of God.



However, this does not mean membership in an exclusive club where we just attend church and keep the rest of the world away. We now move onto the next phase which is our relationship with the world. Just take a look at what is happening worldwide. There is not a single day that goes by without news of war, murder, oppression, injustice, poverty and hopelessness. The eternal God did not create mankind to live this way. We brought it on ourselves by defying God through sin. Therefore, the next phase of the Kingdom of God is the reconciliation of the world to himself through Jesus Christ. We the individuals who are in Christ are the ones God uses to reconcile the world to him through the gospel that Jesus preached.⁶ This gospel of the Kingdom of God is reaching all parts of the world today despite the hopelessness the world presents. People's lives are being transformed and thousands are coming to realize and receive the saving grace of God through Jesus Christ. The Kingdom of God is therefore not static but alive and growing. This growth is part of the divine process where God is using the individuals

he calls to minister to the world whereby reconciliation occurs between man and God. Now we proceed to the next step where Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is already here. How is this possible?

Jesus said that the Kingdom of God has come upon us.⁷ In other words those who are of Christ are already in his Kingdom. Though we may be citizens of various nations in the world, yet our ultimate state of being is as a child of God for whom belongs the Kingdom of God.⁸ This was accomplished because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the single most deciding factor for the establishment of the Kingdom of God at this present time.

Jesus in the gospel of John made a profound statement. Our temporary existence now that leads to death can only be rectified by him. Jesus is the resurrection and the life for mankind.⁹ The Kingdom exists today because Jesus is a risen savior. When Jesus rose from the dead he appeared to his disciples and many other followers for a period of forty days. It was an amazing miracle when Jesus proved to Thomas the disciple that he was indeed the risen Christ by showing him the marks of the wounds he received at the cross. He didn't just appear to them. He continued speaking to them about the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ When he was taken up to heaven, the apostles continued preaching the same message.¹¹ That message has continued to be preached up to this day. Therefore the Kingdom exists in the lives of the people he has called at this age. The principles of the Kingdom of God when applied to every facet of our lives bring blessings and peace. Moving away from these principles brings the suffering that we see now on earth. Many ask "When will there be an end to human suffering in its entirety". The answer to that brings us to the final phase of the Kingdom which is the Kingdom of God that will come in its fullness when Jesus Christ returns in all power and glory.

¹ Mark 1:15

² Matthew 18:3

³ Isaiah 9:6

⁴ Luke 17:20-21

⁵ John 3:3

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5: 18-19

⁷ Matthew 12:28

⁸ Luke 6:20

⁹ John 11:25

¹⁰ Acts: 1:3

¹¹ Acts 28:23

¹² Revelation 11:15

¹³ Matthew 13: 45-46

The book of revelation states, "The kingdoms of the world have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and He will reign forever and ever."¹² It speaks of a time when Christ will literally reign on the earth. It will be a time when all suffering will end. No more sorrows, no more wars, no more hate and greed. In short every evil that we see today will be no more. Many prophecies in the Bible speak of this time. One example is found in Isaiah 2:4 which speaks of Christ judging the nations and settling disputes among many peoples. Humanity will 'beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning forks.' Nations will not go to war anymore; neither will they think of war. All humanity will know their savior Jesus Christ and everyone's heart will be turned to God. It is a time of great joy and happiness in the world when the mess we have created will be no more. What a fantastic blessing to look forward to!

Finally, is the Kingdom of God going to be forced on us? Not so, because the Kingdom of God is a priceless treasure once we recognize it and we will desire it exceedingly. In the gospels Jesus presented many parables to describe the Kingdom. In one parable Jesus describes the great value of the Kingdom of God.¹³ He describes a merchant having found a pearl so precious that he sold all that he had in order to purchase it. That is how we will feel when we see the Kingdom of God in the person of Christ and in its fullness. Our desire for it will dwarf everything else in our human existence. May your lives be enriched and blessed as the Kingdom of God touches you.☐

Continued from page 16

still find it hard to totally trust God? Pain and suffering demand relief. And in the depth of our pain, our only desire is deliverance or at least some kind of guarantee that we will be okay. But, when God doesn't do what we believe He could or should have done, a very different god emerges in our thinking, one that we begin to re define through the lens of our pain. To do this is dangerous, and can thwart our faith. What we can't know for sure is what God can or will do. But what we can know unequivocally is "Who" God says He is. Placing our trust solely in who He is allows our faith to rest firmly on an immovable reality that guarantees that whatever the outcome, it will not only be filled with His deep abiding love for us, but will also be in some way a blessing for our greater good; one so incredible, yet so outside of ourselves, we simply cannot comprehend it within the context of our pain.

God may seem more loving and approachable in our joys, than in our sorrows. Ironically as much as I have enjoyed His presence as we have walked beside the still waters or have been together in green pastures, my glimpses of Who He is there pale into insignificance against the God who has walked beside me not only through my own "valley of the shadow of death" but also in death itself. In that space He has revealed parts

of Himself that I could not have imagined without the shroud of darkness and death surrounding me; without the knowledge that deliverance would not be possible in this lifetime. It is then in the midst of such pain, that I have more fully experienced God's grace and His love. It is there, in the depth of my being that God lovingly has embraced my anguish and surrounded me with His peace — a peace that not only defies human logic, but that opens my soul to an even greater wonder of who this inconceivable God. . . *really is!*☐

God Cares



Though King David said that we humans are “fearfully and wonderfully made,” we don’t always function in accordance with God’s good design. The results can be painful. When we become less active due to injury or aging, we can feel a great sense of loss. Perhaps nothing is more heart-wrenching than the sight of an injured or terribly sick child, leaving us asking, why does God allow suffering? Does he even care? Though answering those questions is beyond the scope of this article, the Bible does provide comfort by giving us snapshots of God’s perspective on human suffering. We’ll look at a few of those snapshots, finding reassurance that our triune God does care, and invites us to share in that caring with him.

Snapshot 1: God created life full of vitality and good

God’s good intention for humanity is addressed in a book called *The Wisdom of Solomon*. Though not part of Holy Scripture as defined by most Protestants, it’s of interest and value to us. Note this from chapter 1:

God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living. For he created all things that they might exist, and the generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them; and the dominion of Hades is not on earth. For righteousness is immortal.¹

Understanding that God created the human body for peak performance, Solomon realized that death, preceded by decline and pain, was not God’s plan. Solomon placed blame for these unfortunate outcomes on the devil:

God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.²

by
Martin Manuel

Instead of listening to God, Adam and Eve, exercising the freedom God gave them, chose to listen to the serpent who led them into a deceitful trap. This, in turn, caused them and their descendants to experience the sorrows of death. God was not at fault.

You’ve heard the expression, “It wasn’t meant to be.” Usually, it’s spoken when something desired fails to happen. It implies that God manipulates everything that occurs. But that idea (a form of *theological determinism*) contradicts what the Bible says concerning the freedom God grants us to make choices. Because of our bad choices, we humans live in a world that gives free reign to evil, often negating the good results of the sound choices we do make. For that unfortunate outcome, we must not blame God.

Snapshot 2: God reacts compassionately

When our bad choices cause bad outcomes, how does God react? Does he say, “You reaped what you sowed”? Though that might be true at times, it does not portray how God feels about us, even when we rebel against him. Consider this: If you told your child not to ride their bike down a steep slope and, disregarding your instruction, they injured themselves, would you say, “I told you so... now suffer the consequences”? Perhaps some parents would say that, but I doubt that, even then, they would disregard their child’s injuries. Most parents would rush to the injured child’s side to help, only later reminding them of their disobedience. Do we think that God would do less?

In 2 Samuel, we are reminded that David, a valiant man with a tender heart like God’s, grieved the death of Saul and his son Jonathan, even though Saul had been trying to kill David:

Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were

swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions.... How the mighty have fallen in battle!³)

In Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah shows a similar heart in response to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Though Jeremiah warned the Jews of impending destruction if they failed to repent, Jeremiah did not gloat when that destruction came. Instead he grieved the people's suffering, reflecting God's own heart for his people:

No one is cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone.⁴

In allowing Jerusalem's destruction, God's purpose was not to merely to inflict pain in order to punish—his purpose was to discipline in order to bring about restoration of the relationship with God that the Jews severed.

Snapshot 3: Jesus reacts the same way

God the Father showed his heart of love and compassion for humanity by sending his Son into the world as its Savior. Jesus is the definitive depiction of God's compassionate disposition toward humanity. The Gospels give many examples of Jesus' compassion for people. Let's look now at a few of them. In Mark chapter 2, at a time in Jesus' ministry when great demands were being placed upon his time and energy. The way Jesus reacted shows his priorities:

When Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.⁵ Imagine going home for some rest and having a big crowd show up at the door demanding your time and attention! As the story unfolds, we learn that some in the crowd were so intent on getting close to Jesus, that they opened a hole in the roof above Jesus's head and lowered a paralyzed friend to Jesus' side. Instead of being perturbed, Jesus responded with compassion and healed the paralytic. Then in Mark 2:13, we are told that Jesus left the house to meet with another crowd of people at the seashore (so much for rest and relaxation!). Then in Mark chapter 3 we learn that a few days later Jesus returned to the same seaside location and yet another crowd:

Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, and a large crowd from Galilee followed. When they heard about all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him.⁶

The situation was becoming chaotic and people, including Jesus, might have been hurt. Yet Jesus stayed and ministered to these needy people. A while later, he entered a house, where another crowd gathered—one so big that Jesus had no time to eat.⁷ Serving people sacrificially was clearly a high priority for the Son of God. Then, in Mark chapter 4, Jesus returned to the seashore once again:

Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge.⁸

Jesus spent time with this crowd, teaching and compassionately healing them. Then, as we read in Mark chapter 5, Jesus left them and crossed the lake to help a demon-possessed outcast who was in desperate need of deliverance. Jesus healed him and then returned to the other side of the lake:

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." So Jesus went with him.⁹

Any parent will relate to this father's concern for a seriously-ill child. With compassion, Jesus graciously responded. On the way to the child's side, another pitiful situation emerged:

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."¹⁰

Though on his way to do something quite important, Jesus stopped to lovingly respond to this woman in need. Not only was she healed, she learned an important lesson and became an example of faith in Jesus.

The story continues in Mark 5:

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe."

When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means, "little girl, I say to you, get up!"). Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to

let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.¹¹

Some think Jesus worked miracles merely to attract crowds so he could preach to them. But Jesus' behavior here is inconsistent with that idea. If he was merely seeking attention, why travel to a remote location to heal a demoniac? Why quietly heal a bleeding woman? Why secretly revive a dead girl? Answers to these questions explain why Jesus healed the sick and drove out demons. Put simply—*he cared*. Jesus loved hurting people so much that he was willing to give of his time and energy, to forgo some of his own needs in order to serve. In doing so, Jesus was showing how God feels about people, despite their flaws and sins.

Jesus, sent by the Father, willingly entered into human tragedy and hopelessness in order, not to condemn, but to relieve, rescue, deliver, heal, comfort and save. Jesus knew very well that it was not his mission at that moment to turn this planet into a paradise where no pain or suffering exists. That is to come later in a new heaven and new earth. For now, humanity is in the "time between the times"—the time between Jesus' first and second comings, when the good news is being proclaimed and people have opportunity to embrace it. *Today* is the day of salvation!

For those who embrace Jesus and his gospel through faith, the result is an intimate relationship with the Father, through his Son, by the Spirit. That relationship provides help to cope with the evils in this present world while living in the hope of the world to come. Living in this world now, in step with the Spirit, they are participants in what Jesus continues to do to share God's love with a sin-sick, needy world.

Our triune God cares more for us than words can describe, though the apostle Paul was inspired to sum it up with these words in today's reading from the epistles:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.¹²

The eternal Son of God, in becoming flesh through the Incarnation, divested himself of tremendous wealth. He did so in order to address the root cause of humanity's problem through his atoning sacrifice. During his earthly ministry he acted out of compassion to alleviate suffering in the lives of people he encountered. Since his ascension, Jesus has continued his work of compassion—interceding on behalf of all humanity.

Snapshot 4: The Church participates

The ascended Lord Jesus, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, calls and equips the church to participate with him in his ministry of compassion and intercession. Note what Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 8:

Here is my judgment about what is best for you in this matter. Last year you were the first not only to give but also to have the desire to do so. Now finish the work, so that your eager willingness to do it may be matched by your completion of it, according to your means.¹³

Paul is referring to the financial support that church members in Corinth were giving to assist impoverished people, including church members, in Judea. The point is that the caring, compassionate heart of our ascended Lord continues to be focused on the needs of people

here on earth, and he invites his followers to share in his heart of love for all people.

Let's summarize: Those who think God doesn't look with compassion and love on people in their fallen, sin-sick state are sadly misinformed. God cares more for us than we can ever comprehend—he cares more for us than we care for ourselves. When people suffer, even as the result of their own sin, that suffering is not God's doing. Rather than causing our suffering, God pities those who suffer and grieves with them, even while he refuses to remove from people the freedom to make decisions—even bad ones that lead to suffering.

Because God the Father does care, he sent Jesus who entered into human misery and suffered with us, and sent the Spirit as our Advocate to be in us now and forever. God's plan is to deliver humanity completely from its troubles in a new heaven and new earth. Between now and the arrival of the fullness of his kingdom, God offers help, relief and deliverance to those who put their trust in him. As we experience his grace and mercy, we are invited, inspired and encouraged to share it with others in need. Amen. □

¹ Wisdom 1:13-15, NRSV

² Wisdom 2:23-24

³ 2 Samuel 1:23, 25

⁴ Lamentations 3:31-33

⁵ Mark 2:1-2

⁶ Mark 3:7-9

⁷ Mark 3:20

⁸ Mark 4:1

⁹ Mark 5:21-24

¹⁰ Mark 5:24-34

¹¹ Mark 5:35-43

¹² 2 Corinthians 8:9

¹³ 2 Corinthians 8:10-11

God has saved you, therefore respond

This article (and others to follow) is based on Dr. Radcliff's book, *The Claim of Humanity in Christ*. Her book summarizes the incarnational Trinitarian theology of Thomas F. (TF) and James B. (JB) Torrance, particularly in the areas of soteriology (salvation) and sanctification (holiness and Christian living).

A radical claim

Dr. Radcliff begins her book by noting that TF's and JB's theology has, at its core, a distinctive, radical claim:

All humanity has its true being in Christ. The whole of humanity is redeemed by Christ's vicarious person and work. Humanity is wholly claimed in Christ prior to anything that we can contribute. This also places an unconditional and all-embracing claim upon humanity; God's grace demands our all. Yet, sanctification is not a daunting, arduous endeavor. We are liberated to grow into the ontological [pertaining to being] reality of who we are in Christ as we freely share by the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father.

In this way, she summarizes TF's and JB's teaching that all people, by virtue of who Jesus is and what he has accomplished on behalf of humanity, have their true being in Christ. In and through the vicarious (representative, substitutionary) humanity of Jesus, God already has reconciled himself to all people (it is an objective, accomplished reality). The Torrances thus believe in *universal reconciliation* (Radcliff calls it universal atonement). In and through the humanity of Jesus Christ (who is one in being with the Father), God has included all people in his life and love. However, as we will see, the Torrances do not teach a doctrine of *universalism*.

The outworking of that reality

As Radcliff notes, what has been accomplished for all humanity in an objective sense in Christ, must be personally (subjectively) *realized*. She states it this way: "God's purposes are fully accomplished [but] not yet fully manifest". The time between the full accomplishment and the, yet future, full manifestation (parousia) is a period she calls "the eschatological reserve." This is the time between Jesus' first advent and his promised return (second advent). It is during this time "between the times" that the Spirit is forming and transforming the body of Christ to participate with Christ in his ongoing work in the world. It is through this participation that believers are personally (subjectively) conformed to Christ and (in that sense) sanctified.

A convenantal not a contractual God

Fundamental to Torrance theology is the understanding that...

God the Father is revealed in his Son as a convenantal God, not a contractual God, with primarily filial rather than judicial purposes for humanity. Prior to any contribution that we could make, God chooses the whole of humanity for salvation in Christ. This liberates us to offer ourselves back to God whole-heartedly in freedom.

When people view God as a *contractual God*, they

by
Ted Johnson

tend to understand salvation and sanctification as grounded in a transaction based on obedience to law. According to this view, God forgives us for breaking the law only upon our repentance, and then having saved us, he empowers us to keep the law, thus bringing about our sanctification. This legalistic/transactional view of salvation and sanctification, which is championed by several theologies, stands in contrast with Torrance theology, which sees God not as a *contract God* but as a *covenant God* whose principal concern is not obedience to law, but establishment of a filial relationship with us. Whereas the contract viewpoint sees salvation as legal (forensic) and thus external to us, the covenant viewpoint sees salvation as relational (participatory) and thus internal to us.

Who over how --- the revelation of God in Jesus

Given the relational/participatory nature of salvation and sanctification, it's vital we begin not with the *how* (How are we saved? How are we sanctified?), but with the *who* - Who is Jesus Christ who both saves and sanctifies us? As Radcliff notes...

We understand God's works from knowing the person of Christ, who is the revelation of God the Father. We must therefore look to who God is in order to understand how he acts.... We cannot seek to understand God according to prior anthropological systems of logic. The method of knowing in theology must be appropriate to the subject of inquiry.

Thus, to understand God (and, ultimately, his acts), we must begin with who Jesus is. This is because Jesus alone reveals the true nature and will of God. Once we are clear on who Jesus is, we can then see how God acts for our salvation and sanctification by looking to what Jesus has done (and continues to do by the Spirit). Dr. Radcliff comments:

Jesus' activity in salvation is one with the Father; the Son was not placating the wrath of the Father in order to receive forgiveness for humanity. The reconciliation that Jesus brings about is the very expression of the love of the Father.... This does not deny a judicial element to atonement, but it means that it must be subsumed and only understood within God's overarching filial purposes for humanity.

The flaw with a largely legal/forensic view of the atonement is that it demands works from humanity for salvation. In contrast, the Torrances believe that the Father's dealings with us [both in salvation and sanctification] are not primarily in terms of law but rather in terms of Fatherhood and sonship. His purposes for us are thus primarily filial rather than judicial... his love sought our salvation so that we might be adopted as sons and daughters in order to live in loving communion with him.

The nature of God's covenant with humanity

Fundamental to Torrance theology is the understanding that because God made a covenant with all humanity, he does not relate to us in contractual terms. A contractual relationship would mean that God forgives

Continued on page 23

Sayings by Richard Rohr

God created us for love, for union, for forgiveness and compassion and, yet, that has not been our storyline. That has not been our history.

Jesus is much more concerned about shaking your foundations, giving you an utterly alternative self-image, world image, and God image, and thus reframing your entire reality. Mere inspiration can never do this.

Life is not a matter of creating a special name for ourselves, but of uncovering the name we have always had.

You surrender to love; you do not accomplish love by willpower.

Before the truth sets you free, it tends to make you miserable.

There are two ways of being a prophet. One is to tell the enslaved that they can be free. It is the difficult path of Moses. The second is to tell those who think they are free that they are in fact enslaved. This is the even more difficult path of Jesus.

Sin happens whenever we refuse to keep growing.

So much is happening on earth that cannot be fixed or explained, but it can be felt and suffered. I think a Christian is one who, along with Jesus, agrees to feel, to suffer the pain of the world.

Most of the Catholics Christians I've met would for all practical

purposes believe Jesus is God only, and we are human only. We missed the big point. The point is the integration, both in Jesus and ourselves.

This life journey has led me to love mystery and not feel the need to change it or make it un-mysterious. This has put me at odds with many other believers I know who seem to need explanations for everything.

Most women prefer circles of sharing to pyramids and hierarchies. They prefer conversation to construction. They will usually choose nurturance and empathy over competition and climbing. They will normally choose connection over simple performance games.

Because I am a part of the Big Picture, I do matter and substantially so. Because I am only a part, however, I am rightly situated off to stage right—and happily so. What freedom there is in such truth! We are inherently important and included, yet not burdened with manufacturing or sustaining that private importance. Our dignity is given by God, and we are freed from ourselves!

The Eucharist becomes a microcosmic moment of belief and power in which we say we believe in the real presence of God in Jesus, in this bread, and in this wine.

What we know about God is important, but what we do with what we know about God is even more important.

Continued from page 22

us (and so saves us) only *after* we repent, whereas a covenant relationship means that God first forgave us then, as a result, we repent (which as we will see, means participating in Jesus' repentance on our behalf).

The covenant that God made first with Abraham, then with Israel, and now in Christ with all humanity, is unilateral (vs. bilateral) and unconditional (vs. conditional). This means that the covenant is made with humanity entirely from God's side. We, the beneficiaries, do not fulfill certain covenant conditions in order to gain God's favor in return. The reality, seen clearly in the person and acts of Jesus, is that humanity *has* God's favor, God's love, already. Indeed, God fulfills *both sides of the covenant for our salvation in Christ*. As JB notes, *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God who has made a covenant for us in Christ, binding himself to man and man to himself in Christ*.

It is thus God's unconditional grace toward humanity that serves as the basis for our salvation. God saved us, in Christ, because he loved us, not in order that we might do something to get him to love us. The same God of love, by grace, sanctifies us, not by what we do, but by what he, in grace, has done for us already in and through Jesus. Radcliff puts it like this:

It is God's unconditional grace that leads to living a holy life that [ultimately] upholds the law. Paul writes that it is under grace that sin has no dominion (Romans 6:14). Grace teaches us to reject ungodliness (Titus 2:11-14)... Paul asserts that we are free from the law and that godly living is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). Godly living fulfills the law but this is the fruit of the Spirit rather than our own efforts....

The logic of grace

As Dr. Radcliff notes, the Torrances teach that...

There are no conditions placed upon humanity for grace, but there are obligations of grace. The "logic of grace," TF believes, is that "all of grace" does not mean nothing of man but rather "all of man." Likewise, JB argues that although God makes the covenant for us, it demands a response from us. God's claim of humanity places a radical claim upon humanity. However, it is essential to distinguish that the obligations of grace are not conditions of grace.

She also notes JB's assertion that "the indicatives of grace are always prior to the obligations of law and human obedience." In similar fashion, TF notes that...

God has already provided the perfect human response in our place through Jesus. This means that our response is a participation in a response already made, which liberates humanity from any demands to earn God's grace and allows us to offer ourselves back to God in freedom.

As Radcliff goes on to note, this means that the proper declaration of the gospel is this:

God has saved you; therefore respond

As we will see in future posts looking at Radcliff's helpful book, that response is our participation in the response Jesus, in his humanity, has already made on our behalf. From start to finish, including all aspects of our salvation and sanctification, it is about Jesus, not us--it is about grace--it is about what the covenant God of love and grace has, in Christ, done for us. Amen. □

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