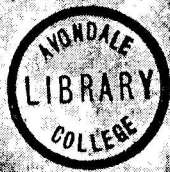


passport to a kingdom



BY DESMOND FORD

"O for a man to arise in me
That the man I am might cease to be."

MOST OF US at one time or another have sighed a prayer similar to the poet's. Our daily experience certifies that all is not well with us, that we are not what we ought to be. A character in one of H. G. Wells's stories declares, "I'm not a man, but a mob"; and thereby he speaks for all mankind by nature, confessing the experience of disintegrated human personality. To start with, each one of us is a mess; we begin life as a welter of unorganized drives and conflicting desires. Is it not strange that the highest and loftiest member of creation should be least in harmony with his environment?

Christianity does not teach what many believe it to teach—that human nature is essentially good and kind. On the contrary, Christ takes for granted our evil nature. "If ye then, being evil," He says. (Matthew 7:11.) Man is more devil than angel according to Scripture, and therefore he requires a far more radical change than what is offered him by education, psychology, or political utopianism.

THE THEORISTS of evolution have hoped for over a century that the inevitable biological advance would outbreed man's baser instincts, but World War II, a continuing cold war, and a crime rate that is fourfold that of population increase in some areas, have indicated how barren are such hopes.

Our only hope seems to be in such an integration of the human personality as will result in harmony with the universe. No doubt this was what Christ meant when He told a nocturnal visitor two thousand years ago, "Except a man be born from above he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3, margin. On other occasions He expressed the same thought in the following way: "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3. These "excepts" stand between every man and eternal life. God is saying that He will not take to heaven anybody who does not already have heaven in himself. He calls for transformation of character, and in our hearts most of us are aware that His call is just. The

matter is not optional, for in Hebrews 2:3 we have a rhetorical question which is also a warning: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

This transformation of character called for by Christ is often referred to as conversion, regeneration, repentance, justification, etc., and theologians discuss at length the technical differences involved in these terms. All students of Scripture, however, are agreed that in a nutshell the Scriptural discussions of such topics are saying in essence that all of us need a new relationship with God, that all of us need changing.

"Could'st thou in vision see
Thyself the man God meant,
Thou nevermore could'st be
The man thou art content."

Consider the most frightening aspect of Christ's words "Ye must be born again"—namely, the *character* of the person to whom He spoke them. It was not to a Mary Magdalene, a lady of the night. It was not to a Zacchaeus, a cheat and thief. Christ's words were addressed to a man of spotless reputation who spoke Sabbath by Sabbath at one of the leading metropolitan churches—Nicodemus, the teacher of Israel. (See John 3:10, R.V.)

Which of us would claim a character as lofty as his? or a mind as enlightened as his? Yet even Nicodemus needed to be born again. No wonder that when Wesley was asked why he preached so often on the text "Ye must be born again," his reply was, "Because 'ye must be born again.'"

Holy Writ declares that by nature we are "dead in trespasses and sins" and "desperately wicked."

EACH OF US is like a person who has fallen out of a lofty upper-story window—bound to meet with destruction unless some power going in the other direction takes hold of us.

Not only does the Bible make such direct statements as these about our natural weaknesses and crookedness, but it illustrates the theme throughout all its pages. In fact, the need for conversion is the great theme of Scripture. One writer has said,

"The central theme of the Bible, the theme about which every other in the whole book clusters, is the redemption plan, the restoration in the human soul of the image of God. . . .

"He who grasps this thought has before him an infinite field for study. He

has the key that will unlock to him the whole treasure house of God's word." —Ellen G. White, *Education*, pp. 125, 126.

Let us consider some examples that illustrate both this quotation and our present theme.

Look at the first picture presented by the Bible—that of our unformed world at its birth, a chaos robed in darkness—"The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." Genesis 1:2.

This is a graphic symbol of the un-renewed heart, of the person whose mind is steeped in darkness, who knows not where he is going spiritually, and who is hopelessly unable to help himself. Over and over the New Testament draws upon this picture as being descriptive of every man without Christ. Thus one New Testament writer says, "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." 2 Corinthians 4:6. And again, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord." Ephesians 5:8. And again, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation." 2 Corinthians 5:17, margin. This is why it was that when John began his gospel of the story of redemption, he did so by using the same words in his introduction as were used to introduce the story of the old creation—"In the beginning." (John 1:1; Genesis 1:1.)

THE FIRST page of Scripture tells us in symbolic form not only the way in which God created the world, but also the way in which He re-creates the soul. The verse that follows the description of the primeval chaos tells us that the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the deep, and that then the word of God called the light out of darkness. This in turn was succeeded by the earth arising from the waters and by life springing up, first as vegetation, and then in animal and human forms. The story closes with a man and a woman in the image of God entering into Sabbath rest and communion with their Maker.

Thus in the Bible's opening chapter we have pictured the whole story of conversion, of how helpless man is moved upon by the Spirit of God, how he receives the Word of God which separates light from darkness, how he experiences resurrection life and begins to bring forth fruit until finally, under the continuing influence of the Word

and the Spirit, he is conformed to the image of his Maker, entering into a Sabbath rest of heart that is the commencement of heaven itself.

THE SECOND chapter tells us that the bride of the first Adam was fashioned from that which came from his side after he had fallen into a deep sleep. Similarly, the bride of the second Adam, the eternal companion of the second Head of the race, the church of Christ, is born as a result of that symbolized by the cleansing water and the atoning blood which came from Christ's riven side prior to His sleep in Joseph's new tomb. Thus this story also is telling us that man needs a power from without to give him life, that he is dependent upon Another, even One who slept the sleep of death and whose side was riven, to convince the sinner that the way to God's heart is open.

In the third chapter of Scripture guilty man is shown fleeing from God and then making excuses for his sins, after having worked feverishly to replenish his garment of light by a tailored garment of fig leaves. When face to face with his Maker, Adam surrendered his self-made garments and received robes fashioned from the skins of a sacrifice. Evidently the theme is still the same—how man must be changed, how man must lose his self-righteousness and his fears of God and his despicable excuse-inventing nature in order to be saved at last. As in the preceding chapters, it is what God does while the creature submits that brings salvation. Only the righteousness of Christ, symbolized by the covering from that first sacrifice, is adequate to clothe the penitent sinner in the presence of his Creator.

Many there are who exclaim, "How can belief on the crucified Christ bring me salvation?" The answer is that a true understanding of Calvary involves the recognition that it was the sinner who nailed God to the cross, and therefore it is the sinner's old nature which merits crucifixion. The beginning of this experience of crucifixion of the self-life the Scriptures call conversion. The cross of Calvary reveals both the love of God and the wickedness of man, and thus it enshrines in acorn form the truths which, received by the sinner, bring conversion.

The experience of every converted soul is found in the account of Jacob's transformation. (Genesis 32:24-31.) Every man who ever enters the king-

dom of God will have repeated Jacob's experience, confessing to his Creator his wretchedness, his wickedness, and his great need.

This account in Genesis 32 shows that the essential knowledge man must have in order to be changed is the knowledge of the loving God, and then in contrast, the awareness of one's own ungodly nature. When Jacob beheld the face of God (Peniel so means), then he confessed himself a sinner, and transformation took place. The cross is our Peniel.

As we would expect, the New Testament as well as the Old illustrates this theme. Every miracle that Christ performed and every parable that He told has bearing upon this vital subject. The healing of the deaf and the dumb, the blind and the lame, the paralyzed, were meant to portray to us the way in which the spiritually deaf, dumb, blind, lame, and paralyzed can find spiritual healing. All found restoration through faith in Christ and obedience to Him.

IN THE thousandth chapter of Scripture, John 3, Christ *taught* what had already been *acted* out in the many prior chapters of Scripture. Nowhere else in Scripture is the process of conversion so fully described. Here we have the "how" of salvation. When Nicodemus asked, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered by saying, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:14, 15.

Here Christ gives in essence the means by which we must be changed. The first time the word *must* occurs in John 3 is in the statement "Ye must be born again." Verse 7. But the second time it occurs is in the above passage where we read, "Even so *must* the Son of man be lifted up." Here is the key we seek: salvation comes through beholding the Christ of the cross. Faith is looking, faith is believing, faith is trusting, but all these terms refer merely to our relationship to Jesus Christ. We need not be confused over the matter of believing. Our Lord has told us that believing is merely *coming* in heart, mind, and will to Him. (See John 6:35.)

The goodness of God leads man to repentance; the kindness and mercy of God our Saviour turns us from sin. When we see that God loved us so much as to become like a common criminal

and hang on a cross for our sakes, then that, under the Holy Spirit's influence, love is awakened in our hearts for our Maker.

The Scripture declares that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself"; that "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (2 Corinthians 5:19; Romans 5:8.) In 2 Corinthians 5:14 we read "that one has died for all; therefore have all died." (R.S.V.) Thus the Bible asserts that when Jesus died, the Creator for the creature, then the whole wicked world potentially died in Him and paid the price for its sins. Now God is already reconciled to all men, and He says, "Be ye reconciled to God." Potentially all men are saved; all that individuals need to do is accept so great salvation and lay hold of eternal life.

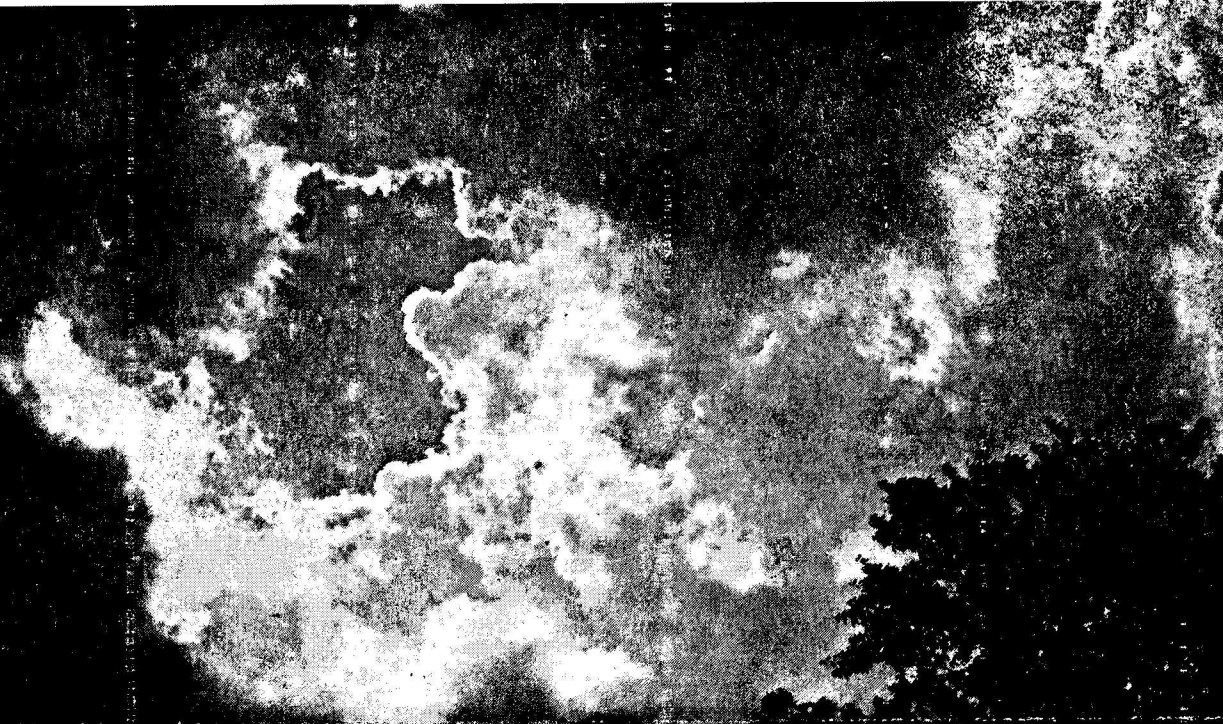
The experience of Charles Spurgeon as a boy well illustrates the words of Christ to Nicodemus.

"The minister did not come that morning; he was snowed up, I suppose. At last, a very thin-looking man, a shoemaker, or tailor, or something of that sort, went up into the pulpit to preach. Now, it is well that preachers should be instructed; but this man was really stupid. He was obliged to stick to his text, for the simple reason that he had little else to say. The text was,—'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.' He did not even pronounce the words rightly, but that did not matter. There was, I thought, a glimpse of hope for me in that text. The preacher began thus: 'My dear friends, this is a very simple text indeed. It says, 'Look.' Now lookin' don't take a deal of pains. It ain't liftin' your foot or your fingers; it is just, 'Look.' Well, a man needn't go to College to learn to look. You may be the biggest fool, and yet you can look. A man needn't be worth a thousand a year to be able to look. Anyone can look; even a child can look. But then the text says, 'Look unto Me.' Ay!" said he in broad Essex, 'many on ye are lookin' to yourselves, but it's no use lookin' there. You'll never find any comfort in yourselves. Some look to God the Father. No, look to Him by-and-by. Jesus Christ says, 'Look unto Me.' Some on ye say, 'We must wait for the Spirit's workin'.' You have no business with that just now. Look to Christ. The text says, 'Look unto Me.'"

"Then the good man followed up his

Continued

passport to a kingdom



TRUTH FOR THESE TIMES-3
By Desmond Ford

text in this way:—"Look unto Me; I am sweatin' great drops of blood. Look unto Me; I am hangin' on the cross. Look unto Me; I am dead and buried. Look unto Me; I rise again. Look unto Me; I ascend to Heaven. Look unto Me; I am sittin' at the Father's right hand. O poor sinner, look unto Me! look unto Me!"

"When he had gone to about that length, and managed to spin out ten minutes or so, he was at the end of his tether. Then he looked at me under the gallery, and I daresay, with so few present, he knew me to be a stranger. Just fixing his eyes on me, as if he knew all my heart, he said, 'Young man, you look very miserable.' Well, I did; but I had not been accustomed to have remarks made from the pulpit on my personal appearance before. However, it was a good blow, struck right home. He continued, 'and you always will be miserable,—miserable in life, and miserable in death,—if you don't obey my text; but if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved.' Then, lifting up his hands, he shouted, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, 'Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothin' to do but to look and live.' I saw at once the way of salvation. I know not what else he said,—I did not take much

notice of it,—I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard that word, 'Look!' what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could almost have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to Him. Oh, that somebody had told me this before, 'Trust Christ, and you shall be saved.'"—*C. H. Spurgeon's Autobiography*, pp. 105-107.

The great Reformation doctrine of "righteousness by faith" has been misunderstood by many. What is implied by the statement is really "righteousness through Christ." Faith has no virtue in itself. It is merely the hand by which we receive the One in whom is all virtue. Thus righteousness does not come through faith in our faith; it comes through looking at Jesus Christ and believing what He says, just as the boy Spurgeon looked, believed, and was born again.

True belief when connected with a

person always involves more than a mental assent. If we believe in a banker, we will entrust our money to him; if we believe in a doctor, we go to him with our physical ills. If we are to believe in Christ the Saviour and Lord, we must both permit Him to save us from our sins and obey Him implicitly. Thus it is that repentance, confession of sin, restitution, and obedience are ever associated with conversion and regeneration. By surrender we are to consecrate our all to Christ, and by faith we are to receive His all.

"Not by painful struggles or wearisome toil, not by gift or sacrifice, is righteousness obtained; but it is freely given to every soul who hungers and thirsts to receive it. 'Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat, . . . without money and without price.' 'Their righteousness is of Me, saith the Lord,' and, 'This is His name whereby He shall be called, the Lord our Righteousness.'"—Ellen G. White, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 34.

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One of the most meaningful questions ever put to Jesus Christ was, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." John 6:68. Yes; where can we go for help but to our Creator? Truly there is no hope in the counsels of man. Despite flashes of brilliance, even the wisest of men fail to provide the ultimate answers to life. Only God has these. He says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest." Rest, joy, dynamic, satisfaction, hope—all these are yours in Christ. Our free Bible course will make all this very plain. Simply send in the coupon at the left. There is no obligation.