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Good News Unlimited

THE COST OF SALVATION

He Could Not Save Himself

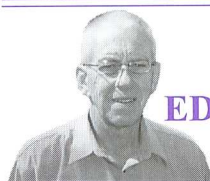
Uncertain Times

The Gift of God

Your Heavenly Account

The Fishing Story that Foretells the Future

Published by *Good News Unlimited*
www.goodnewsunlimited.org.au



EDITORIAL

Good News Unlimited is committed to proclaiming the unlimited good news about Jesus Christ.

We've said it before and we say it again, the good news is unlimited in its scope—there is absolutely no one who is beyond salvation; not Joseph Stalin, not Adolf Hitler, not Pol Pot, nobody. Jesus died for everyone. 'He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of *the whole world*' (1 John 2:2). But, as Santo Calarco points out in his article this month, while Christ died for us, he will not impose his free gift of forgiveness upon us without our consent. The apostle John says, Only those who believe in the Son will receive eternal life; those who reject the Son will not see life (John 3:36).

The good news is not only unlimited in the quantity and quality of the people it can save, it is also unlimited in the quantity and quality of its messages. Throughout two millennia, new sermons about God's

love and grace have been proclaimed every week and new gems are mined from the depths of God's Word every day, gems that have not seen the light of day before. Because the good news is about the infinite God who humbled himself to die on a cross, we will never be able to plumb the full depths of that love and grace.

Will eternity be long enough to discover everything there is to know about the good news? Will eternity be long enough to use up every possible combination of music notes to produce songs of praise to God? Will eternity be long enough to use up every combination of letters of the alphabet to write articles or sermons to proclaim God's love? Never! Never! Never! We might as well ask if eternity will be long enough to breathe all the air or use all the sunshine God created? The poet Lehman puts it this way:

*'The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell.
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell ...
Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the sky of parchment made
And if every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
Though stretched from sky to sky.'*

For years we have proclaimed the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but few have ever given much thought to the full extent of that sacrifice. What actually did Jesus sacrifice when he died on the cross? When he died, what kind of death did he die? If he just died the first death, then his sacrifice would not have matched the sacrifice of many martyrs who endured far greater suffering than Jesus and for much longer.

It would have been no great sacrifice for Jesus to give up three days in the grave. And if that was all he sacrificed, why did he sweat great drops of blood over that? Why did he nearly die in agony over this decision in the garden of Gethsemane? There was a great deal more to Jesus' sacrifice than surrendering his life for thirty-six hours.

If those whose names are not written in the book of life die the second death (Rev. 20:14-15), and if Jesus took our punishment on the cross, then he had to die the second death in our place. That thought is explored in this issue of *Good News Unlimited*.

Ritchie Way

—Ritchie Way

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Mission Statement

Christians united in offering to all, meaning and direction in their lives by a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.

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HE COULD NOT SAVE HIMSELF

Ritchie Way

make the most excruciating decision of his life—which boy to throw the other end to and which one to sacrifice. He knew his son had accepted Christ and his friend hadn't. Anguished, the father yelled, 'I love you son,' and threw the rope to his son's friend. By the time he'd pulled the boy back to the capsized boat his son had disappeared beneath the waves. His body was never recovered. The father knew his son would step into eternity with Jesus and couldn't bear the thought of his son's friend facing

eternity without Christ.'

At the end of the service a teenage boy approached the old man and said, 'That's a nice story, but what father in his right mind would sacrifice his son's life in hopes that the other boy would become a Christian?'

'You've got the point,' the old preacher replied, 'It's not realistic. But I'm standing here today to tell you that story gives me a glimpse into what it must have been like for God to sacrifice his only Son for us. You see ... I was that father and your pastor was my son's friend.'

This story beautifully illustrates the point: The Pharisees who watched Christ die sneered, 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.' And they were right; he couldn't do both, so he chose to save you.

We are frequently faced with choices that are mutually exclusive: We can marry this person or that, but we can't marry both at the same time; we can invest our savings in this company or that, but we can't invest the full amount in both at the same time; we can travel to the other side of the world by flying east or west, but we can't go both ways at the same time.

Jesus was faced with the same quandary in the Garden of Gethsemane. He could either save himself or save the world, but he couldn't save both. Although he had predicted, several times, that he would

When the Father turned his back on Jesus and abandoned him there at the cross (Matt. 27:46), there was total silence in heaven. Never before, and never again, will the universe behold such a spectacle. Without God nothing can exist, for apart from him there is no life, no future and no hope. When the Father deserted him, Jesus experienced the second death in full.

Bob Gass tells the story of a church pastor introducing a visiting elderly minister before inviting him to speak to the congregation.

The elderly minister began:

'A father, his son and his son's friend, were sailing off the Pacific coast when a storm overturned their boat sweeping all of them into the ocean. Grabbing a rescue line, in a split second the father had to

rise from the dead on the third day, when it came to the crunch it became painfully obvious that it was God's intention to annihilate sin completely—to expunge it forever from the universe—and if he, Jesus, drank the cup of our sins he would be sent on a one-way journey to oblivion. With the full weight of the world's sins on his shoulders any other alternative to annihilation was out of the question.

If Jesus was a burned-out drug addict, annihilation might have been a blessing, for he would have had very little to lose, but Jesus was God in the flesh (John 1:1; 8:58), the Creator of the whole universe (John 1:3; Heb.1:2). He had everything to lose by giving his life for the world.

The prophecies pointing to Jesus' resurrection from the dead were totally overwhelmed by the depressing blanket of the world's sins that smothered him and left him struggling to survive. He, who had always been positive and totally in control of events, confessed to his inner circle, 'My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (Matt. 26:38). So extreme was Jesus' anguish, his sweat mingled with blood. And so close was he to dying, an angel from heaven came to give him strength so he could complete his mission.

It wasn't just three days in Joseph's tomb Jesus was sacrificing, it was his destiny; it wasn't just time he was giving up, but eternity. He who had 'equality with God' had to choose whether this equality was something to be clung to, or whether he would make 'himself nothing' in the absolute sense (Philp. 2:6-7). Thank God that Love chose to sacrifice himself in order to cover a multitude of sins.

Never belittle the sacrifice of Jesus by thinking that all it involved was a scourging and a crucifixion. Others went through much worse and for far longer. A sacrifice is determined by what is given up. Inasmuch as the Creator is worth more than his creation,

so is the death of Jesus worth more than the entire universe and its inhabitants.

When the Father turned his back on Jesus and abandoned him there at the cross (Matt. 27:46), there was total silence in heaven. Never before, and never again, will the universe behold such a spectacle. Without God nothing can exist, for apart from him there is no life; no future and no hope. When the Father deserted him, Jesus experienced the second death *in full*. That was the only way he could be our substitute. *If the destiny of those whose names are not written in the book of life is the second death* (Rev. 20:14-15), *and if Jesus paid that price for those whose names are written in the book of life, then Jesus had to die the second death.*

Down below the cross the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 'He saved others,' they sneered, 'but he can't save himself' (Matt. 27:41-42). What they unwittingly declared was the truth, for had Jesus saved himself he would not have been able to save others, so he sacrificed himself so that others might be saved.

That was the greatest demonstration of love the world will ever behold—the God who was everything became nothing, so that we who were nothing might have everything.

If we perish in the end it won't be because we rejected certain teachings or beliefs; it will be because we rejected Love. The cross divides the whole world into two, those who accept and reflect God's love and those who reject his love. Like the two criminals who were executed with Jesus, we are all sinners worthy of death. One was saved because he put his trust in Jesus; one was lost because he rejected Jesus. We, likewise, are sinners worthy of death, but if we put our faith in Jesus we shall have a home with him in Paradise. ☒

SATURDAY SERVICE CANBERRA, ACT

The Belconnen Baptist Church in Canberra now conducts a **Saturday service at 5.00pm**. You are invited to attend this great and friendly service each Saturday. Refreshments are provided.

The address is: Belconnen Baptist Church, Corner of Dallachy and MacAdam Streets, Page, 2614 Canberra, ACT.

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Good News Unlimited **Saturday Bible School 9.30am**

Morning tea provided.

Please bring your Bible

Further information:

Phone 07: 5524 5040

email:

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**Bible study at the
GNU office
2/54-60 Industry Dr.,
South Tweed Heads NSW**

October: No meetings

November: 21

December 5

Narellan Sydney

Focus for Life Christian Fellowship

Those living in or near Narellan are warmly invited to meet for Bible study and fellowship in the Salvation Army Worship Centre on the corner of Exchange Parade and Narellan Road in Narellan, **every Saturday at 1:30pm**. For further information, contact Pastor Santo Calarco. phone: 0404 029822

THE GIFT OF GOD

Author unknown

Dr Christianson, a Professor of Religion, taught the required survey course in Christianity at a small college in the western United States.

Every student was required to take this course in his freshman year, regardless of his or her major.

Although Dr Christianson tried hard to communicate the essence of the gospel to his class, he found that most of his students looked upon the course as nothing more than required drudgery. Despite his best efforts, most students refused to take Christianity seriously.

This year, Dr Christianson had a special student named Steve. Steve was only a freshman, but was studying with the intention of going onto seminary for the ministry. Steve was popular, well liked, and he was an imposing physical specimen. He was now the starting center on the school football team and was one of the best students in the professor's class.

One day, Dr Christianson asked Steve to stay after class so he could talk with him.

'How many push-ups can you do?'

Steve said, 'I do about two hundred every night.'

'Two hundred? That's pretty good, Steve,' Dr Christianson said. 'Do you think you could do three hundred?'

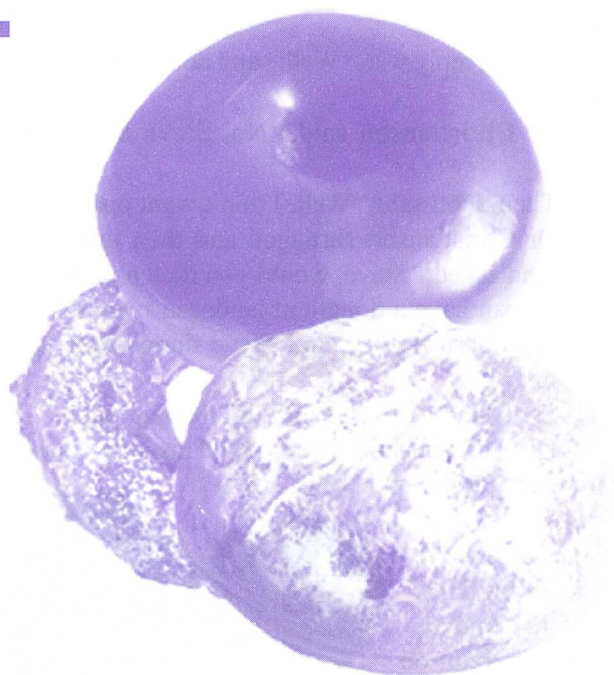
Steve replied, 'I don't know ... I've never done three hundred at a time.'

'Do you think you could?' asked Dr Christianson again.

'Well, I can try,' said Steve.

'Can you do three hundred in sets of ten? I have a class project in mind and I need you to do about three hundred push-ups in sets of ten for this to work. Can you do it? I need you to tell me if you can do it,' said the professor.

Steve said, 'Well ... I think I can ... yeah, I can do it.'



Dr Christianson said, 'Good! I need you to do this on Friday. Let me explain what I have in mind.'

Friday came and Steve got to class early and sat in the front of the room. When class started, the professor pulled out a big box of doughnuts. No, these weren't the normal kinds of doughnuts, they were the extra fancy big kind, with cream centers and frosting swirls. Everyone was pretty excited it was Friday, the last class of the day and they were going to get an early start on the weekend with a party in Dr Christianson's class.

Dr Christianson went to the first girl in the first row and asked, 'Cynthia, do you want to have one of these doughnuts?'

Cynthia said, 'Yes.'

Dr Christianson then turned to Steve and asked, 'Steve, would you do ten push-ups so that Cynthia can have a doughnut?'

'Sure ...' Steve jumped down from his desk to do a quick ten. Then Steve again sat back in his desk. Dr Christianson put a doughnut on Cynthia's desk.

Dr Christianson then went to Joe, the next person, and asked, 'Joe, do you want a doughnut?'

Joe said, 'Yes.' Dr Christianson asked, 'Steve would you do ten push-ups so Joe can have a doughnut?'

Steve did ten push-ups, Joe got a doughnut. And so it went, down the first aisle, Steve did ten push-ups for every person before they got their doughnut.

Walking down the second aisle, Dr Christianson came to Scott. Scott was on the basketball team and in as good condition as Steve. He was very popular and was never lacking for female companionship.

When the professor asked, 'Scott, do you want

a doughnut?"

Scott's reply was, 'Well, can I do my own push-ups?'

Dr Christianson said, 'No, Steve has to do them.'

Then Scott said, 'Well, I don't want one then.'

Dr Christianson shrugged and then turned to Steve and asked, 'Steve, would you do ten push-ups so Scott can have a doughnut he doesn't want?'

With perfect obedience Steve started to do ten push-ups.

Scott said, 'Hey! I said I didn't want one!'

Dr Christianson said, 'Look! This is my classroom, my desks and these are my doughnuts. Just leave it on the desk if you don't want it.' And he put a doughnut on Scott's desk.

By this time, Steve had begun to slow down a little. He just stayed on the floor between sets because it took too much effort to be getting up and down. Perspiration was beginning to form on his brow.

Dr Christianson started down the third row. Now the students were beginning to get a little angry. Dr Christianson asked Jenny, 'Jenny, do you want a doughnut?'

Sternly, Jenny said, 'No.'

Then Dr Christianson asked Steve, 'Steve, would you do ten more push-ups so Jenny can have a doughnut she doesn't want?'

Steve did ten. Jenny got a doughnut.

By now, a growing sense of uneasiness filled the room. The students were beginning to say 'No' and there were all these uneaten doughnuts on the desks.

Steve also had to really put forth a lot of extra effort to get these push-ups done for each doughnut.

There began to be a small pool of sweat on the floor beneath his face, his arms and brow were beginning to get red because of the physical effort involved.

Dr Christianson asked Robert, who was the most vocal unbeliever in the class, to watch Steve do each push-up to make sure he did the full ten push-ups in a set, because he couldn't bear to watch all of Steve's work for all of those uneaten doughnuts. He sent Robert over to where Steve was so Robert could count the set and watch Steve closely.

Dr Christianson started down the fourth row. During his class, however, some students from other

classes had wandered in and sat down on the steps along the radiators which ran down the sides of the room. When the professor realised this, he did a quick count and saw that now there were thirty-four students in the room. He started to wonder if Steve could finish the task.

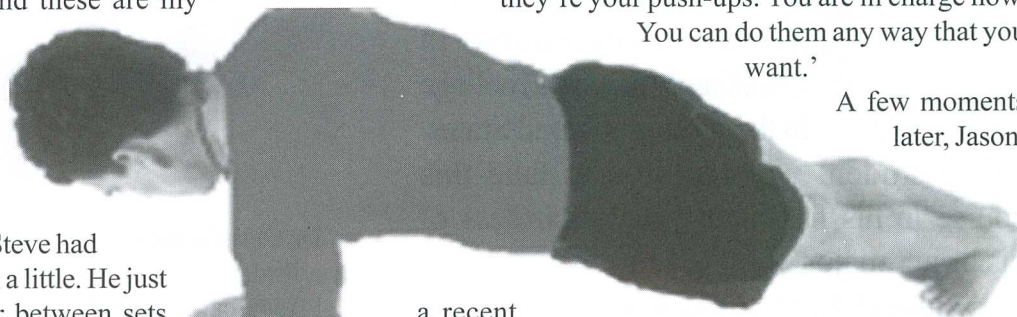
Dr Christianson went on to the next person and the next and the next. Near the end of that row, Steve was really having a rough time. He was taking a lot more time to complete each set.

Steve asked Dr Christianson, 'Do I have to make my nose touch the floor on each one?'

Dr Christianson thought for a moment, 'Well, they're your push-ups. You are in charge now.

You can do them any way that you want.'

A few moments later, Jason,



a recent transfer student, was about to enter the room when all the students yelled in one voice, 'No! Don't come in! Stay out!'

Jason didn't know what was going on. Steve picked up his head and said, 'No, let him come.'

Professor Christianson said, 'You realise that if Jason comes in you will have to do ten push-ups for him?'

Steve said, 'Yes, let him come in. Give him a doughnut'

Dr Christianson said, 'Okay, Steve, I'll let you get Jason's out of the way right now. Jason, do you want a doughnut?'

Jason, new to the room, didn't know what was going on. 'Yes please,' he replied.

Steve, will you do ten push-ups so that Jason can have a doughnut?'

Steve did ten push-ups very slowly and with great effort. Jason, bewildered, was handed a doughnut and sat down.

Dr Christianson finished the fourth row and then started on those visitors seated by the heaters. Steve's arms were now shaking with each push-up in a struggle to lift himself against the force of gravity. By this time, sweat was running from his brow and there was no sound except his heavy breathing. Many of the students in the room had tears running down their cheeks.

The very last two students were two young women, both cheerleaders and very popular. Dr Christianson went to Linda, the second to last, and

asked, 'Linda, do you want a doughnut?'

Linda said, very sadly, 'No, thank you.'

Professor Christianson quietly asked, 'Steve, would you do ten push-ups so that Linda can have a doughnut she doesn't want?'

Grunting from the effort, Steve did ten very slow push-ups for Linda.

Then Dr Christianson turned to the last girl, Susan. 'Susan, do you want a doughnut?'

Susan, with tears flowing down her face, began to cry. 'Dr Christianson, why can't I help him?'

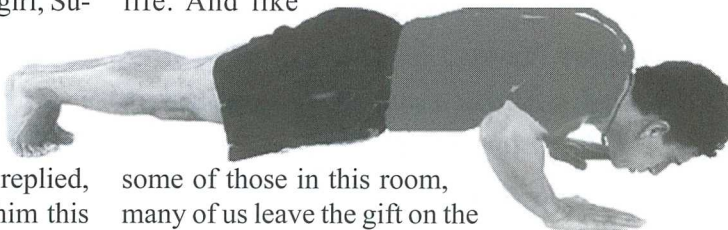
Dr Christianson, with tears of his own, replied, 'No, Steve has to do it alone, I have given him this task and he is in charge of seeing that everyone has an opportunity for a doughnut whether they want it or not. When I decided to have a party this last day of class, I looked at my grade book. Steve here is the only student with a perfect grade. Everyone else has failed a test, skipped class, or offered me inferior work. Steve told me that in football practice, when a player messes up he must do push-ups. I told Steve that none of you could come to my party unless he paid the price by doing your push-ups. He and I made a deal for your sakes.'

'Steve, would you do ten push-ups so Susan can have a doughnut?'

As Steve very slowly finished his last push-up, with the understanding that he had accomplished all that was required of him, having done three hundred

and fifty push-ups, his arms buckled beneath him and he fell face-first to the floor.

Dr Christianson turned to the room and said. 'And so it was, that our Saviour, Jesus Christ, on the cross, said to the Father, "Into your hands I commit my spirit." With the understanding that he had done everything that was required of him, he yielded up his life. And like



some of those in this room, many of us leave the gift on the desk, uneaten.'

Two students helped Steve up off the floor and to a seat, physically exhausted, but wearing a thin smile.

'Well done, good and faithful servant,' said the professor, adding, 'Not all sermons are preached in words.'

Turning to his class, the professor said, 'My wish is that you might understand and fully comprehend all the riches of grace and mercy that have been given to you through the sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He did not spare his Son but gave him up for us all. Whether or not we choose to accept his free gift, the price was paid in full.'

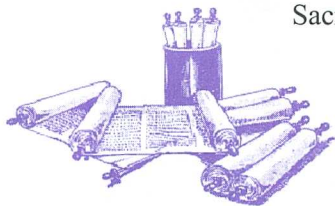
'Wouldn't you be foolish and ungrateful to leave it lying on the desk?' □

2009 Christ In All The Scriptures

Prahran Adventist Church 8 Wynnstay Road, Prahran, Melbourne

28th November Dr Adrian Turner

Christ, Whose Kingdom is Come, Abides Forever 11.00am & 2.00pm
Sacred Music Concert 5.00pm Celebration Singers



Special Notice

The meeting for the **31st October**, will be held at the
Carey Baptist Grammar Chapel, Bakers Road Kew, with a new time of
10.00am - 12 noon with **Dr Desmond Ford**

***Christ in Hebrews & Revelation* 10.00am - 12 noon**

UNCERTAIN TIMES

Pastor Ron Allen

'Come all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare' (Isaiah 55:1-2).

These are uncertain times! The ship of economy on which our hopes were floated is floundering. The superstructure of our social security apparatus is cracked and broken. The change in fortunes has been rapid and spectacular. Government and corporate rhetoric struggles to keep up with each day's developments. High priests and prophets of financial markets watch agog as their remedies and stimulus packages achieve nil impact. High priced executives and hedge-fund moguls, having emptied the pockets of eager investors, walk away from their stricken companies. It is as if we are living through—and are part of—an object lesson in misplaced confidence. The words of John of Patmos appear eerily apt: *'In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin'* (Revelation 18:17).

In America and the rest of the developed world, there are thousands . . . millions of men, women and families who have become suddenly bereft. We are told to expect much more of the same in the months to come.

Amid the debris of loss and shattered dreams, the time is ripe to consider another way. Long ago, Isaiah wrote about things of supreme import, which could be enjoyed even if one had no money at all. He was speaking about the extraordinary generosity of God. God operates according to a law of giving. His way is the way of grace in which nothing is bought, or it wouldn't be grace. God is not an accountant, a merchant or a broker, or an investment advisor. Everything he has is given *'without money and without cost.'* In the system that mankind has contrived, everything is for sale. The markets dictate worth.

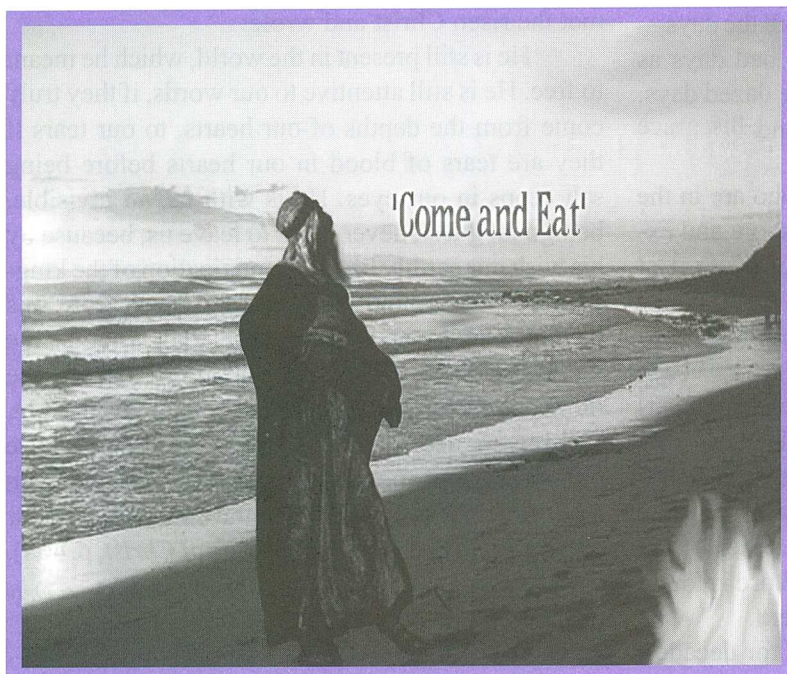
Society esteems most highly, persons who are beautiful, handsome, athletic, famous or rich. Capital expenditures on the handicapped, the sick or terminally ill; the insane, the old, the unemployed, homeless, destitute and imprisoned, must always fight their way against a vast consensus, hostile to God's law—the law of giving.

The law of acquisition (selling) lets us down; our aggregated lust for more is never appeased. We remain thirsty. What money can buy is poor recompense. Only God can truly satisfy. What can be earned never quenches human longing. The free and overflowing love of God is the air we were meant to breathe and the law on which our personal and social well-being must stand.

To serve and promote that law—which is nothing else but the law of Christ, the gospel—is the task of Good News Unlimited. We cherish no illusions about the strength of the law of selling . . . yes, the law of selling is formidable. It would be intimidating if we did not believe that grace is stronger. Let us be clear: God does not need anyone's money in order to get his work done. But we need to place whatever his gifts to us are at the disposal of his law of giving, in order to experience his joy and take delight in the richest of fare.

Money is scarcer [today], but since God is not subject to the law of money these are days of opportunity for the gospel. Together, let us be faithful. Good News Unlimited's best days may yet be ahead. We ask for your continued prayers and that you consider the ministry of Good News Unlimited as you distribute your gifts to share the gospel message with many around the globe.





THE FISHING STORY THAT FORETELLS THE FUTURE

Dr Desmond Ford *

Let us look at the story of an early morning breakfast recorded in John 21. To a degree this story duplicates the fishing story in Luke 5. That happened at the beginning of our Lord's ministry when he met men who had fished all night and caught nothing. Then, while sitting in one of the tiny vessels, he filled their boats with fish. After that he called them to be fishers of men.

Now in this post-resurrection story the Lord again gives success to the failed fishermen. But he is not now in one of the boats. He is on the further shore seen only through the mists. That is the way things will be in the coming years, because Christ will be ministering from heaven.

This chapter which closes John's Gospel is a link between Christ's resurrection and the missionary labours of the church to be set forth in the following book of Acts. The great fishing haul represented the fact that Christ would use his followers to bring in large numbers to the gospel net and to the shore of heaven. The chief difference from Luke 5 is that Christ is not now in the boat, but at the distant shore. For now we cannot see or touch him. Only our faith penetrates the mists and discerns Christ on the heavenly shore.

Peter is prominent in both stories. In the first (Luke 5), he falls at Christ's feet and confesses that he is a sinful man. Now, while Peter stands by the

coals of fire (as on the night of his denials), he is challenged three times (the number of those denials) about his love for his Lord. Then he is reinstated to become the preacher of Pentecost.

The whole story can be applied, not only to the missionary work of the church, but as a parable concerning this life compared to the next. In this life it is often dark, and, too often, we are like those madmen who lived in the tombs, or like doubting Thomas with hearts filled with uncertainties, or like the eleven fear-filled as in the upper room, or toiling in the dark and failing of success. Much of our lives can be like that. The person who has never made a mistake never made anything. Thus darkness, toil, sweat and tears are part of every life here in this world which lies under the curse.

But this is a good thing, this discipline that is the lot of every believer. The worst thing that could happen to any one of us would be constant success. There could be nothing so devastating as that. It's much easier to run with an empty cup than a full one. For every person destroyed by adversity, ten are destroyed by prosperity. So this story of men wrestling in the dark and failing, is true of much of this life even for the believer.

We can only graduate from the darkness by faith. There will never come a day when the shadow of Satan is not cast across our pathway. There will never come a day when each of us is not tempted to think, 'I've failed again.' But nearer than Satan is Christ, and more powerful than fear and failure is love and trust. The coming finale will more than make up for our days of darkness, sorrow and failure. We are to remember his promise, that as we go into all the world

with the good news of grace, he is with us all the days—the dark days as well as the bright; the bad days as well as the good; he is with us even in the dazed days. He will never leave us or forsake us and his grace towards us is infinite.

The day is coming for each of us who are in the ship, when we will approach the eternal shore and experience the swirling foam of the surf of death. But beyond that last experience in this life lies the resurrection and our visible Lord. Notice that a meal was ready for them and fellowship. He knew that they had been working, that they were tired and cold. He understands about our physical, as well as our spiritual needs.

In chapter one of John's Gospel we read the invitation 'Come and see.' Now in the last chapter the invitation is 'Come and eat.' That's the order of the believer's experience. In his resurrected Lord is found everything needed for this life and the next.

One who had been a rabid Atheist for decades,

met the risen Christ and wrote:

'He is still present in the world, which he meant to free. He is still attentive to our words, if they truly come from the depths of our hearts, to our tears if they are tears of blood in our hearts before being salt drops in our eyes. He is with us, an invisible, benignant guest, never more to leave us, because by his wish our earthly life is an anticipation of the kingdom of Heaven and is a part of Heaven from this day on ... today he is closer to us than when he ate the bread of our fields. No divine promise can be blotted out; the May cloud which hid him from sight, still hovers near the earth and every day we raise our weary and mortal eyes to that same Heaven from which he will descend in the terrible splendour of his glory' (Giovanni Papini, *Life of Christ*, p. 408).

*This article is taken from Dr. Ford's book, *Jesus Only* (pp. 243-245).



DID YOU KNOW?

JOHN THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist's parents were both from priestly stock. His father, Zacharius, was a priest in the 'course' of Abijah—one of the twenty-four courses that took turns in conducting ceremonies of worship at the temple—and his mother, Elizabeth, was descended from Aaron. Elizabeth was a relative of Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:36).

On one occasion, when Zacharius was on duty in the Holy Place of the temple offering incense at the golden altar, he was astounded to find another person present in the chamber where he was supposed to be alone. An angel of the Lord, named Gabriel, appeared at the right side of the altar (the side of favour) to tell him that his prayers had been answered: God would give him and Elizabeth a son in their old age, and they were to name him John. John's mission would be to fulfil the prophecy made by Malachi in chapter 4:5-6.

Six months after John was born, Gabriel visited Mary in Nazareth, to tell her that she, too, would have a son who would be the Messiah (Luke 1:26-36).

John was an ascetic individual who lived in the desert, dressed in clothing made of camel hair and who ate locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:6). It seems probable that he had some contact with the Essene community, because some of his themes paralleled the teachings of the Essenes, but were not limited by them. The Essenes, for example, only baptised initiates within their ranks, whereas, John baptised anyone who re-

pented and confessed their sins (Mark 1:4-5).

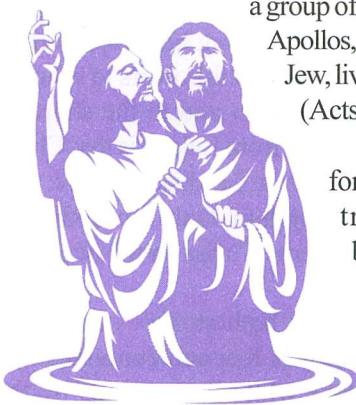
John's primary mission was to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. When challenged about his mission, 'he replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, "Make straight the way for the Lord"' (John 1:23). Jesus said of John that he was the Elijah who would come before the Lord came (Matt. 11:14; Mal. 4:5).

One day, while John was baptising in the Jordan River, he looked up to see a man standing on the bank. As he looked he saw the Holy Spirit, like a dove descend upon the man. John pointed to him and proclaimed, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). Two of John's disciples left him to follow Jesus.

Sometime later John denounced Herod Antipas and Herodias for living together in adultery. John was imprisoned for his denunciation and was executed at the request of Herodias during Herod's birthday party in the stronghold of Machaerus (Mark 6:14-29).

The loyalty of John's disciples to him is revealed by the fact that twenty years after his death there were a group of his disciples, including Apollos, the learned Alexandrian Jew, living in faraway Ephesus (Acts 19:1-7).

Jesus said of his forerunner, 'I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist ...' (Matt. 11:11).



YOUR HEAVENLY ACCOUNT

I am embarrassed to admit that I have been a Christian for thirty-three years, and a pastor for twenty-five of those years, but it wasn't until Christmas 2008 that I finally experienced real freedom from guilt and condemnation. I have shared the gospel of God's grace with many over the decades. Many of these folk walked away with freedom from guilt, but others, like myself, still carried a burden even after accepting salvation. Depression plagued me for years while I walked with Jesus until the Holy Spirit opened my eyes to see where my problem lay.

For years I used 2 Corinthians 5:14-21 as the basis for presenting the gospel to folk as I introduced them to Jesus. I would share with them the good news that when Jesus died on the Cross, the entire world died with him: 'If one died for all then all died' (2 Cor. 5:14). The 'all' who died clearly refers to the entire human race since Paul goes on to say that God had already reconciled the *whole* world to himself through the doing and dying of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:19). This meant that death, the punishment and penalty for the world's sins, was fully paid and satisfied. As a result, those who placed faith in Jesus were considered brand new creations in God's eyes (2 Cor. 5:17). For decades I understood this, yet I still felt guilty and sensed a barrier each time I tried to come into the presence of

Santo Calarco

God. Why was it that many of the people I shared this with walked away free and yet I didn't?

Well, last Christmas it happened for me. I noticed that Paul used the word 'reconcile' in two significant ways in that wonderful passage. Paul says that God was already reconciled to mankind through the death of Jesus, but then begs the Corinthian Christians to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20). So there were two sides to this reconciliation—God's and ours. The Christians in Corinth believed that God had already been reconciled to them, but they had not yet reconciled themselves to God. Paul was saying in effect, 'God is already reconciled to you, yet you haven't reconciled yourselves to God.'

One day, while reading 2 Corinthians 5:19, I discovered what Paul meant by the word, 'reconcile.' He wrote, 'God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.' The New King James Version puts it a little more technically: 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, *not imputing* their trespasses to them.' It was at that point that the light came on for me.

I worked in a bank for four years so I understand what is meant by 'reconciling' and 'imputing'. Reconciling and imputing are accounting terms. The Greek word for reconcile is *katallasso* which, at its core, means 'to change, exchange—especially of money.'¹ In 2 Corinthians 5:19, Paul was using an accounting term to describe a restored relationship between God and man. Now this really got my attention. It had been my job to 'reconcile' the bank's records through imputing. To impute simply means to

'reckon to' or 'put to a person's account'. When I placed a credit into a customer's account I would impute funds to them. Many business people around the world use an accounting computer program called MYOB. Every three months in Australia most business people are required to complete a 'reconciliation' report of their financial dealings for the past quarter. Anyone familiar with that program is aware that there is a 'reconcile' button at the bottom of the page. When that button is hit (assuming that the accounting is correct) the record will show a 'zero' balance.

My wife Rochelle runs her own business and in 'reconciling' the books she attempts to balance 'accounts receivable' with 'accounts payable'. There are times when Rochelle has customers who owe her money, but are unable to pay. In such circumstances all she can do is write off the debt. Did this mean that there was no cost involved? Not at all. In writing off the debt in order to reconcile her books, she had to carry the cost and pay the loss and debt herself.

Staff who have done work for that customer must still be paid for their work and stock that has gone to that customer must still be paid for. To reconcile her accounts Rochelle deletes the expense from her 'accounts receivable' by carrying and paying for the outstanding debt herself.

The person who owed Rochelle money would also have to write off the amount owed to her from their 'accounts payable'. Both Rochelle and her customer thus 'reconcile' their respective books by bringing the debt to zero. Both would make 'imputations' to accounts to bring about a nil balance. Credits or debits were imputed as necessary to achieve reconciliation. Remember, that in Rochelle's case, she could not just make the debt that was owed to her simply disappear. She had to carry and pay for the other's debt herself. In order to reconcile her books she had to pay the price that someone else was not able to pay.

Paul chose this very symbol to describe what God did with sin in order to reconcile his 'books' in heaven. In the books of heaven God has an 'accounts receivable'. What appeared in God's 'accounts receivable' is what we owed him for our debt of sin.

If you think I may be pressing this analogy too far I would strongly recommend that you read Matthew 18, where Jesus speaks specifically about the forgiveness of sins in terms of a cancelling of a debt. In answering the question from Peter about how many times he should forgive a person their sins, Jesus answered with a parable and revealed to him that forgiveness was equiva-

lent to debt cancellation (Matt. 18:21-27).

Significantly, when Paul used this analogy, he stressed that there were two sets of books that needed reconciling—God's and ours.

Book 1: 'God has reconciled you to himself.'

Book 2: 'Now you be reconciled'.

God had already reconciled his own books by the death of Jesus; he is not imputing the world's sin to them. God wrote off our debt of sin by paying for it with the blood of Jesus. As a result, the 'accounts receivable' in heaven for the whole of humanity was written off. This happened two thousand years ago, all debt—past, present and future—was brought to naught (1 John 2:2).

Because of this fact, Paul calls the Corinthian Christians (and us, if the shoe fits) to reconcile their

books and likewise bring them to zero. God has written off our debt in his 'accounts receivable' and we are called to do likewise in our

God, through the death of Jesus, paid off our debt in full.

'accounts payable.' For Paul to call believers to do this, means that some, although possibly accepting that God had written the debt off his books, had not yet written it off theirs. No human being owes God anything! The point is this, unless we reconcile our 'accounts payable' by bringing it to zero, we will still believe and feel that we still owe God, even though we do not!

Think about it. How would you feel and react if you saw someone coming towards you whom you thought you owed money to—a debt accrued over many years but were unable to pay? I know from personal experience that I would try and avoid them. And if I did meet up with them I would still not feel comfortable in their presence. I would suggest that even if we knew they had cancelled the debt and bore the price, we may still feel uncomfortable in their presence and so be hindered in a personal relationship with them unless we had a heart that was humble and grateful. God, through the death of Jesus, paid off our debt in full. His heart yearns for us to connect with him intimately. But God knows that if we don't write the debt off and reconcile our books by bringing them to zero, but instead, continue to believe that we still owe him, then we may not seek his presence, or even if we do, we will not experience the intimacy he so much desires.

This is what God revealed to me. I knew that God had paid my debt in full. His books had been reconciled. My sins were brought to zero. However, I had not yet reconciled my account and brought it to zero. God had forgiven me (cancelled the debt) but I

had not yet forgiven myself (cancelled the debt) and because of that I felt I owed God, and as a result, didn't feel comfortable in his presence or experience his love and grace as I should.

Could I suggest that if my story resonates with your heart that you too do what I did. It took me thirty-three years, but it needn't have. So don't wait one day more. Remember that we owed God a debt we could never pay, and Jesus paid a debt that he did not owe.

Just say this right now: 'Father, in the name of Jesus I thank you that through his death you paid, removed and cancelled the debt for all my sins—past,

present and future. I now declare that I too cancel this debt and forgive myself and give myself permission to stand in your presence free from all accusation and guilt. Amen.' Having done this, if guilt returns, just remind yourself that God has already written your debt off, therefore you should do the same also so that full reconciliation with the Lord is possible. ☒

Endnote:

1. W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger and William White, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

THE SUNSHINE VITAMIN

One of the real benefits of working or exercising outdoors—particularly in the winter time—is exposure to sunshine which produces an active form of vitamin D in the skin. Because 125D, which is manufactured in the skin when it is exposed to ultraviolet B light, circulates throughout the body, turning genes on or off in almost every tissue; it is technically a hormone. It is suspected that over one thousand different genes are regulated by vitamin D. Some tissues and cells that have been identified as benefiting from vitamin D are bone, brain, breast, intestine, immune cells, kidneys, liver, nerves, pancreas and prostate.

There is documented evidence that many TB patients and children with rickets have been cured solely by exposure to sunshine alone. Vitamin D acts to reduce cancers and inflammation and also helps build strong bones.

Tests have revealed that many people who work indoors are vitamin D deficient and it is suspected that this may be one of the major reasons why certain disease levels have escalated in recent times. 'Accumulating evidence suggests that the subtle and longer-term effects of even slight vitamin D deficiency may be multifold and manifested later in life, in the form of increased frequency of bone fractures and enhanced susceptibility to infection and autoimmune diseases, as well as elevated frequencies of certain cancers.'¹

Professor Kilpatrick, Melbourne University's director of neuroscience, says there appears to be a link between vitamin D deficiency and the devastating autoimmune disease multiple sclerosis, for which there is no cure. In New Zealand the prevalence of MS increases from 50.8 people per 100,000 in Northland to 134.6 people per 100,000

in Southland where sunlight levels are lower.

Vitamin D has a major influence on a person's health from conception to the grave. Oxford University research indicates that a child's lack of vitamin D in the womb, or in early childhood, can affect the development of their immune system. And the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry* reveals that Vitamin D may help people stay mentally agile as they age. A study of 3,133 European men aged forty years to seventy-nine years, revealed that those with low levels of vitamin D did not do as well in tests which measured memory and the speed at which their brains were able to process information.

How much sunshine is needed to produce an adequate level of vitamin D in the body? 'An adult woman with white skin exposed to summer sun while wearing a bikini generates about 10,000 IU of vitamin D in 15 to 20 minutes. Longer exposures do not generate higher amounts of vitamin D, because UVB light also degrades the vitamin, preventing too much of it from building up in the skin.'²

While foods provide relatively small amounts of vitamin D, compared to the amounts made by sunshine acting on the skin, the following foods will provide some:

1 tablespoon of codliver oil = 1,360 IU D3

100 grams fresh Shitake mushrooms = 100 IU D2

1 egg yolk = 20 IU D3 or D2

Endnotes:

1. Luz E. Tavera-Mendoza and John H. White, 'Cell Defences and the Sunshine Vitamin,' *Scientific American*, (November 2007), p. 44.

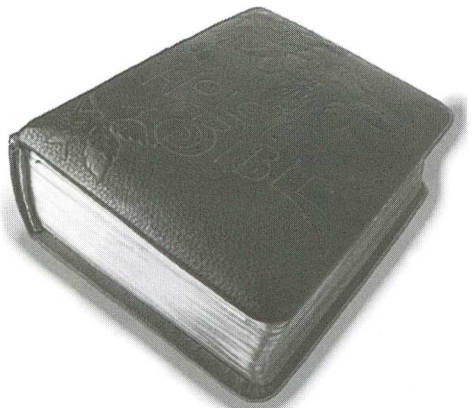
2. *Ibid.* ☒



THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Part 10

Jesus Protects the Guilty



Ritchie Way

John 8:1-11

It galled the religious leaders of the Jews that more and more people were turning their backs on traditional Judaism to follow Jesus of Nazareth. The Sanhedrin was desperate to either discredit or destroy this young preacher from Galilee; he had to be stopped. It was known that Jesus was in Jerusalem for one of the festivals and that it was his practice to teach in one of the courts of the Temple, so they set a trap for him.

‘At dawn [Jesus] appeared in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him and he sat down to teach them. The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him’ (John 8:2-6).

If Jesus defended the woman contrary to what Moses had written, he would have been accused of not upholding God’s Word. If he agreed that the woman

should be stoned to death he could be reported to the Romans, because the Jews were forbidden under Roman law, to execute people themselves. Such a judgement would have also alienated the tax collectors and sinners that Jesus came to save.

The whole set-up smelled of intrigue: Why were so many teachers of the law and Pharisees involved in this affair? Furthermore, it was highly unusual that they should be on such a mission just after sunrise. In addition, the Law of Moses commanded that not only the adulteress be stoned, but also the adulterer (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). It takes *two to tango*, so where was the man? Was he also complicit in their scheme to trap Jesus?

Without saying a word, ‘Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground’ (John 8:6-8).

The first time God wrote with his finger was upon tables of stone (Deut. 9:10). The second was upon the wall of the great hall in Belshazzar’s royal palace (Dan. 5:5) and the third time was in the dust of the temple courtyard. On all three occasions his writing upheld righteousness and condemned sin.

Patently Jesus wrote down the sin of the oldest of the assembled Pharisees—whom we shall call Rabbi Benjamin.¹ ‘Rabbi Benjamin,’ wrote Jesus; ‘third watch yesterday; widow Miriam’s home.’ Rabbi Benjamin decided it was time to get out of there before Jesus revealed any more details about what had happened. He drew his cloak about him and shuffled away. Without looking up Jesus smoothed the dust and began to write a second time, exposing the sins of the second oldest man. ‘Micah Bar Amos; second watch on Sabbath; Temple Treasury.’ Micah Bar Amos blushed crimson, coughed into his hand and muttered something about an appointment he had to keep, backed through the group and moved off quickly. One by one, in chronological order from the oldest to the youngest, after reading Jesus’ words each of the accusers departed until only one man remained, Jesus himself.

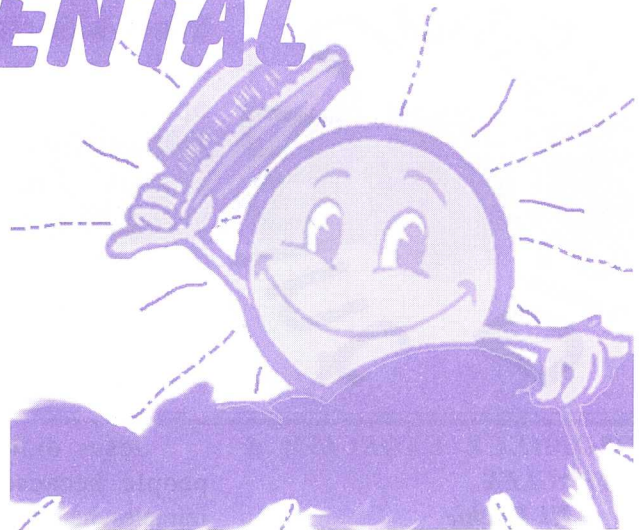
In spite of the fact that Jesus brooked no nonsense from these hypocrites, he did not shame them publicly, as they had shamed the woman. The Pharisees had marched this woman into the Temple courtyard and loudly announced her sin in front of the people Jesus was teaching. By contrast, Jesus did not announce their individual sins publicly and revealed only enough so each accuser, and no-one else, understood that Jesus knew all about them.

Eventually, ‘Jesus straightened up and asked her,

(Continued on page 18)

POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE

Ritchie Way



I am continually amazed at how many Christians there are who allow Satan to attack the citadel of their being without putting up any resistance to him. Your citadel, the control centre and fortification of your body, is your mind.

You can tell the minds of those Christians captured by the enemy, by the amount of negativity that comes forth from them. They are critical of others, they overflow with false guilt that has been heaped on them, they are judgemental and blaming, they are negative about anything good. The whole world is against them.

A person who is continually negative is not in charge of their thoughts, rather, their thoughts control them. They do not have the mind of Christ. Can you imagine Christ going around complaining all the time to his disciples about the way he was being treated and how, if he had been born at any other time, things would have been better for him; and why did God give him such poor parents and have him grow up in such a low-life town, etc. etc.? His disciples would have quickly found reasons to return to their fishing or taxation businesses. No, Christ found positives in every situation, even in the sacrifice that he was to make (Heb. 12:2). The Bible says, 'Since Jesus went through everything you're going through and more, learn to think like him' (1 Pet. 4:1 TMB).

One of the reasons why the apostle Paul was so successful, was his infectious positivity—even in times of prolonged imprisonment. From behind bars he wrote: 'Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say again: Rejoice!' (Philp. 4:4). Then he goes on to say, 'Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things' (4:8). There's not a negative thought in that lot.

We don't have to accept the negative thoughts and feelings Satan thrusts upon us. We don't have to

accept the false guilt he pours into our minds. Take charge of your life and reject these impostors. Say, 'No, I won't accept that.' Then replace it with something positive.

I want to give you some positive substitutes for negativity. They will work only if you make a practice of using them. If you use these methods daily for a month you will help create a habit that will bless your own life and others you come in contact with. I challenge you to give it a go:

1. Every day make it a habit to *thank God for ten new things*. As well as thanking him for healthy food, colourful sunsets, and good friends, try thanking him for things like the blessings that cold weather provides; and the blessings that recession inspires, etc. Start now with your list of ten things.

2. *Learn some Scripture off by heart*. When we lived in Papua New Guinea our family memorised Psalm 37 as we washed the dishes each evening. The Word of God in your life has energising power.

3. *Expect three neat things* to happen to you each day. They could be a compliment from someone, a helpful stranger, the finding of something you thought you had lost. And praise God for each one.

4. Finally, *bless other people* you meet, particularly harassed people who serve at supermarket checkouts, bank tellers and others. Read their name badges and say kindly, 'Thank you, Candice, you have been very helpful and professional. It is appreciated. God bless you.' You will make their day. Their hearts will beat a little faster, they will perk up and while they will forget the other customers, they will remember how good they felt when you passed by their way. And you will feel good about yourself also. Your self esteem depends upon how you treat others: If you are a blessing to them your self esteem will go up; if you are a pain to them, your self esteem will go down.



Discussion Point

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore, opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of many of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.

PROPHECY, EXORCISM & MIRACLES

Hi Ritchie

Jesus said, 'Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles"? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!'

What I would like to know is, how can Jesus reject people who prophesy in his name and cast out demons and perform many miracles in his name? If Jesus didn't give them the power to do these things, they wouldn't be able to do them. So why would he condemn them for doing good? It doesn't make sense.

C.C.

Dear C

There are two sources of supernatural power in the world, Christ and Satan. The book of Revelation speaks of 'spirits of demons performing miraculous signs' (16:14). Even the Antichrist is able to perform 'great and miraculous signs' (Rev. 13:13). So it is possible for a person to be empowered by hell as well as by heaven.

But why would a person, empowered by hell, seek to work as a Christian evangelist? The most effective method the devil has of discrediting Christianity, is by using professed Christians who are 'evildoers.' That's far more effective than using Atheists.

Jesus didn't reject these people because they worked miracles; he rejected them because they were 'evildoers.' They were possibly covetous; loved money and would only stay at the best hotels. They possibly faked a lot of their miracles, taking wheelchairs and crutches up to the platform after their show, to fool the crowd into thinking that many had been healed of their afflictions. In other words, their reputations were more important than God's character. They didn't have the spirit of Jesus.

Ritchie.

THE TIME OF JESUS' COMING

Dear Ritchie

In Matthew 10:22 Jesus says, 'When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes.'

What coming is Jesus talking about in this verse? It is certainly not his second coming.

J. P.

Dear J.

This is one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament. I'm inclined to believe what Dr. Ford taught me years ago, that it refers to Jesus coming in Judgement against Jerusalem in AD. 70 (see Luke 21:20).

In his parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus said of the Jews who rejected his invitation to attend, 'The king was enraged. He sent his army

and destroyed those murderers and burned their city' (Matt. 22:7). This referred to the coming of Jesus in judgement against those who rejected his grace.

For me, this interpretation, which is a type of Jesus' second coming, best fits the context of Jesus' words in Matthew 10.

Ritchie.

JESUS' BROTHERS

Dear Editor

I was a bit blown away to discover that Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matt. 13:55-56). I always thought he was an only child. Were they full brothers, half brothers or what?

S. C.

Dear S

The words for brother and sister can mean half-brother or half-sister. Roman Catholics, to support their teaching that Mary remained a virgin all her life, teach that Jesus' brothers were actually the children of Joseph by an earlier marriage. There is, however, no evidence that this was the case. Furthermore, if Joseph did have children by an earlier marriage, what happened to them when he and Mary went to Bethlehem for the census and during the family's sojourn in Egypt?

There is no theological reason why Mary had to remain a virgin all her life. In fact, it is quite unrealistic to insist that she did remain a virgin. I doubt that Joseph had the hang ups that Roman Catholicism has about sex.

Ritchie.

MIRACLES

Dear Ritchie

What's the story on miracles? I mean, how can one be sure a certain event is natural or miraculous. I once got caught in a huge traffic jam in a city, due to a concert being put on there by a well-known artist and everyone was looking for car parks. I had a very urgent

appointment to get to near by, but couldn't move. In my desperation I called out to God, and as I did so some people got into a vehicle beside me. As they drove out I moved into the empty space. And it was free. Is that a miracle?

T. G

Dear T

That's a tricky one. Did you hear about the young man who prayed, 'Lord, if it is your will that I have KFC for tea tonight, please provide me with a carpark right outside the restaurant' Well, on his fifth time around the block that is what happened; there was a carpark right outside the restaurant. I expect that after Jesus comes we will learn of many miracles that we knew nothing about, and many things that we thought were miracles we'll discover were not so.

Generally, God works on 'the economy of miracles', that is, he does not work a miracle for us if our need can be solved naturally. For example, I know a young man who did not seek medical treatment for his critical health condition, which was treatable. He chose not to seek medical treatment because his family were praying that God would work a miracle for them. He didn't live long after that.

There are times, of God's own choosing, when he will do for us what we can't do, but he won't do for us what we can do. And when God does work a miracle he only does what we can't do and expects us to do what we can. For example, when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he didn't use a miracle to move the rock from the entrance to the tomb, or a miracle to remove Lazarus's wrappings. God did what only he could do—raise Lazarus to life—and expected the people to do what they could.

Similarly, when Jesus raised Jairus's daughter to life, he told the

family to give her something to eat. Apparently she hadn't eaten for several days due to her illness, but Jesus didn't supernaturally fill her stomach with nourishing food. Providing the girl with food was something the family could do.

So don't expect God to do what he has given you the power to do. He was kind to you that time, but don't expect the same treatment next time if you fail to plan ahead.

Ritchie.

A GOD OF LOVE

Dear Ritchie

On your recommendation I have just read Wm. Paul Young's book, The Shack. I am now going to buy a copy of my own to share with my children. I absolutely loved it.

There was one thing I found in The Shack that I haven't found in the Bible, and that is the incredible love of God. The God of the Bible seems to me to be a God of 'Do this,' and 'Do that.' He's more of a God of the big stick than a God of love. Why is that so?

Blessings

C.C.

Dear C

The first expatriate missionaries that went to Papua New Guinea treated the native missionaries very roughly. If necessary, they would give them a boot in the backside or a clip in the ear. For the natives who grew up in tribes where summary justice was meted out for even small crimes, that was the only 'language' they understood at that time. In order to communicate their wishes effectively, the expatriate missionaries had to 'speak' to the native missionaries in the context of their culture.

Things were changing quickly by the time Rosemary and I went to Papua New Guinea early in 1970. Whereas the expatriate missionaries used to be called

'Master', we went there as servants of the native people.

A similar situation existed in the Bible. In Old Testament times, when it was common to execute masses of the captured enemy, and when kings who came to the throne murdered all their siblings to remove any threat of a take-over, God could only speak to his people in terms of their own culture. If he didn't 'speak' their language his message would not be understood. But slowly, often too slowly, a change took place.

Eventually, God was ready to reveal himself to mankind as he really was. He was ready to fulfil his promise to come and dwell among them, to walk among them and be their God. It disturbed many that this God-in-the-flesh was a servant, rather than a warrior (Luke 22:27). He was not a God of the big stick; he never punished or executed anyone; instead, he allowed others to punish and execute him—in our place. That was supreme love, saving love.

To understand the love of God, spend more time reading the New Testament, especially the Gospels. There you will see more of God's love than in any book outside of the Bible.

Grace and peace

Ritchie.

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(Continued from page 14)

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Jesus Protects the Guilty

“Woman, where are they? Has no-one condemned you?” “No-one sir,” she said. “Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin” (John 8:10-11).

This woman was a sinner—she may have even been the sister of Lazarus and Martha (cf. Luke 7:37; John 11:2)—but Jesus treated her with utmost respect, addressing her exactly as he had addressed his own dear mother (John 2:4).² This woman deserved condemnation, but it is respect which wins sinners to Christ, not condemnation. There is more power in love and mercy than there is in censure and denunciation.

There are several astounding things about this passage: The first is that Jesus knows what is in the hearts of all men and women. He not only knew the sins of each of the woman’s accusers, he also knew their respective ages and dealt with them according to their responsibility, the oldest being more responsible than the youngest.

When the paralytic was lowered through the roof of the house to Jesus, Jesus knew that his main problem was not with his body, but with his heart, so he addressed that matter first (Mark 2:1-5). When Judas was at the Last Supper, Jesus knew all about the betrayal fermenting in his heart (John 13:18-30). He tried to save Judas with love, by treating him as the honoured guest.³ Judas sealed his own destiny when he rejected that love.

Jesus knows our hearts also; our motives, plans, secret thoughts and sins are open to his gaze. But he is not interested in exposing either our sins or our

hypocrisy to others. Jesus is love and, ‘love covers over a multitude of sins’ (1 Pet. 4:8). Jesus longs, more than anything else, to cast the robe of his forgiveness over us as the father did to his prodigal son. We are told in John 3:17 that ‘God did *not* send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.’

We don’t save sinners by condemning them. They get more condemnation than they can handle from their own hearts without us adding to it. We save sinners by telling them about Jesus, who has freely forgiven them, because he has already paid the penalty for their sins. There is nothing more that they can do to atone for their guilt. Because Jesus has paid the full price for our sin there is nothing to pay. His forgiveness is free. Hear God’s Word: ‘To him who is thirsty I will give to drink *without cost* from the spring of the water of life’ (Rev. 21:6). ‘Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the *free* gift of the water of life’ (Rev. 22:17). This means everyone has access to his forgiveness, the poor as well as the rich. All they have to do is turn their eyes to Jesus and say with sincerity: ‘Lord, forgive me, a sinner. I accept your free gift of forgiveness.’

Jesus did not condemn the woman for her sins, but neither did he condone them. The consequences of our sins are *always* painful and God wants to spare us from this pain, which is why Jesus said to the woman, ‘Go and sin no more.’ □

Endnotes:

1. These details are speculative.
2. The word *gunai* (woman, or dear woman) is used of both.
3. The honoured guest was the one to whom the head of the table gave the sop.



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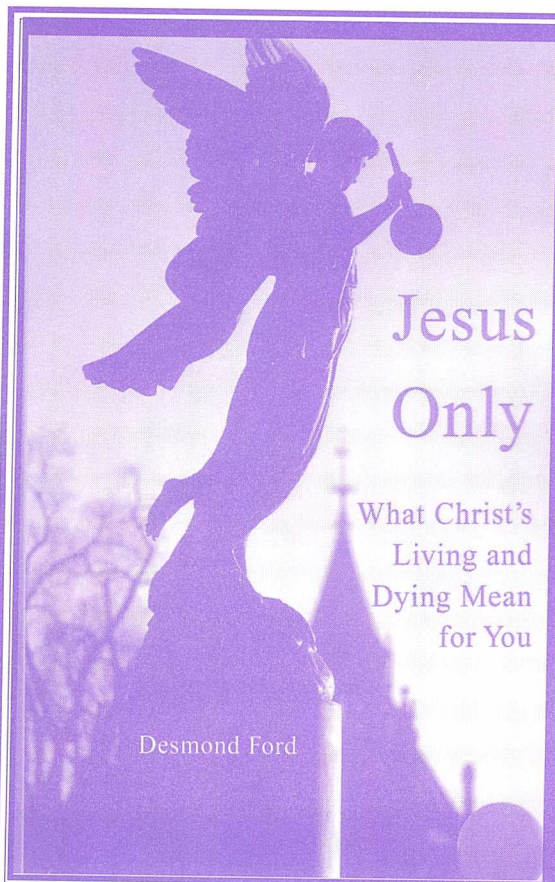
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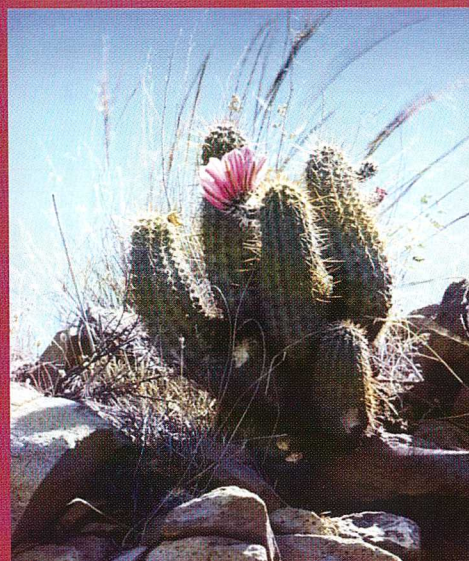
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