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A Lamb for the Slaughter



The Empty Tomb:

Reasons To Believe

From **Prison**
To

Prime Minister

Extravagant Grace

FACE TO FACE MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL



Easter is the time of year when Christians have decided to remember the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ. Unfortunately the Good News of this amazing story is too often lost among the eggs and bunnies.

As you celebrate, I'd like you to remember that along with Him, two things were nailed to the cross, without which the story of our salvation would be incomplete.

The first was a list of our sins and transgressions; nailed

with Christ, the list of every wrong or inappropriate thought or action, His blood blotting them out, washing them clean.

Colossians 2:14 "Because we broke God's laws, we owed a debt--a debt that listed all the rules we failed to follow. But God forgave us that debt. He took it away and nailed it to the cross" (ERV).

Before we ever even realised we needed saving, God acted in love because He couldn't bear the thought of spending eternity without you and me. He reached out to us in our brokenness and washed our sins clean with His blood.

Also, nailed to the cross above Christ was a sign, written in three languages. But why?

My opinion is that God wanted the whole world to hear of His love and devotion, so He posted this sign and inspired all four Gospel writers to record the event:

John 19:19-22 "Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS.

Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek.

The chief priests of the Jews protested to Pilate, "Do not write 'The King of the Jews,' but that this man claimed to be king of the Jews."

Pilate answered, 'What I have written, I have written.'"

Isn't it interesting that a few hours later, one of the thieves hanging on a cross alongside Jesus (Luke 23:42) asks that Jesus remember him in His Kingdom. What gave him the idea that Christ was King? Well the sign of course, a proclamation for all eternity! A message of hope, leading to his salvation.

A man who was God made flesh, a list of wrong doings and a sign, all nailed to the cross for us, and preserved through the generations, that we could know of His immeasurable love.

And we at Face to Face continue to share the Good News that God loves you, has died for you, has forgiven your sins and rules as King of the entire universe. And through this sharing our prayer is that you be led into an ever deeper and more personal relationship with Him.

In Christian love,

Tim



OUR VISION

"Living and sharing life changing Hope, with all kinds of people in all kinds of places"

OUR MISSION

1. Face to Face seeks to become a trustworthy Christian Media Ministry with a reputation for quality content, balanced theology and thought provoking articles and programmes.
2. Face to Face is committed to bringing a positive and practical Christian perspective on everyday issues facing ordinary people. Its content is biblically based, relational, inspirational and informative.
3. Face to Face undertakes to engage individuals from a wide range of national and cultural backgrounds. It seeks to reflect perspectives across these cultural boundaries fairly, accurately and respectfully.
4. Face to Face seeks to inspire readers to embrace the gospel and live a grace-centred life in Jesus Christ.
5. Face to Face seeks to cultivate a cooperative and constructive engagement with leaders and communities across a broad spectrum of Christian faiths.

OUR VALUES

1. Respect for human cultural diversity
2. All people, without exception, are of equal value and spiritual potential
3. Responsible theological methods and exegesis of Scripture
4. Trustworthiness and earned credibility
5. Building relationships individually and in community

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A Lamb for the Slaughter



John Halford

My wife and I like mutton and lamb, but it is hard to get these meats where we live. This is very much beef and pork territory, and mutton and lamb, when they are available, are very expensive. So when a farmer friend offered me a sheep at a good price, I was very interested.

"How do we take care of the slaughtering and butchering?" I asked. "I don't know anything about that."

"No problem," he said, and gave

me the phone number of a local abattoir and meat processor.

I called them to make arrangements. "Well, we don't see sheep too often, but we can do it next week for you," said the butcher. "Just bring it on Monday morning, and we'll take care of it. But are you sure it is a sheep and not a goat? People round here often don't know the difference. There usually isn't enough meat on a goat to make it worth your while."

I called my friend back. "They said you can take it in next Monday. But are you sure it is a sheep and not a goat?"

He sounded a bit offended.

"It's a sheep all right. I'll bring it by on the way and you can check for yourself if you like?"

"No! Don't do that." One glimpse of the doomed sheep on the way to the slaughter and my wife would undoubtedly give it a reprieve and I'd end up with a pet sheep instead of a freezer full of meat. (My wife does not like to be reminded that steaks, chops and hamburgers were once parts of living creatures.)

Two days before the sheep was to be dispatched to the abattoir, they called us and asked, "How do you want this meat?"

We hadn't thought about that.

"Er...what do you mean?"

"You want us to cut it up and package it, right?" Yes. Emphatically right. "So do you want all of it?"

"Yes, I guess so." We assumed he meant the legs, shoulders, chops – the usual cuts you buy at the supermarket.

"Yeah, I know. But what about the brains, liver, kidneys...?"

"No!" said my wife firmly.

"We don't want those yucky bits. Just the nice bits."

So a few days later I drove out to the processing plant, and picked up two large boxes of frozen cuts of mutton. Just the 'nice bits' – neatly wrapped and labelled, ready to be put in the freezer. We enjoy them from time to time. And as we do, we don't stop to remind ourselves that the delicious meal was once a part of a beautiful animal.

But let's think about it now.

Lamb of God

I'm not talking about becoming a vegetarian. And although I am not one, I certainly have no criticism of people who are. But let's think for a moment about another sheep that was led to the slaughter – I mean Jesus. The Lamb of God, who took away the sins of the world, slaughtered in Jerusalem about two thousand years ago. As I write, it will soon be Good Friday, when most Christians across the globe commemorate that terrible day when the human race killed their Creator.

Crucifixion was a brutal business. Most depictions of Jesus on the cross do not begin to show what it was like. Frankly, you wouldn't want realistic pictures of the real thing – a human being, already beaten to a pulp, forced to stumble through the streets carrying a heavy, rough-hewn beam, to which he is then nailed and left writhing in agony, exposed to the elements and the taunts of the crowd, until death came from exhaustion and suffocation. We don't like those 'yucky' details. We prefer a cleaned up version.

And so it is with our Christianity. Thankfully, very few readers of this magazine have ever faced serious persecution or death because they are Christian (and probably never will). I know Christianity is on

the decline, and the church no longer has the influence it once did. But most people who read this do not live in fear because we are disciples of Jesus. We get ridicule perhaps, and maybe discrimination in some cases. But not death, and certainly not death by crucifixion. So what did Jesus mean when he said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24)

The way the Gospel is often marketed today it sounds like a programme to make you rich and healthy. That is perhaps understandable. People who have no sense of sin have no need for a Saviour. But don't we all want to be richer and healthier? So it makes good marketing sense to focus on those aspects of the Gospel message which offer benefits in this world, along with the vaguer promises of life after death. Advertise Christianity as a good deal, and overlook the small print.

Actually, 'deal' is not the right word. Jesus does not offer us a 'good deal'. We have nothing to offer with which to make 'a deal'. Christ died for us while we were unrepentant sinners (Romans 5:8). Salvation is God's gift, unearned, undeserved – but freely and lovingly given. Jesus offers us all the privilege of citizenship in His Kingdom, now and for all eternity.

Caveat Emptor

However, accepting that offer brings with it responsibility. He cautioned those who wanted to follow him to 'count the cost'. Some sacrifice would be needed, for the ways of the Kingdom are not the ways of this world. After his initial ministry on earth was complete, Jesus did not 'escape' to heaven to wait, in safety and comfort, until it is time to come back. He remains, to this day, intimately involved with this world and its needs. In His parable of the sheep and the goats he shows that He identifies with the hungry, the poor, the widows, orphans and prisoners. He feels it personally when their suffering is relieved. He does not turn his back on the 'yucky' needs

of humanity, and He expects His fellow citizens to share the burden.

Professor Rodney Stark has done extensive research of the rise of Christianity in the first centuries. His book, *The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus movement became the world's largest religion*, combines the sensitivities and insights of both a historian and a sociologist.

He has shown that the faith spread not through elaborate campaigns or glitzy evangelism. Rather it was through the generosity, self-sacrifice, concern for the poor and downtrodden of those first followers. It was because the Christians showed the harsh world of the Roman Empire that there was another way to live. They did not just pray 'thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. They tried to live that way, and in doing so, they 'carried their crosses'.

Jesus cautioned those who wanted to follow Him to 'count the cost'.

It is no different today. The Epistle of Titus sums it up well: 'For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a people that are His very own, eager to do what is good' (Titus 2:11-14).

We do not do these things so we can be saved. We live like this because we are saved. The sacrifice of the Lamb made that possible.

Accept it all – not just the 'nice' bits.



A TALE OF TWO TEACHERS



 Joseph Tkach

I grew up as a grandson of immigrants. Both of my grandfathers had journeyed to America as adults, one fleeing a revolution and the other seeking his fortune. But both of them shared a similarity – they both hoped to see their culture passed down to their grandchildren. And so, I endured many an afternoon of “tutoring.”

My Russian grandfather would recite the Russian alphabet like he was announcing a cattle auction. I tried hard to keep up but always fell behind. When he finished, he would say, “Okay, now you try.” I’d start at the beginning and maybe make it a few letters in, but sooner or later, I’d always fail. And with each failure, my Russian grandfather would threaten to spank me if I didn’t do better next time.

On the other hand, my Greek grandfather wanted me to learn Greek. But he took a different approach. Rather than threatening punishment and zooming ahead, this grandfather would start slow, saying the first five letters of the Greek alphabet before pausing, and giving me the chance to actually learn. When I needed help, he graciously stepped in, prompting me. And when

I succeeded, he always rewarded me with a slice of baklava.

This is my Tale of the Two Teachers. Both wanted me to learn their language (for good reasons!) But one worked as a taskmaster of the Law, prodding me on, disappointed whenever I made a mistake, and trying to motivate me mainly by threats. The other worked under the code of grace, gently and patiently working with me, step by step – forgiving a misstep and rewarding a success with love.

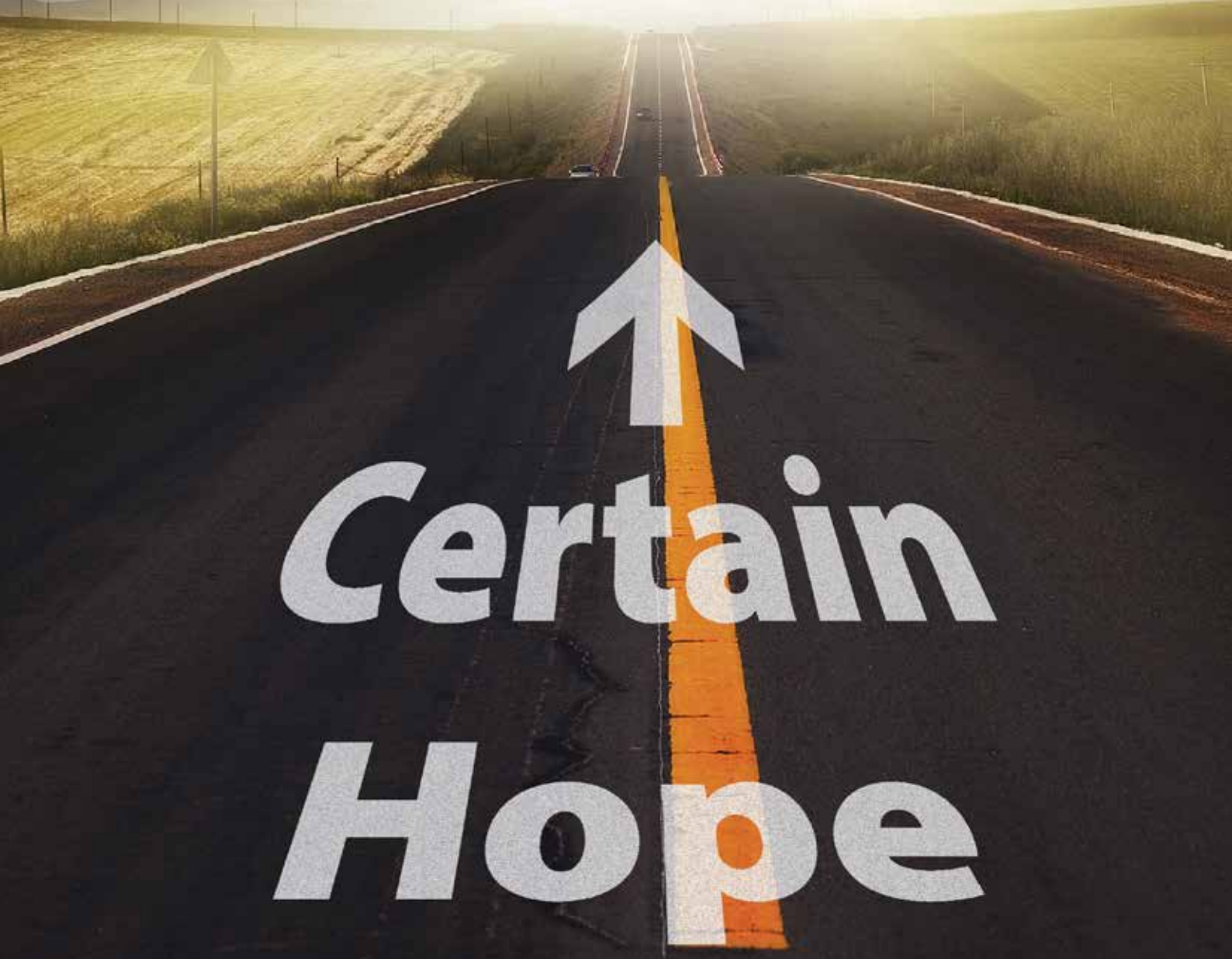
But let me be clear, when I make this contrast, I don’t mean for anyone to conclude that I loved one grandfather more than the other. That’s just not true. In fact, I love them both – just as I love both the law and grace.

What I want to show is that grace is more powerful than the law to bring about God’s good purposes. See how Paul writes about it in Romans,

“For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned in sin the flesh, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:3-4).

God made a covenant of grace with Israel, to be their God and to enable them to be a channel of blessing to the future generations of all the families of the earth. The law was added in 430 years later to give them clear instruction about how to live within that covenant and serve notice as to when they were departing from it. It was never meant to give them righteous loving hearts. It could not protect them from temptation to sin. It was weak and could never bring about God’s covenant purposes for his people. It mostly was simply demanding and condemning. But by the working of God’s grace in us we are given new natures. The Holy Spirit gives us a share in Christ’s own mind and heart and we are transformed from the inside out and enabled to live a Christ-centered life as His beloved children.

Our Triune God has wonderfully worked out a way for us to share in his “culture,” to learn his language of faith, hope and love and to be channels of his blessing to others. Now that’s a reward that far surpasses even Baklava! I pray that we all come to know God’s covenant love and grace ever more powerfully in our daily lives.



Certain Hope



Hilary Buck

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”
1 Corinthians 13:12-13 (NIV)

Faith and love - aren't they the big duo, the most basic qualities in our Christian life? But in 1 Corinthians 13:12-13 there's a threefold partnership, with hope sandwiched in between them, maybe looking to us a bit of a little flyweight surrounded by two heavyweights.

Perhaps we may not think that hope is such an important quality because of the way we use the word. We say: I hope it won't rain tomorrow; I hope the train's on time today; I hope we'll get a holiday

this year. Hope is linked in our minds and language with uncertainty. We talk about faint hope, desperate hope, and a little hope. It's a kind of wish or a desire for something that we may not necessarily get. The New Testament writers use the word the same way when they are sharing their plans: Paul writes to the Romans that he hopes to see them on his journey and John tells his church he hopes to see them shortly (Romans 15:24; 3 John 1:14).

But when it is about our life with God and his plans for us – that's a different matter. Unlike our human hope, it possesses certainty. Now hope is a confident looking forward to the glory of God and the glorious appearing of Jesus; now our hope sees our future of salvation, our redemption, the resurrection of our bodies and our eternal, righteous life with utter assurance.

And while we look forward to the

future, hope is alive and active in us (1 Peter 1:3), but unlike some virus that's made its home in us and does us harm, hope exerts a great beneficial power and influence over us in our everyday lives. Look at it one way and it's an anchor securing us to Christ (Hebrews 6:18-20). Look at it another and it's a helmet protecting our minds (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Look again and it's shouting encouragement at us, motivating our flagging spirits, and giving us strength to endure (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17). Not only does it energise us but it can affect others around us - Paul prayed that we may overflow with hope (Romans 15:13). If we do, then may our families, friends, acquaintances and even our enemies get their feet wet in the puddle.



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Only Words

It's **ONLY** words...
and **WORDS** ARE *all I* HAVE,



Hilary Jacobs

Isometimes indulge in a musical trip down memory lane. An old 1960s hit by the Bee Gees really struck a chord – so to speak – when I listened to their rendering of ‘Words.’ “...It’s only words, and words are all I have, to take your heart away.”

What would songs be without words? The composers Schubert and Mendelssohn wrote a number of ‘Songs without words’, but I don’t remember any of them particularly. Where would our worship services be without words? When we sing new songs, we pay great attention to the words even when the music is mediocre. Famous speeches, moving sermons, great literature, inspiring poetry, even map books, detective stories and fairy tales all have one thing in common – words. Jesus, the great Saviour of all mankind has the title of ‘Logos’ or The Word. Christians refer to the Bible as the Word of God.

Words began with the creation of humans. God spoke directly to Adam and Eve, and no doubt they conversed with each other. Satan used some very enticing words to take Eve’s heart away, and she in turn presented a slightly modified version of those words to Adam. The result was catastrophic to say the least.

After the flood the entire human population all spoke the same language. Verbal communication was vitally important in planning the tower that would “reach to the heavens.” But this undertaking was in direct opposition to God’s command to multiply and fill the

earth, so He decided to put a stop to the ‘progress’. And how did He do it? By confusing their languages, making them unable to understand each other’s words.

But with the New Covenant, came new beginnings. There were many different language groups gathering in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost shortly after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. But all those listening to Peter’s address on that day were utterly amazed to hear him preaching the gospel in their own language! Whether the miracle was in the hearing or the speaking, the barrier of language was removed. Three thousand people understood sufficiently to seek repentance and forgiveness on that day, giving the church a ‘kick-start.’

Tongue Control

Words can hurt or heal, distress or impress. As Jesus began His ministry, people were impressed by the gracious words that proceeded from His mouth. Later on, when some disciples turned away, Jesus asked the Twelve, “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Peter, seldom at a loss for words, answered, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life...” (John 6:68).

The Book of James has quite a bit to say about the tongue. He compares it to a forest fire started by a small spark. How well we know this in South Africa! A few venomous words on social media can set off a war of words threatening hate, violence and polarization.

So how should we Christians manage our words? While we are

flesh and blood, we will not make a perfect job of it. James says, “If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is the perfect man...” (James 3:2). There has only ever been one perfect man, and it’s not any of us. Jesus knew exactly when to speak and when to remain silent. The Pharisees and teachers of the law tried repeatedly to “catch Him in His words,” but could not.

We can however, pray for the ability to speak the truth in love. Love can sometimes mean tough love, the need to speak out and not mince our words, but it can also mean to consider the effect of our words on others and to speak accordingly.

I can so clearly remember as a child when my dad would say, “I want to have a word with you.” This could only mean a reprimand, but when he would exclaim, “my word,!” it usually meant something good.

In Matthew 24:35 Jesus assures us that “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” My personal favourite words in the Bible are found at the end of the Book of Revelation. This is when God makes everything new, new heaven and new earth, and when there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain.

Jesus tells John to write this down for His words are trustworthy and true (Revelation 21: 4,5). Jesus’ words, as well as His indwelling Spirit, are all we have and all we need to take our hearts away. Away from the god of this world and into His glorious kingdom.

The Blue Jewel Called Earth



Cliff Neill

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every activity under heaven.”

Ecclesiastes 3:1 (NLT)

In Genesis we read that God created the sun, moon and stars not only to provide light here on earth but also for “signs, seasons and for days and years.” As we think about this amazing blue jewel that we call home and wonder at our 24 hour day, 365 day year and the four seasons that are brought about by the tilt of the earth (23.5 degrees), and its interaction with the sun; we just have to stand in awe of this amazing orderliness in a universe that seems filled with disorder and, as far as we know, filled with barren and uninhabited planets.

Our great God declares that this planet was created “to be inhabited!” Notice—“For the Lord is God, and He created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. He made the world to be lived in,

not to be a place of empty chaos. “‘I am the Lord’ he says ‘and there is no other’” (Isaiah 45:18 NLT).

Our precious home is a gift from the hand of a loving Father. Everything here on planet earth was designed to nurture us, sustain us, delight us and bring us great joy as we journey through life. And what is the purpose of all these blessings that we probably take for granted? Solomon wrote; “God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end. So I concluded that there is nothing better than to be happy and to enjoy themselves as long as they can. And people should eat and drink and enjoy the fruits of their labour, for these are gifts from God.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11-13).

That might be true but we were also created to look beyond this physical life, beyond the daily occurrences to a life that has no

end; a time of eternity with our God. To also seek Him and to give thanks for all these blessings here and now; to tell Him what part of nature we like most, how much we enjoy sunsets, waterfalls, clouds, trees, the beach, the night sky with all its myriads of stars. Let’s draw close to Him who inhabits eternity (Isaiah 57:15) and finally, thank Him for being not only powerful but also personal. He is after all, the One who wants to share the universe with us for all eternity!

Prayer

Great Creator God, thank you for our beautiful blue planet home and for all the wonderful and amazing gifts you have given because of your great love for us. Help us accept them with gratitude and deep joy as we seek you and look ahead to the eternity you have promised to share with us.

Amen



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The Empty Tomb:

Reasons
to Believe



Jesus Christ's resurrection from a rock sepulchre galvanized the faith of early Christians. The empty tomb and the appearances of the risen Lord were the crowning proof that the Master they loved and served was not just another moral teacher. He was, as He claimed to be, God in the flesh.

This conviction energized the early church. "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard," the apostle Peter testified to the Jewish religious authorities, who could not quench the faith of those early believers (Acts 4:20).

We who read the accounts almost 2,000 years later need to remember that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not, as Paul boldly declared before the elite of his nation, "done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). Just the opposite was true. The disciples testified in the laboratory of public scrutiny and debate. People in their audiences could refute them at every point, if they were not telling the truth.

To first-century Christians, the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the pivotal event in history. Their dramatic encounters with Jesus after his escape from the rock tomb were vivid and unforgettable:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us." (1 John 1:1-2).

John, an apostle and disciple of Jesus Christ, wrote as an eyewitness to His resurrection from the dead (John 20:30-31; 21:24-25).

Luke, an educated man who wrote a detailed study of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, authenticated the report that went from tiny Judea into the world beyond: "Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account...so that you may know the certainty of the things you

have been taught" (Luke 1:3-4).

Paul distilled the essence of the new faith he helped spread across the Roman Empire: "What I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Full Public Scrutiny

The apostles faced the test of informed public opinion, a jury of their contemporaries. Some in their audiences already had Jesus' blood on their hands. The execution of one or two more fishermen from Galilee wouldn't make much difference. Yet the disciples had unconquerable confidence. Their words still pulsate with moral fervour and authority. The good news of the resurrection was big news on the streets of Jerusalem. It was hard-hitting. It was effective. It changed lives.

The good news of the resurrection was big news on the streets of Jerusalem. It was hard-hitting. It was effective. It changed lives.

"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know,"

Peter trumpeted (Acts 2:22). "God has made this

Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ" (verse 36). This bold preaching threw the Jerusalem religious hierarchy completely on the defensive. "You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood," they protested (Acts 5:28).

If the disciples had been perpetrating fraud or deceit, their testimony could have been easily overthrown. It wasn't. The willingness to risk all for the truth of the resurrection was convincing testimony from fallible human beings—men who had earlier deserted Christ and fled (Matthew 26:56). That willingness, and the powerful miracles being done in Christ's name, made the gospel compelling. It rocked Jerusalem.

No wonder Christ's newly energized disciples were "highly regarded by the people" (Acts 5:13). Remember something else: Other popular movements had come and gone in first-century Judea. Sensational leaders had arisen before Jesus of Nazareth, people the world at large has forgotten (verses 35-39). One of them, Judas, was also a Galilean, who lived not far from where Jesus was reared.

Around AD 6, Judas gathered a following and set himself against the Roman power. His movement failed and he was killed. But no one in the first century claimed that this Judas of Galilee was raised from the dead or that he and his followers had many prolonged talks after a resurrection. Still less did anyone risk life and limb for the Judas movement years afterward. Yet ordinary human beings risked their all for Jesus of Nazareth.

History Not Dogma

The late F.F. Bruce, evangelical author, notes:

"The Christian gospel is not primarily a code of ethics or a metaphysical system; it is first and foremost good news, and as such it was proclaimed by its earliest preachers.... This good news is intimately bound up with the historical order, for it tells how for the world's redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the Christ." (The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable? pages 7-8)

The disciples were convicted by seeing and touching the Lord Jesus. They believed in the power of the resurrection. Their testimony was believable because they believed. How about us? Do we believe?

We should. The same Jesus Christ who walked the dusty paths of Galilee is alive today, alive and glorified. He intervenes for those of us who turn to Him in faith and belief, just as He did for Peter, Andrew, James and John. The empty tomb could not hold him, and the evil powers of this world — natural and supernatural — could not stamp out the truth of His resurrection.

To experience this transforming power for ourselves, to "know Christ and the power of His resurrection" (Philippians 3:10), we will also have to believe in the empty tomb and in the power of the resurrection. We are not asked to make a commitment to Christ without evidence. The empty tomb stands as stark evidence that our Lord and Savior is risen from the dead.

Peter, preeminent preacher of the empty tomb, said it best: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that He may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you" (Acts 3:19-20).

The decision is yours. Will you believe?

They Say Peace, Peace...but...



Natu Moti

“They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, ‘Peace, Peace!’ When there is no Peace.”Jeremiah 6:14 (NKJV)

Is there peace on this earth? Why is the world in chaos and devoid of peace? Are you surprised to find no peace? I am not, because the Bible is very specific about it. God says in Romans 3:17-18, “And the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.” While we read in Proverbs 16:25 that, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

In recent times peace was never so far away from the hearts and minds of people. Nations are at each other's throats, and violence is spreading like wild fire. The problem of migrants and refugees in Europe seems to be wearing down the EU leaders and their patience is running low.

Every day we hear of horror and suffering and killings and violence. Look at Syria, Israel, Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, North and South Korea, to name a few who are in turmoil and there is the threat of brutality of ISIS and Boko Haram. What a world we are living in! Families are torn apart by the ravaging cancer of divorce, and to be politically correct, same sex marriages and abortions are legalized by

many western nations. It is a fact before our eyes. No one can deny that. As in the days of Noah so it shall be in the latter days, said Jesus.

The U.S Secretary of State John Kerry is tirelessly travelling to and fro to negotiate peace among warring nations and factions. He must be the most disappointed person, because no sooner are the agreements signed, but they are broken. At times they may hold for a while and there may be a temporary period of truce through ceasefire, but it too, crumbles quickly. There is no lasting peace. I admire the tenacity, skill, diplomacy, patience, courage, and endless efforts of John Kerry, but to little avail. On human terms to achieve peace is impossible.

God has repeated, “Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood; their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destructions are in their paths. The way of peace they have not known, and there is no justice in their ways; they have made themselves crooked paths; whoever takes that way shall not know peace.” (Isaiah 59:7-8)

The only way to peace is Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6-7). He will end all wars and rebuke the nations and teach them His ways (Isaiah 2:1-4). That is the absolute guarantee for the future. However, Christians can have peace today, in spite of

what is happening around us in this world. Let us not forget the natural calamities of earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, volcanoes, plane crashes and on top of it the suicide bombers, etc. Nevertheless, God has promised peace to those who love Him. It is found in Philippians 4:6-7: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” And again we read in Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

I say with the Apostle Paul (Romans 1:7), “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ.” Peace will come on this earth, but it will be on God's terms.

Prayer

Father in heaven, I look forward to the peace and harmony and joy which You have promised. I pray speed that day, and I make this supplication in Jesus' name.

Amen

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Silence in hell?



James Henderson

“And (they) shall be as though they had never been”
Obadiah 16 (ESV)

Halloween customs often conjure images of hell-fire. I recently heard of some people who were praying for relatives suffering, supposedly, in Hell. Their prayers were sincere and compassionate, but is it true that hell is a place of eternal torment?

Obadiah has an historical context of the mutual hostility between the descendants of the brothers Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom). Its contention is that Edom had played a treacherous role in Israel's downfall and captivity, and that, one day, Edom would get its comeuppance. Parallels are drawn between Israel, often seen by Biblical scholars as a metaphor for true religion (Christianity), and Edom, metaphorically regarded as secularism because the Edomites were not particularly religious.

Edom appeared to have the upper hand militarily, but which side would

triumph in the end? Obadiah lifts his readers and listeners from their present circumstances to the future day of the Lord, when good triumphs clearly over evil. He writes “there shall be no survivor for the house of Esau” (verse 18). He explains that, as we read above in the leading scripture, the Edomites “shall be as though they had never been.”

There are some obvious implications for us today. The victories of secular thinking will in the end come to nothing. Jesus is victorious. “The kingdom shall be the Lord's” (verse 21). But, what about those who ultimately reject God's gracious acceptance of them in Christ? If we follow through on the metaphors of true religion and secularism, do Obadiah's words imply that there will be no secularists in God's kingdom, and that those who refuse Jesus completely will be as though they never had existed? In other words, no memory of them. Is it that in Hell they would be no longer sustained by Jesus, by whose life the universe and everything in it are held together

(see Colossians 1:17)? Without Jesus there is no physical or spiritual life.

We don't know everything about Hell, and there are lots of odd notions about it in circulation. What the Bible suggests is that no one is there yet, and that those who end up there choose it for themselves by rejecting Jesus Christ. And, if we take a hint from Obadiah's words, the fate of those in Hell may be that they cease to exist. Silence: the weeping and wailing is over. That sounds more like a loving God than one who lets a conquered and sadistic devil punish unrepentant sinners eternally.

Prayer

Eternal Father of grace and compassion, we don't know everything about Hell, but we do know about your Son, Jesus, and we pray that we may live in His life forever. In Jesus' name.

Amen

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FROM PRISON TO PRIME MINISTER

The man who never gave up



 Robert Klynsmith

Who would you think of as your greatest inspirational leader of all time?

Would it be Nelson Mandela, Walt Disney, Oprah Winfrey, or one of the Bible greats like King David or Queen Esther? Because you are an individual, with a unique background and personality, your choice of role model may be quite different from those of your friends and family.

Allow me to share some thoughts about my own all time favourite, and in turn I would love to hear from you about who you would nominate and why. Feel free to communicate with me through the Face to Face website or email address.

For me, Joseph is a larger-than-life Biblical personality, whose story is as relevant today as it was about 3800 years ago. He was an exceptionally gifted leader and administrator who showed amazing resilience in the face of a series of crises that rolled relentlessly into his life like the waves of the sea. Horrible things happened to him through circumstances beyond his control.

Jealousy and Hatred

Joseph's father Israel loved him dearly, more than any of his other sons and gave him a magnificent multi-coloured robe. Joseph was thrilled with this precious gift. However, his ten brothers did not share the excitement. They were already

jealous because he was Dad's favourite. Their resentment grew into hatred which finally culminated in a tragic incident that changed Joseph's life forever. They threw him into a deep cistern, and then plotted to kill him. Finally after a heated squabble they agreed this was too drastic a step. So they sold him for a mere 20 shekels of silver to a group of passing Midianite slave traders.

Slave traders were often cruel, chaining slaves to one another as they trudged along their harrowing journey into the unknown. We can only imagine the emotional agony that must have raged in Joseph's heart as he plodded wearily under the desert sun, thinking about his home and family – wondering if he would ever see them again.

The Midianites eventually arrived in Egypt and sold Joseph to an official named Potiphar, who was Pharaoh's captain of the guard. What a culture shock for Joseph, having to adapt to working as a house slave in a sophisticated home, when all he knew about was farming.

A Trust Relationship

Here is where we begin to gain insight into the character of Joseph and the trust relationship he enjoyed with the Lord. Notice Genesis 39:2-5: "The Lord was with Joseph and he prospered...When his master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord gave him success in everything

he did, Joseph found favour in his eyes...Potiphar put him in charge of his household and he entrusted to his care everything he owned... The Lord blessed the house of the Egyptian because of Joseph."

Quite a comeback considering the mental, psychological and emotional ordeal Joseph had been through. Yet, he remained true to his Lord, knowing that God would always be at his side in the midst of the fiercest of storms... accentuated in Hebrews 13: 5-6... Because God has said, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Joseph's source of strength and resilience was anchored firmly in the Triune God. He never allowed the distress of his situation to get in the way of serving his Lord through his God-given talents. Potiphar was so inspired by Joseph's relationship with God that he entrusted the oversight of his entire household to him.

However, Joseph's early success in Egypt was short-lived. Potiphar's wife found him irresistible and attempted to entice him into bed. Besides the snare of an adulterous relationship, Joseph realised he would be bringing the Lord's name into disrepute, and fled the scene. She reacted angrily, falsely accused him of sexual harassment and had him thrown into prison. His reputation was besmirched in an instant, probably



making juicy grapevine news in the corridors of Egyptian high society.

Yet Joseph remained steadfast, faithfully serving God even within the cauldron of the prison walls. Genesis 29:21 tells us "The Lord was with him; He showed kindness and granted him favour in the eyes of the prison warden. So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in prison."

I encourage you to read the full story of events surrounding his 12 year long stint in prison, and the dignified yet assertive manner in which Joseph honoured God in exercising his spiritual gift of interpreting dreams. Pharaoh had a dream about seven fat cows and seven lean cows, and only Joseph could reveal that these depicted seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. This interpretation had a dramatic impact on Joseph's life. We read in Genesis 41:38-40, "so Pharaoh asked his officials, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the Spirit of God?". Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made known all of this to you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my palace and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you."

From Zero to Hero

What an incredible turnaround in the life of Joseph! Pharaoh, an Egyptian pagan to the core, was

deeply moved by the way in which Joseph's entire persona manifested the sovereignty of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. So much so that he appointed Joseph to be at the helm of Egypt during a precarious period in his history. Joseph's remarkable talents of wisdom, leadership and administrative acumen saved Egypt from total devastation. He circumspectly led the nation through the good times of prosperity, shrewdly building silos and storing grain for the lean years.

Joseph blossomed to his full potential through an identity that was totally immersed in the Triune God, whether things were going well, or in tribulations of the worst kind. He continually responded to the faithfulness of God, trusting in Him even when his whole world was falling apart and everything appeared so hopeless and unfair.

The life of Joseph portrays the life-saving divine relationship you can enjoy in Christ today, even in your darkest moments. Author James Fowler states in The stages of faith, that "faith is always relational; there is always another 'person' in faith." The faith of God, Jesus and our ever present Comforter, the Holy Spirit, lies at the very heart of the spiritual resilience that will enable you to rise above seemingly impossible circumstances. Paul encourages us in Romans 8:28,31 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him and have been called accord-

ing to His purpose...What then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?"

Joseph finally demonstrated the love of God in a touching encounter with his brothers who had been sent to Egypt by their father to source grain, as the land of Canaan was also in the deadly grip of famine. Joseph was gracious and forgiving. He never allowed the malicious action of his brothers, or of Potiphar's wife to taint his soul with bitterness. Nor did he allow their vindictiveness to sap his spiritual vitality and prevent him from growing to his full potential in the Lord.

The good news is that rifts were healed and Joseph was eventually united with his father. Joseph's powerful position enabled him to bring his entire family into Egypt where they settled peacefully in the land of Goshen.

Joseph led an extraordinary life in total allegiance to God...an amazing role model of how you can live fully in a delightful relationship with Jesus, who is always at your side rejoicing in your successes and giving comfort and strength in your suffering.

Paul enlightens us in Romans 8:35,37: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."





Triumph Over Temptation



Max Lucado

Still chuckle when I think about the joke I heard about the game warden who got a quick lesson on fishing.

It seems he noticed how this one particular fellow named Sam consistently caught more fish than anyone else. Whereas the other guys would only catch three or four a day, Sam would come in off the lake with a boat full. Stringer after stringer was always packed with freshly caught trout.

The warden, curious, asked Sam his secret. The successful fisherman invited the game warden to accompany him and observe. So the next morning the two met at the dock and took off in Sam's boat. When they got to the middle of the lake, they stopped the boat and the warden sat back to see how it was done. Sam's approach was simple. He took out a stick of dynamite, lit it, and threw it in the air. The explosion rocked the lake with such a force that dead fish immediately began to surface. Sam took out a net and started scooping them up.

Well, you can imagine the reaction of the game warden. When he recovered from the shock of it all, he began yelling at Sam. 'You can't do this! I'll put you in jail, buddy! You will be paying every fine there is in the book!' Sam, meanwhile, set his net down and took out another stick of dynamite. He lit it and tossed it in the lap of the game warden with these words, 'Are you going to sit there all day complaining or are you going to fish?'

The poor warden was left with a fast decision to make. He was yanked, in one second, from an observer to a participant. A dynamite of a choice had to be made and be made quickly!

Life is like that. Few days go by without our coming face to face with an uninvited, unanticipated, yet unavoidable decision. Like a crashing

snowbank, these decisions tumble upon us without warning. They disorientate and bewilder. Quick. Immediate. Sudden. No council, no study, no advice. Pow! All of a sudden you are hurled into the air of uncertainty and only instinct will determine if you will land on your feet.

Want a good example? Look at the three apostles in the garden. Sound asleep. Weary from a full meal and full week, their eyelids too heavy, they are awakened by Jesus only to tumble back into dreamland. The last time, however, they were awakened by Jesus to clanging swords, bright torches, and loud voices.

"There he is!"

"Let's get him!"

A shout. A kiss. A shuffling of feet. A slight skirmish. All of a sudden it is decision time. No time to huddle. No time to pray. No time to mediate or consult friends. Decision. Peter makes his. Out comes the sword. Off goes the ear. Jesus rebukes him. Now what? Mark, who apparently was a young eyewitness, wrote these words, "Then everyone deserted him and fled."¹ That's a nice way of saying they ran like scared mice. The only thing that was moving faster than their feet was their pulse rate. All those words of loyalty and commitment were left behind in a cloud of dust.

But before we get too hard on these quick-footed followers, let's look at ourselves. Maybe you have been in the garden of decision a few times yourself. Has your loyalty ever been challenged? Have you ever passed by this trap door of the devil?

For the teenager it could be a joint being passed around the circle.

For the businessman it could be an offer to make a little cash "under the table."

For the wife it could be a chance for her to give her "two bits" of juicy gossip.

For the student it could be an opportunity to improve his grade while looking at his friend's quiz.

For the husband it could mean

an urge to lose his temper over his wife's spending.

One minute we are in a calm boat on a lake talking about fishing, in the next we have a stick of dynamite in our hands.

More often than not, the end result is catastrophe. Rather than calmly defusing the bomb, we let it explode. We find ourselves doing the very thing we detest. The child in us lunges forward, uncontrolled and unrestrained, and the adult in us follows behind shaking his head.

Now, it doesn't have to be like that. Jesus didn't panic. He, too, heard the swords and saw the clubs, but He didn't lose His head.

In re-reading the garden scene we can see why. One statement made by our Master offers two basic tools for keeping our cool in the heat of a decision. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation."²

All Jesus is saying is, "pay attention." You know your weaknesses. You also know the situations in which your weaknesses are most vulnerable. Stay out of those situations. Back seats. Late hours. Nightclubs. Poker games. Bridge parties. Movie theatres. Whatever it is that gives Satan a foothold in your life, stay away from it. Watch out!

Second tool: "Pray." Prayer isn't telling God anything new. There is not a sinner or a saint who would surprise Him. What prayer does is invite God to walk the shadowy pathways of life with us. Prayer is asking God to watch ahead for falling trees and tumbling boulders and to bring up the rear, guarding our backside from the poison darts of the devil.

"Watch and pray." Good advice. Let's take it. It could be the difference between a peaceful day on the lake and a stick of dynamite blowing up in our faces.

1 Mark 14:50

2 Mark 14:38

Excerpt from "Winning Your Spiritual Battles"

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COMBATING ATHEISM



Joseph Tkach

In the last few years, we have seen the rising influence of writers and scientists who vigorously preach atheism.

They not only express their personal doubts about God's existence, but they campaign with almost evangelical fervor against the very idea of God and religion.

These atheists are highly educated and their arguments are not easily dismissed by most people, even though their arguments have long ago been defeated. It is difficult to logically refute arguments that are unfamiliar to you. Many Christians see this move towards atheism as a threat. We who believe in God feel we must somehow win this argument, and prove that God does exist, otherwise the atheists will have won the argument.

But no, they haven't. You see, although I have absolutely no doubt about God's existence, I have also learned that it is impossible to prove it to someone who is determined not to believe. There is ample evidence in the world and the whole cosmos to show the existence of a Creator. As the Psalms say, "The Heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). And Paul wrote to the church at Rome, "God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made" (Romans 1:20).

Knock Down Proof?

These scriptures are often used to prove God's existence, but that is not what they are saying. The wonders of creation provide impressive evidence for those who believe, but they do not give knock down proof for those who

do not. A determined atheist can always find a hole in an argument, or a loose brick in the proof. Thomas Aquinas, one of the greatest thinkers of church history, put it well when he wrote, "To one who has faith, no explanation is necessary. To one without faith, no explanation is possible."

The problem is that you cannot prove God's existence from within naturalism – the philosophy held by those who assume that only nature exists. There is no amount of evidence that can be taken from nature and used as proof for the God of the Bible.

This is because God is not physically a part of nature; He is transcendent of its origin. You can only 'prove' one aspect of nature on the basis of some other aspect of nature. So by studying nature, one can only yield further knowledge of nature. But, as the theologians of the early church put it: "Only God knows God, and only God reveals God." At best, nature can give us indirect evidences that confirm the existence of God, but the ultimate reason Christians have faith in God is Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus is the Reason, or as the Gospel of John puts it, The Logos.

But, just because we cannot give clear material proof that God exists, it does not mean the atheist has won the argument. We don't need to be on the defensive. What we need is to turn the argument around. It is not

our job to prove God exists – it is the atheist's task to prove He does not.

Atheists may cite some scientific discovery, the weakness of religious arguments, or the hypocrisy of some religious behavior to support their case. But, this should not divert attention away from the central fact they have to prove. They must still prove that God does not exist. And just as it is not possible to prove

God exists through naturalism, you cannot prove God does not exist through naturalism. The study of nature can only negate claims about nature.

For this reason, many atheists eventually admit that they are actually agnostic. Even Richard Dawkins in his recent public conversation with the Archbishop Rowan Williams acknowledged that he could not say with 100% certainty that God does not exist – he stops short at 99%. If they are honest, they cannot dismiss the evidence that the physical, materialistic world is not all there is. They may not come to the point where they accept and surrender their lives to their Creator, but they are no longer sure He does not exist. They simply don't know! They are agnostic, or "without knowledge."

Never forget that the strongest proof of God's existence is first, Jesus Christ and, second, the example of those who have surrendered to God, and live their lives in partnership with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Let us do that and let God take care of the atheists in his own good time. He will – because He loves them too.

It is impossible to prove it [God's existence] to someone who is determined not to believe.

Amen to that!

 Takalani Musekwa

Apart from the words God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Jesus, and Christ, the word **Amen** is one of the most used words by Christians.

They use it in their private prayers, in public worship together, and in songs. In fact, it is also one of the words commonly used in the Psalms. What does this little, but very popular word mean? What are we saying when we say 'Amen?'

A Wake Up Call?

For some, the word 'amen' is just like a full stop at the end of a prayer. In most churches, it is the announcement of the end of the church meeting. At times, the word "amen" serves as an alarm to wake up those that have fallen asleep during the looong prayers.

I think most of us miss the gospel message hidden in this little word. To explain it, I want to go to its first usage in the Bible, which is in the book of Numbers. In Numbers 5:11-15 we read of a ritual which was to be performed if there were issues of jealousy or infidelity in marriage.

"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If a man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him so that another man has sexual relations with her, and this is hidden from her husband and her impurity is undetected (since there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act), and if feelings of jealousy come over her husband and he suspects his wife and she is impure – or if he is jealous and suspects her even though she is not impure – then he is to take his wife to the priest.'"

At first reading of this passage it is easy to think that this is about jealous husbands, and innocently accused wives. However it is wrong to think that this passage is about that. One of the greatest errors in reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament, is to read it apart from the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus said the scriptures (meaning the Old Testament) speak

about Him. It is wrong to think that the Old Testament is only about a man sacrificing his only son, or a nation being rescued from slavery, or a young boy killing a giant, or a nation being fed food falling out of the sky, or water coming out of a rock, a young brother being sold into slavery by his older brothers, or twelve sons forming a nation. Those stories foreshadow Jesus and His ministry and his relationship to humanity.

In Exodus 20:5, God describes Himself as a jealous God and in many other places as the husband of Israel. The prophets lament the state of adulterous Israel who has departed from God. Hosea even marries a prostitute to show to Israel what they have become to God. The passage in Numbers 5 is about God, and not only about husbands and wives.

As we saw in Numbers 5:11-15 above, if the wife was unfaithful, and the husband suspects it but has no proof, or if the husband is simply jealous, but the wife has not been unfaithful, he was asked to bring his wife to the priest, who would perform the ritual described below.

"The priest shall bring her and make her stand before the Lord. Then he shall take some holy water in a clay jar and put some dust from the tabernacle floor into the water. ... Then the priest shall put the woman under oath and say to her, 'If no other man has had sexual relations with you and you have not gone astray and become impure while married to your husband, may this bitter water that brings a curse not harm you. But if you have gone astray while married to your husband and you have made yourself impure by having sexual relations with a man other than your husband' – here the priest is to put the woman under this curse – 'may the Lord cause you to become a curse among

your people when He makes your womb miscarry and your abdomen swell. May this water that brings a curse enter your body so that your abdomen swells or your womb miscarries.' "Then the woman is to say, 'Amen. Amen.'" (Num. 5:16-22)

As we see above, when the woman appears before the priest (Jesus), the priest was to take holy water (Holy Spirit) in a clay jar (humanity), and put dust from the floor of the tabernacle (humanity of Jesus). This combination, of the Holy Spirit in humans, whose

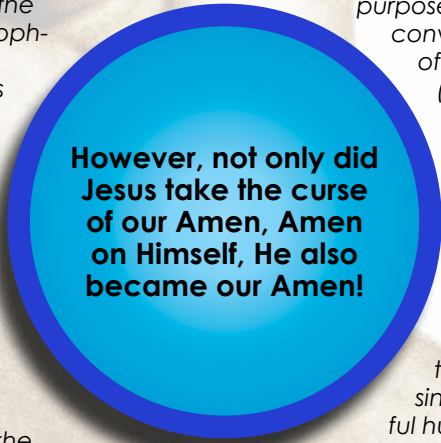
purpose is to convict humans of their sin (John 16:8); and the Holy Son of God who has become dust like us, brings judgment upon the errant, sinful, unfaithful humanity.

This passage is about God's judgement on humans, and not only about husbands and their wives.

Once the priest had mixed the water, he was supposed to pronounce a curse upon the wife if she was guilty of adultery and a blessing upon her if she was innocent. When he had done that, the woman was to say "Amen, Amen" (Numbers 5:22 ESV). This is the first time the word "Amen" appears in the Bible. The double Amen was like an oath to say the truth must come out. If she is guilty she would be destroyed, and if she was innocent, she would be okay. The Amen in this case was bad news if you were guilty. The truth is that all humans are guilty and are under the judgement of God, and our Amen is bad news for us.

A Curse for Us

However, this ritual is an allegory to communicate the good news

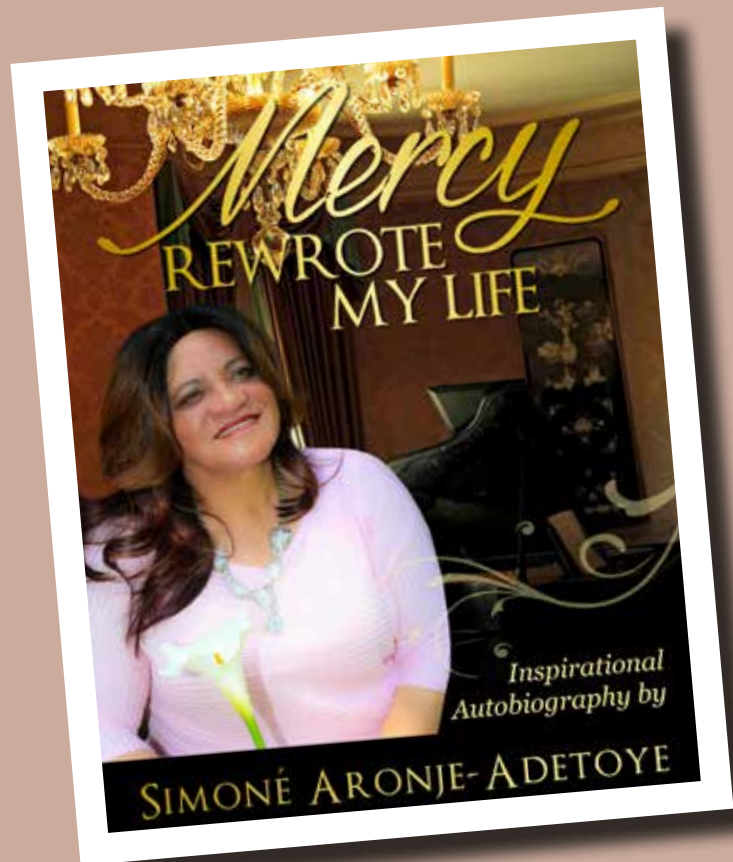


However, not only did Jesus take the curse of our Amen, Amen on Himself, He also became our Amen!

BOOK REVIEW:

MERCY RE-WROTE MY LIFE

BY SIMONE ARONJE-ADETOYE



Review by Hilary Jacobs

of Jesus. Knowing that we are guilty before God, Jesus our priest became the curse for us! "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

However, not only did Jesus take the curse of our Amen, Amen on Himself, He also became our Amen! "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation" (Revelation 3:14). John calls Jesus the Amen! Even though we are guilty, Jesus has taken away the curse that was supposed to fall on us, and utters the 'Amen, Amen' of our judgement on our behalf. Therefore there is no more condemnation for those that are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God." (2 Corinthians 1:20, emphasis mine). Through Jesus, the promises of God are Yes, and through Him, we say Amen to the glory of God who has redeemed us from our guilt in Jesus Christ! Amen! Amen to that!

The word Amen is pregnant with the gospel. Amen is like a signature on the contract which says if you do not meet the requirements of this contract you will be killed, arrested, liquidated, etc, only to find out that Jesus has signed the contract on your behalf. He is the one who takes our prayers and presents them to God in a perfect way. Therefore, despite what the jealousy ritual in Numbers 5 says, we can boldly say 'Amen, Amen' because Jesus has taken on our dust of humanity in His becoming human, and has given us the Holy Spirit, and has become our Amen. Guilty or not guilty, we can say 'Amen, Amen' with confidence, with no fear of the curse falling upon us, because it has fallen on Jesus already. Do I hear an Amen?

I say "Amen" to that!

The TV program *Against all odds*, presented by Mpho Lakage has surely been an inspiration to many viewers. It is about people who have succeeded in their lives in spite of great adversities. This book, also featured on the program, must rank among the most inspiring of all, as Simone tells her story. One hardly knows where to begin or what to say, so amazing are the events, and so staggering both the setbacks and divine interventions. One could truly say 'truth is stranger...'

From the age of nine, Simone encountered abuse from both parents and husband. In spite of this, she obtained her Teacher's Diploma, and made rapid advances in her teaching career. Her musical talent saw her advancing in spectacular ways by teaching in private schools and accompanying choirs.

Re-locating to Polokwane after an inspirational dream, she started on a chequered journey to realizing that dream – the beginning of the Limpopo Youth Orchestra. Repeatedly she is brought to rely on Jesus for rescue from intolerable situations. Time and again she turns to Him and miraculously gets back on track! The final sorrow in her life at the time of publishing was the tragic loss of her house-keeper's son who drowned in a swimming pool while the orchestra was on tour in Senegal. But again, Simone's faith and trust kept her 'on the potter's wheel.'

To say that this book is an inspiration is to understate. Simone's experiences are testimony to an all powerful, loving personal God and Saviour who is able to change any situation.

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KING SOLOMON'S MINES

MODERN WISDOM
FROM THE ANCIENT
BOOK OF PROVERBS
(PART 29)

SELF
CONTROL

Just Say No?

I have a friend. His name is Jimmy. Everyone likes Jimmy. He is hard working, generous and has a great sense of humour. But Jimmy has a problem.

Recently someone swerved in front of him on the freeway. Jimmy rammed his foot down on the accelerator and chased the arrogant driver. When the culprit stopped at a red traffic light Jimmy slammed on brakes behind him, leapt out of his car, charged towards the offender, punched his window, bludgeoned his bleeding arm through the shattered glass and pummelled the terrified driver. But vengeance was short lived. Suddenly Jimmy clutched his chest and fell to the ground. Within an hour he was undergoing a quintuple heart bypass.

Jimmy has a problem with self control. Most of us do. It may not be anger but often it's something just as destructive - fear, bitterness, gluttony, jealousy, pride, lust, substance abuse, self pity, greed.

Proverbs 25:28 compares self-control to city walls and warns us about the dangers of allowing our appetites and desires to master us: "Like a city that is broken down and without walls [leaving it unprotected] is a man who has no self-control over his spirit [and sets himself up for trouble]" (Amp). In ancient times walls were erected around cities to protect the citizens from enemy invasion, dangerous wildlife and other unwarranted entry. When these formidable structures were overthrown the people were left vulnerable – like we are if we don't control our emotions and desires. When we allow our selfish impulses to master us we open the door for lying, insults, hatred, illness, embarrassment and we can cause severe damage in the lives of others (Proverbs 21:23).

What is an answer to winning the battle over our destructive appetites?

Self-discipline? Will power? Try harder? Just say "no"?

The New Testament provides us with a critical clue as to how we can win the battle for self control: Self control is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). It is not our hard work, our self discipline¹ or our determination but self-control arises from the Holy Spirit. He is the source. The word 'self-control' means 'to grip' or 'to take hold of'. The Spirit gives us the inner ability to take hold of ourselves and live lives that are not dictated by our selfish emotions and desires (2Timothy 1:7 ESV). Even just saying 'no' is something we cannot do in our own strength. Titus wrote that

the grace of God teaches us to say 'no' to worldly passions and to live a self-controlled life (Titus 2:11-12).

But the Spirit doesn't just help us to restrain a bad habit. The Spirit works in us to transform us and replace selfish impulses with the exciting, dynamic life of Jesus Christ. Self control is when we choose (the Holy Spirit doesn't take away our free will) - moment to moment - to live from Him as our source and not to live from our appetites. As we do this our behaviour becomes His expression. An electric light bulb expresses electricity - we express Jesus Christ.

How can we live self-controlled lives? Jesus showed us what a human being was always intended to be. He was not controlled by his appetites because He was totally dependent on His Father. In the ultimate spiritual battle when Satan tempted Jesus in the desert we receive an insight into what self-control looks like. Jesus was tired, alone and hungry after fasting for 40 days. Sensing vulnerability Satan seized the moment and tempted him with the very thing he craved most – food. But Jesus countered: "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God." In Jesus' words we discover a key to training our spirit that is indwelt with the Holy Spirit.

Internal Storage

In Psalm 119:11 the psalmist elaborates: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." God's word needs to be hidden in our hearts. It is not enough to store it in a notebook or in a computer programme. It needs to be inside of us. The word "hidden" was used for treasure or supplies that were hidden or stored away for future emergencies. We store God's written word by practising something that may sound strange to modern ears – biblical meditation. Meditation is pondering, reflecting, listening, internalising and turning scriptures over and over in our minds like a dog chewing on a bone. Meditating enables us to store God's word in the place which has the greatest influence upon our lives – our hearts (Proverbs 4:23). Ignoring the Scriptures will allow old patterns of wrong thinking and destructive out-of-control habits to continue to exert authority over us. But if we immerse and saturate our minds on the scriptures and let them take root in our hearts, His word begins to become

a part of us and naturally comes out of our mouths and colours our actions.

In Ephesians 6:18 Paul likens God's word to a sword: "Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God". Paul was probably thinking of a soldier's smaller sword which he always carried on him - ready to use at any moment. The Spirit is able to make the scriptures vividly come alive in our minds (John

14:26) by reaching into that reservoir of verses we have stored up in our hearts through meditation and helps us in our moment of need by dropping a word into our minds or supernaturally reminding us of a verse or promise.

God has created us with a multitude of temperaments, emotions and desires. They must all be brought under control or they will end up controlling us. Self-control has been likened to the conductor of a symphony orchestra. Under the conductor's baton the multitude of talented musicians can play the right notes at the right time at the right volume so that everything sounds just right. Likewise, our appetites and longings have their proper place. Self-control is the Holy Spirit's baton in our hearts under whose skillful direction everything stays in its proper place and comes in at just the right time. To be self-controlled is to be Spirit-controlled.

Prayer: *Father, I deeply desire to live a self-controlled life. But I cannot without you. Thank you that you have already given me everything I need to live a life pleasing to you (2Peter 1:3). Please empower me with inner strength through your Spirit (Ephesians 3:16) to be a responsible person so that I am able to respond to your enablement! Set a guard over my mouth (Ps 141:3) and strengthen me to make no provision for my flesh (Rom 13:14). Enable me to act decently and be who I really am – your child (1John 3:1). I surrender to you. Live in me and through me in this moment. In Jesus name.*



¹ Don't confuse self discipline with self control. Self-control arises from the presence of the Holy Spirit within us but self-discipline is usually something that is imposed from the outside - a diet, an exercise etc. It is usually a rule for a brief period that we feel we have to do. So we grit our teeth and can't wait for it to be over! Many religious rules are like that. Instead of the Holy Spirit berthing the desires from within, it is decided for us by religious authorities what God wants - what we can and cannot do (you must pray 15 minutes a day, you can't wear this or read that etc.). If it's a sin or temptation and we try to overcome it with self discipline we just suppress it - but it's not dealt with.

Extravagant Grace



Tim Maguire

Grace, which is described as **God's unconditional and unmerited pardon**, is the first word in the name of our denomination.

God's grace, in the person of Jesus Christ, is for all humanity without distinction to race, status, gender or sinfulness. And that is why the vision of Grace Communion International South Africa is *Living and sharing life-changing Hope, with all kinds of people in all kinds of places.*

Fairness

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

In the parable of workers being called to labour throughout the day, Jesus gave us a lesson in fairness

(Matthew 20:1-12). In verses 13-15 He explains: "But he answered one of them, 'Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn't you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?'"

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

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

Ephesians 2:8-9 tell us "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by

works, so that no one can boast."

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

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

But What About the Condemnation of the Law?

Jesus teaches us that true righteousness involves much more than the law. It involves not just our behavior, but also our minds—our thoughts, our attitudes, our whole being. In Jesus, we can see that we fall short all the time. But in Jesus, we trust in God's love and mercy for us. Even though we still wrestle with sin in this life and often fail, because of Jesus we are not condemned. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the

law of sin and death" (Romans 8:1-2).

Good Works

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

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

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

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

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

pretending to be worthy and righteous, admit we are hopeless sinners without anything to our credit, and put our trust in Jesus Christ, for whose sake God justifies the ungodly. I'm reminded that my own righteousness, Tim at his very best, is as filthy rags to God. "However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5).

Does That Leave Us With a License to Sin?

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

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

It seems that our vigilant efforts to prevent anyone from "turning grace into license to sin" has resulted, ironically, in our managing to turn sin into a barrier to accepting grace. The church promises grace, then delivers condemnation. The church announces the gospel, then preaches hellfire. "My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2).

Nobody who trusts God wants to sin. When you trust God to love you and forgive you, you want to be like Jesus; you don't want to sin. But when we do sin, in spite of the fact that we don't want to, we have an advocate with the Father.

Paul told Titus that it is grace that teaches us to say no to sin. "The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for Himself a

people that are His very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:11-14).

It's Relational

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

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

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

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

Response to Grace

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

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

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



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