



Foundation of Faith

His
Suffering . . .
Our
Triumph

WHY DID JESUS NEED TO SUFFER AND DIE?

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS DAILY!

BECAUSE JESUS LIVES

LOOK AND LIVE!

MY UNUSUAL DOCTOR VISIT



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Editorial

Dear Reader,

With great emphasis, the Apostle Paul writes to the believers in Corinth, “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7).

Back in Egypt, each family from the nation of Israel had to slaughter a lamb. With the blood of the lamb, they had to coat the sides and top of the doorframe. The blood was the sign that they were people who trusted God and knew in faith that the wrath of God would not strike them in this plague. They were safe.

So now this wonderful message is for all of us who believe in the Lord: Even for us, the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ, has been slaughtered!

All of Scripture clearly shows us we have all sinned and are lost, but Jesus came as Savior and Redeemer for the affliction of all people. Therefore it is said of Him, “He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter” (please read Isaiah 53: 1–7).

Dear Reader, this year we will once again observe the Passion Week. On Good Friday, after hours of agony and terrible pain, we hear the cry of the Son of God, “It is finished!” (John 19: 30). This cry should strike deeply into our hearts.

The message of the Lamb of God is a theme throughout the Bible. We find references to the Lamb of God, numerous times in Revelation, of which I would like to cite only three:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches . . .” (5: 12).

“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (7: 14).

“[T]he marriage of the Lamb has come . . . Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!” (19: 7–9)

So the question to you, dear Reader, is, “Do you love Jesus, the Lamb of God? Do you serve Him with all your heart, and do you worship Him?”

H. D. Nimz



He Walked 2400 Kilometers to Find Salvation

Many years ago, a young man living in northern Germany had decisively rejected all thoughts about God. He committed blatant and horrendous sins and was deplorably ungodly and more depraved than his peers.

But the Almighty God's ways are simply wonderful. Despite this man's extreme sinfulness, God awakened in him a deep desire for salvation. He became greatly troubled by his own ungodliness.

"I am much worse than everyone else," he thought. "If it is true that sinners go to hell and only good people go to heaven, it's clear where I'm going. If ever a man is eternally lost, I am."

Thoughts like these haunted this wretched sinner day and night. He found no peace and couldn't even find relief and happiness by indulging in his sins. Instead, he thought to himself, "If only it were possible for me to be saved!"

What should he do? He had heard of penitential practices in monasteries where monks spent their days working to atone for

their sins. He thought no work would be too hard and no torment too great if it would give him even the slightest hope of forgiveness.

He made the decision to become a monk and learned after much research which monastery adhered to the most rigorous restrictions, and the most stringent penitential exercises. Even if it meant traveling to the other end of the earth, he determined to get there and spend the rest of his life repenting and praying. Upon inquiring, he was told the strictest monastery was in La Trappe, which was 2400 kilometers (1491 mi) from his home. Since he had no means to cover the cost of travel, he decided to set out on foot. This alone would be the beginning of penitence, and perhaps he could gain a step toward heaven by doing so.

The journey was unimaginably long and arduous. Each day brought him through foreign lands, under an increasingly hot sun. When at last he caught sight of the old building where he hoped to find rest for his soul, his vitality was completely exhausted.

But even that meant very little to him. When he pulled the bell on the gate, he waited until an elderly monk opened it. This monk was frail and sickly, hardly able to walk.

"What would you like?" asked the old man.

"I am seeking salvation," replied the penitent traveler. "I hope to find it here."

The monk invited him to come in and led him to a room where they could have a private conversation.

"Now tell me what you really want," the elderly monk said.

"I am a lost sinner," the German replied. "I have led a godless life that I can scarcely describe to you. It seems almost impossible for me to find salvation. But whatever must be done, I am willing to do. I won't complain about anything, if only I am taken in. The harder the work and the greater the misery, the better it will be for me. Just tell me what to do, and I'll do it."

Now the old monk, who had experienced a similar plight for years, could speak from his own



knowledge and experience. In his old age, withdrawn in solitude, God had revealed Himself to him. With a grateful heart, he was now able to pass on what he had received. He said to the man, "If you are willing to do what I tell you, you will immediately turn around and go back home. The entire work was completed for you before you came here, and there is nothing left for you to do. Someone has already done it on your behalf. It is finished!"

"It is finished?"

"Yes, it is finished. Don't you know that God sent His Son into this world to be the Savior? Has He not come? Didn't He complete the work the Father told Him to do? Did He not exclaim on the cross, 'It is finished!'"

"What was finished?" asked the confused man.

"Jesus took it upon Himself to bear the full penalty of every sinner, and He bore it. God's justice was satisfied through the work of His Son. Do you know this?"

"Where is Jesus now?" he questioned.

"He is in heaven," the monk replied.

"He's in heaven? But why is He there?"

"Because He finished the work; otherwise He would not be there. He would still be here until it was completed. Now that God the Son is satisfied with His work, He is with God the Father.

"Oh, dear Friend, why should we try to do what the Son of God has already done for us? If we had to do it, it could never be done. If we had to absolve through penance every sin that has been committed, it would be completely useless to us. Even if you were to perform penance rather than acquiring your salvation, you would be adding the biggest sin to your life. It would be as if you were saying, 'Christ did not do enough.' It would bring contempt and shame upon the perfect work of the Son of God. How dare we attempt to add anything to what Jesus already proclaimed as 'finished!' Yes, this would be a shameful treatment of Christ, and God would be made a liar. If I were not so old that I could hardly walk

to the gate, I would not stay here another day. But since I am, I must wait until the Lord takes me home. Because of my poverty and my age, and because I have no person to go to, I will have to stay here in this monastery. But you can go, and I ask you to go. Thank God that His Son accomplished everything for you and bore the punishment for your sin. Always remember that Christ is in heaven."

What a surprising message this was for the poor sinner! He was finally able to grasp the truth about salvation and believe it. After a time of rest, during which he heard more of the glorious gospel, he returned to his own country to preach the message of love and grace among the lost sinners there.

This message is also for you, dear Reader. Redemption has been finished for every one of us. Jesus wants to forgive your sins too, and give you peace and joy. "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). ■

The Suffering of Jesus

How many have researched, have tried to comprehend, and have described how great and difficult the sufferings of Jesus were—yet such things still remain incomprehensible to our limited minds.

In Matthew 16:21, Jesus mentions for the first time that He will need to suffer. “From that time on, Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day.”

From this time forward, He would repeatedly mention that He would suffer greatly at the hands of the religious elite. Up to this time, His focal teaching point had been that He was the Christ. But the time had come to share with His disciples that Christ had come into the world fully aware of the suffering He would encounter. It was imperative that the apostles were informed of this event in order to prepare them for it when it would come. However, when the time came and the suffering began, the disciples were not prepared for it. Two of the disciples walked to Emmaus after the crucifixion and discussed the event, when Jesus approached them and traveled with them. In the conversation, Jesus says, “Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). Somehow in their imagination, it was inconceivable that Jesus should suffer, as they had put great hopes in Him to establish an earthly kingdom.

Christianity varies greatly from all other religions in that it has at its center a founder who is utterly humiliated and caused to suffer beyond human capacity to endure. Jesus suffered rejection from His own people. He was despised by many and ridiculed for His seeming incapability to save Himself from suffering on the cross. Centuries before this happened, the prophet

Isaiah painted the suffering of the Christ in his description of Jesus in chapter 53:5: “But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”

In the medical field, pain is calculated on a scale of 1–10, but the intensity and magnitude of pain cannot really be measured. The agony of Jesus on the cross cannot be gauged by medical science, since His suffering was not only physical. Jesus’ greater agony was spiritual and emotional, especially the feeling of abandonment by His Father in heaven. In His cry on the cross, the most distressing call was “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” which means “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Our human mind is unable to comprehend the depth of such suffering; the incomparable agony that Jesus’ soul went through is beyond human comprehension. Paul writes that He “descended into the lower parts of earth” (Ephesians 4:9). No human being has ever stepped down to such a level of suffering and agony. While contemplating the suffering of Jesus, questions come to mind:

Why Did Jesus Suffer?

There is only one reason; it is sin. “But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities.” Had the religious or civil courts found any fault in Him, then the reason could be charged to Him, but they did not. God’s proclamation that He suffered for our sake is the only valid reason. As we look at the agony of Jesus, we must recognize the abhorrence of sin in the holy eyes of God. Sin is the complete antithesis



of love, and of Who God is; therefore, all sinfulness is banished from His presence.

For Whom Did Jesus Suffer?

You and I, we are the perpetrators that deserved the punishment Jesus received because of our sinfulness. Tragically, even if we were to suffer the punishment we deserved for our sins, we could still not purchase our redemption with it. Jesus told the Jews who did not believe in Him, “I am going away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin. Where I go you cannot come” (John 8: 21). Jesus, the blameless Lamb of God had to suffer and pay the debt we could not pay, to purchase the life we did not have. All stand under the cross as convicted sinners. The only path to redemption is found in the truth that Jesus suffered for our sins. But unless we recognize our own responsibility for His suffering and repent of the sins that caused His suffering, we benefit nothing from it.

What Should We Learn from His Suffering?

First, we learn about our worth in the eyes of God. Je-

sus deemed us worthy and suffered the indescribable anguish on the cross because we are created for heaven. We are bearers of God’s image and have the capacity to glorify the Lord on earth. In order to do so, Jesus had to redeem us and restore that pure and holy image in us to make us a light in the world. As we think about the suffering of Christ on the cross, let us remember what the suffering was for and what high privilege it affords us to bring honor to His name.

Another reason for His suffering was to make us eligible to be guests at the wedding feast of the Lamb. Paul makes it very clear that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). In our natural state, we cannot enter into the heavenly bliss; we must be washed from our sins. Because of Jesus’ suffering, all the guests at the Lamb’s wedding feast are washed in the blood shed on the cross. His suffering is an invitation for us to become partakers of His divine nature, assuring us an eternity with Jesus.

*Peter Ens
Toronto, Ontario*

Why Did Jesus Need to Suffer and Die?

We are all familiar with suffering. At some time, we have all felt pain in our body through a wound, an illness, an accident, or a headache. We hear more and more about mood disorders, mental illnesses, psychosomatic disorders, depression, and so on. Suffering is a reality everyone deals with in one way or another.

In Matthew 16: 21, Jesus talks about the suffering He was soon going to face. We read, “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.”

Why Did Jesus Need to Suffer?

The passion or suffering of Jesus was foretold by the prophets. In Psalm 22, David spoke of the Messiah suffering, and, Isaiah 53 also gives us a clear account of Jesus’ suffering. His suffering fulfilled the prophecies foretold in the Holy Scriptures and was part of the plan of salvation. It was necessary for the scriptures to be fulfilled (Matthew 25: 54).

Jesus Was the Sacrificial Lamb of God for Us

In the Old Testament, the sacrifice for human sins required an animal without a flaw or blemish. At that time, it was considered a ceremonial cleansing: “the cleansing of the flesh” (Hebrews 9: 13). But the blood of Jesus removes guilt from the conscience and cleanses the heart from all sin. In contrast to ceremonial cleansing, “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9: 14).

Christ carried the sins of all people of all times in His body to the cross. The Apostle Peter had this in mind when he noted that Jesus “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2: 24).

The suffering of Christ was necessary in order to pardon sinners. He died in our stead in order to reconcile us to God. In this way, the wrath of God has turned away from us, who were guilty in His sight.

Since Christ suffered for us, He can sympathize with us when we suffer, and He helps us in temptation. We read in Hebrews 2:18, “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.” What a comfort this is for all who suffer and are tempted! Even if you have nobody who understands you and nobody with whom you can share your suffering, the Lord understands you well.

Jesus is our High Priest and the Son of God. Because of His suffering, He has compassion for us. He knows our present weaknesses and temptations. Therefore, you can come with confidence to Him in prayer and receive His grace for full victory. The Lord always helps at the right time.

What Did Christ Need to Suffer?

First of all, He suffered in His soul both tremendous emotional and psychological stress. He said to the three disciples who accompanied Him in Gethsemane, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26: 38).

He was praying so desperately, yet His disciples slept. No doubt, the feeling of abandonment and being alone was acute. He heard no word of encouragement, support, or solidarity from His disciples—nothing. Fatigue overpowered them.

And then He was betrayed by a friend. If that happened to us, no doubt we would be overwhelmed by inner turmoil. This painful situation was also a fulfillment of prophecy, because Psalm 41: 9 says that “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up *his* heel against me.” Then, shortly before His arrest, all the disciples abandoned Him and fled. He was left alone in the hands of the evildoers and enemies.

At the judicial hearing of our dear Lord, the religious leaders presented false accusations. They sought false blame against Him in order to condemn Him to death. When He was finally brought to trial, the crowd shouted, “Crucify Him, crucify Him.” The Lord stood despised and rejected by the people to whom He had showed such love and compassion, and who only days before had called out to the Son of David, “Hosanna! Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the Lord”

(Mark 11:9). How quickly the opinion of people can change! Have you experienced this as well? In difficult situations, look up to the Lord. God the Father was with His beloved Son, and He will also help everyone who stays true to Him.

After Jesus endured such mental and psychological turmoil, there was still the horrible physical abuse and pain that followed. They beat Him and “spat in His face.” Others “struck Him on the face and asked Him, saying, ‘Prophecy! Who is the one who struck You?’” (Luke 22:64). They mocked the One who took their sin upon Himself. Yet that was not all. They put on His head a crown of thorns and beat Him on the head. The King of kings was humbled and despised by giving Him a crown of thorns and mocking Him. The thorns growing on the bushes in Israel are much larger than the thorns we are familiar with, and they inflict much greater pain than the prickles of our thorns.

In his well-known song, Paul Gerhardt wrote:

*O sacred Head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, Thine only crown!
O sacred Head, what glory,
What bliss till now was thine!
Yet, though despised and gory,
I joy to call Thee mine.*

Then came His greatest suffering: the crucifixion. His hands and feet were nailed to the cross, and the weight of His whole body hung on those raw, painful wounds. The scriptures describe an escalation of suffering. The sorrow and pain heightened to an unimaginable level. Jesus continued to drink that bitter cup of suffering until He at last called out, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Can one’s heart remain cold and untouched by Christ’s passion? Paul Gerhardt’s song continues:

*What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered
Was all for sinners’ gain.
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But Thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
‘Tis I deserve Thy place.
Look on me with Thy favor,
And grant to me Thy grace.*

Christ needed to suffer all these things and die on the cross (Luke 24:26ff). He did it for us. Have you given your heart to the Lord, Who died for you? Or are you still without peace in this sinful world? Come to the cross and leave your burden of sin there, and you will walk the path of life with joy. On the third day, a cry of triumph was heard: He lives! Jesus lives, and you too should live. He offers you eternal life. Come to Him in faith today.

*Herbert Kowalski
Hamm, Germany*



Take Up YOUR Cross Daily

As we enter the Passion Week, we direct our attention to Christ's suffering and dying on a cruel Roman cross for the sins of mankind. Yes, for you and for me too! If Christ had not come, suffered and died, and been raised from the dead, we would have no hope of eternal life, no salvation from sin, and, as the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:17, our faith would be futile. Praise God, Jesus Christ did come and suffer and die for us so we may experience "redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). In this article, I would like to direct our attention to the words of Jesus as recorded in Luke 9:23, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

What does it mean to take up "our cross" daily to follow Christ? Please don't misunderstand. It doesn't mean we can earn our salvation by sacrificial works. "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). Christ paid the full price for our salvation when He shed His blood on Calvary. So what does it mean to "take up [your] cross daily"? Some understand it to mean bearing some physical or emotional affliction. They say, they're dealing with cancer or diabetes or some other disease; "that's my cross." I don't think that was what Jesus had in mind, because a disease is not something we can take up or lay down at will. The cross is a symbol of suffering. In Jesus' day, it was only used for the vilest of criminals. Jesus knew what awaited Him on that fateful night, but still He prayed, "Father, . . . not My will, but Yours, be done."

If we desire to be followers of Jesus, He expects us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him. Denying self is not a popular concept in our culture. The media bombards us with ads encouraging us to indulge and pamper ourselves, stating we "needn't deny ourselves anything." If you don't currently have the necessary funds, there's always Visa or MasterCard or one of the many other credit cards.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul admonishes them to be like-minded with Jesus. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal

with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross" (Phil 2:5-8). In 1 Peter 2:19 and 21, Peter writes, "For this *is* commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. . . . For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps."

Here are some glowing examples of bearing the cross for conscience's sake, for the sake of pleasing God and honoring our Lord Jesus Christ. I think of a few Old-Testament examples of men willing to suffer rather than displease their God, such as Daniel, who rather went into the lions' den than displease his God. His three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, chose to suffer the fiery furnace rather than worship an idol. If anyone is entitled to speak about suffering for Christ's sake, consider the Apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 11, he shares what he suffered for Christ's sake and for the gospel. Five times he received forty stripes minus one, three times he was beaten with rods, once he was stoned, three times shipwrecked, and the list goes on and on.

I well remember the story of Jim Elliot who, along with four other missionaries, was murdered in 1956 by Auca Indians in South America. He had written in his diary, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." I had the opportunity to personally meet his widow, Elizabeth Elliot, who, some time after Jim's death, took her young daughter and lived among the Auca Indians to bring them the wonderful message of God's love and saving grace. I know pastors who gave up lucrative positions and salaries in order to bring the gospel to others, sometimes in a small country church far away from the impressive skyscrapers and bright lights of the big city.

As we enter the Passion Week, let us ask ourselves, "Am I willing to deny myself and take up my cross and joyfully follow Jesus?"

Arthur E. Lange
Vernon, British Columbia

My Unusual Doctor Visit

This particular Monday (December 2022) started out like most Mondays. I went to my son's shop to give him a hand. I had made an appointment to see the doctor on Thursday to remove some stitches from my foot, but on Monday my daughter-in-law walked in and said, "I have made an appointment for you to see the doctor tomorrow." I'm not sure what prompted her to change my appointment, but on Tuesday I went to see my doctor. He removed my stitches and then checked me out. Everything seemed to be going well until he listened to my heart. He abruptly stopped and said, "I am going to send you to the cardiology lab right now."

I went to the lab, and a young lady attached all the wires, started the test, and quickly gave me an odd look. She left, saying she needed to speak with the cardiologist. Soon she came back and said I needed to go directly to the emergency room as my heart was racing at 187. When I checked in at the ER, the lady asked why I was there. I told her my heart was racing at 187, to which she replied, "It is at 197 now." After a few hours in the emergency, I was sent home, only to wake up on the floor of our home the next morning. When this happened a second morning, I was taken into emergency by ambulance.

In the hospital, I was sent for numerous x-rays and CT scans, after which "Job's friends" started to arrive in my room. One said they had to stabilize my heart. Then another nurse came in and said I had tested positive for COVID-19. The last was a lung specialist who abruptly informed me that they had found a mass on my lung. Of course I asked, "What could that be?" and she blurted out, "Well, it could be cancer!" It took some time to process all this, but I soon realized I needed to get home, sell our condo, and move my wife closer to all amenities and the church because obviously I wouldn't be around much longer.

They ran many more x-rays and CT scans and finally had my heart operating normally so I could go home and come in for day visits. I went back to the hospital to see the heart specialist, and after his examination I asked him if he couldn't do a procedure

to balance my electrolytes, so I wouldn't have to take medication. He said he could, but he would have to wait and see what would happen with my lung. My impression was that he was saying, "If you're going to die anyway, why bother with this procedure?" The reports had been very negative and depressing.

I sent a WhatsApp message out to all the pastors and asked them to have the congregations pray for me. After this, the reports became more positive.

Soon, I went into the hospital because the lung specialist wanted to go down into my lung with a camera. She said she couldn't go down as far as she would have wanted to, but she took a few biopsies from the area that she examined, and they proved to be benign. She said they would have to do further x-rays and biopsies.

Next, I underwent numerous tests to determine what treatments would be necessary. The nurse prepped me and said I would need to rest before I would be taken in for several hours of x-rays and biopsies. A few minutes later, someone walked in and said, "We're going to do a CT scan first to see if the mass has increased." The technician put me into the machine, then pulled me out about half-way, looked at me and said, "It's gone!" He left, and a specialist appeared and she confirmed, "It's gone; there will be no further x-rays or biopsies. You are free to go." I left that hospital rejoicing and thanking God!

I was still scheduled for a PET scan, which the lung specialist wanted to cancel, but I told her I would want to go ahead with this, knowing such tests are difficult to come by. I went in for the PET scan, and the next day she called me and said that I am cancer-free!

I would like to praise God in heaven for His mercy, grace, and compassion that He showered upon me. I'm so thankful too for all the children of God who earnestly prayed for me. God is still the same, He is still the Great Physician, and He can help when all hope seems to be gone.

*Harvey Elke
Kelowna, British Columbia*

New Life through Christ's Death and Resurrection

| *"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Romans 6: 8).*

God said to Noah in Genesis 8: 22, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, winter and summer, and day and night shall not cease." As we know, spring has come. Spring is a season that brings joy to countless people around the world; maybe it's the warmer weather or the longer days. One of my favorite parts of spring is seeing new life in the vegetation: how the grass begins to turn green; how the trees bud and produce vibrant green leaves, and how the first flowers begin to sprout up out of the ground and bloom. The season of spring brings so much new life. But have we ever considered that this dramatic display of new life wouldn't occur without the death and decay of the previous season? New life can only take place after something has died. Jesus also used nature to illustrate this truth. He says in John 12: 24, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." The grain sacrifices itself and dies so that new life can grow and sprout from it, which will bear more seeds.

Jesus used this illustration to explain to His listeners what would soon happen to Him. He knew His death was approaching. He says in the previous verse, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified" (John 12: 23). Jesus wanted His followers to know that He would soon need to give His life. Why? So we can live in Him. According to the Bible, all those who have not experienced Christ's forgiveness have sin in their hearts, and there is nothing we can do to remove these sins on our own. That is why Jesus came to earth. Jesus, God's only Son, left His heavenly throne, became man, experienced everything we experience, yet remained perfect without ever sinning. Because He was perfect, God considered Him to be an acceptable offering on our behalf. Someone needed to be punished for mankind's sins. Because of His great love for us, Jesus willingly took our sins upon Himself and carried them to the cross of Calvary. There, Christ died for every person, for you and for me.

After His death, two of His friends (Joseph and Nicodemus), took His body from the cross, prepared it for burial, and laid it in a tomb. But, praise God, Jesus



did not remain in that tomb! On the morning of the third day, the tomb was open, and Jesus was gone. He arose; and because He lives, He can grant eternal life to all those who believe in Him and accept His salvation. His resurrection illustrates what we heard earlier, that from death comes life. When a seed is buried, it gives its life so new life can grow out of it.

Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can partake of His life and be saved from our eternal punishment. Jesus says in John 3: 16–17, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." To receive this life in Christ, we must first recognize our need for a Savior: that if we have sin in our hearts, we cannot have fellowship with God and will be punished for all eternity. After realizing this, we can bring our sins to God and ask Him to forgive our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Who died for all those who believe in Him. In one sense, we need to crucify ourselves with Christ. The Apostle Paul writes in Galatians 2: 20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." The gift of salvation transforms us into new creations who are alive in Christ.

Jesus' resurrection not only allows us to receive new life through salvation, but it is also the firstfruit

of the final resurrection when the Lord returns. In John 11, the Bible tells us how Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead. However, before He did this, He told Martha (Lazarus's sister), "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live" (verse 25). Scripture teaches that on the final day, when Jesus returns, all those who have died will be resurrected and brought before Him. Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians 4: 14–16, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep [have died] in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep [dead]. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first."

Some people say they believe in Jesus but don't believe He arose from the grave. However, without Jesus' resurrection there is no salvation from sin. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15: 14, "And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith is also empty." Paul continues in verse 20, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." Jesus' resurrection is a promise to us that He will come again and do the same to our physical bodies so we may enjoy eternal life with Him.

*David Knelsen
Seminole, Texas*





Risen According to the Word

The apostles testified to Jesus' resurrection and established it as an irrefutable reality. They all report how some women, early in the morning, made that difficult walk to the burial place of Jesus. It was not a joy-filled walk. They were all deeply depressed by the painful events of Good Friday.

Peter referred to this horrific event in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2). He openly declared, "Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know, Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:22-24). He also added that God used the evil work of men to bring about His purpose. As close followers of Jesus, the disciples and women all knew about His incomprehensible suffering. In great sadness, they would have awaited that Easter morning.

But then that momentous event occurred. Peter traced the facts in his sermon. Courageously and with complete assurance of faith, he shouted out to the crowd, this Jesus, "Whom God raised up . . ." The women found the tomb empty! "But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay'" (Matthew 28:5-6). They had come to the tomb saddened and deeply troubled, but in reverence and great joy they hurried away.

Referring to this, Paul wrote, "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scripture, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen of over five hundred brethren at once . . . Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). This he traced back to his experience at the gates of Damascus (Acts 9:8).

The expression “according to the Scriptures” points to the writings of the Old Testament prophets, such as Isaiah 53 and Psalm 16:10. This stands in full accordance with what the risen Lord explicitly said to the two disciples of Emmaus: “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:25–27).

The truth, the reality of Jesus’ resurrection is seen as the main message of the gospel. Paul explained this in 1 Corinthians 15: If Christ had not been raised, we would all be false witnesses, our faith would be worthless, we would still be in our sins, and all who had fallen asleep in Christ would be lost. Then our preaching and faith would be in vain, and there would be no hope of eternal life.

If Christ had not risen, faith in the resurrection would not have occurred. The mourning of the women at the tomb would not have been transformed into joy; the disciples would have remained behind closed doors instead of appearing as powerful witnesses. The apostles and many other witnesses would never have gone to their deaths because of their message. And this preaching, this faith, and even the church of our Lord would be long gone! Then we would be, as Paul said, “of all men the most pitiable” (1 Corinthians 15:19). He could not have proclaimed, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work

of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (verse 58).

Nevertheless, critics have opposed all this and claimed that Christ never really died but only appeared so, from which He woke up again. This and other misleading beliefs could never be substantiated. Rather, some who at one time promoted these theories have recanted them.

The theologian Spitta of Göttingen thought he had to refute Jesus’ resurrection. However, through a deep study of the New Testament, he became more and more uncertain in his view and finally realized that the joy of the disciples on Easter morning and the powerful testimony of the early church could not be explained in any other way than by believing the true resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He did not keep this conviction to himself. He confessed his error and then forcefully advocated the exact opposite of what he had previously taught.

Another theology professor was asked by one of his students what the real tenet of his readings was. His answer was, “Jesus lives! I proceed from that fact.” And this fact is more important than anything else.

The joy of the disciples, the silence of the enemies, and the powerful testimony of the biblical witnesses are the strongest proof of Easter. Therefore, it should not be difficult for us, to “believe in all that the prophets have spoken.” Let us believe and proclaim, “The Lord is risen indeed”!

*Friedrich Krebs
Edmonton, Alberta*

Announcements

Easter Conference 2023
April 7–10, 2023

Place: Hamm, Germany
Langewanneweg 248

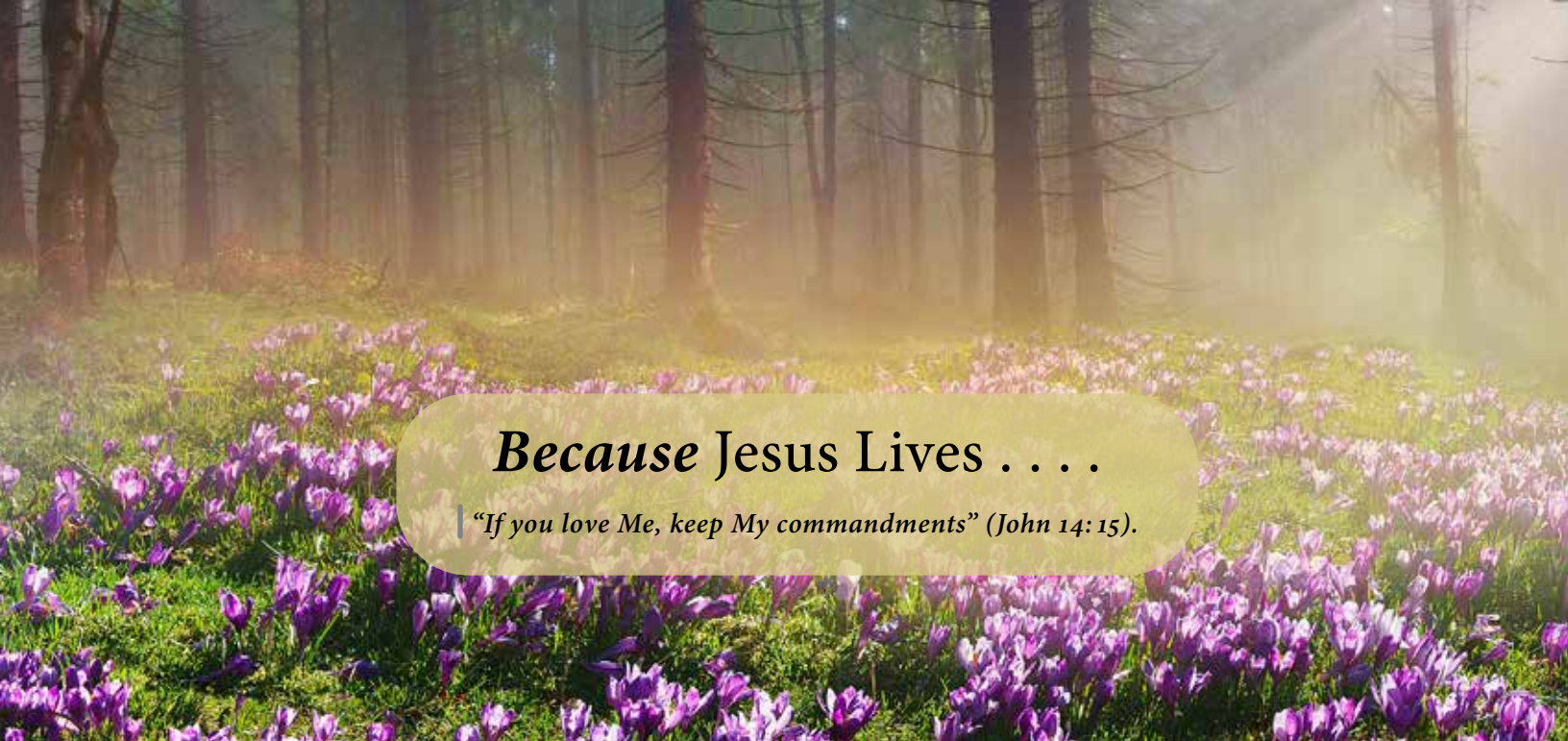
Further information:
www.gghamm.de

Pentecost Conference 2023
May 27–29, 2023

Place: Herford, Germany
Zimmerstraße 3

Further information:
www.gghf.de

Camp Meeting in Blaubeuren, Germany
August 12–19, 2023



Because Jesus Lives

| *“If you love Me, keep My commandments” (John 14:15).*

How often do we hear, *because* of this and that, this happened to me! This seemingly unimportant word has changed the lives of many. *Because* they came to the cross, they are “a new creation.” *Because* God created heaven and earth, it was *all* very good. *Because* Eve listened to the serpent, we are a fallen race. *Because* people do not seek God, trouble, pain, and eternal separation from Him is their lot. But, *because* Jesus lives, it need not be that way.

Because He lives, You and I Can Have Eternal Life

Jesus said, “Because I live, you also will live.” People today often feel that their time on earth is a struggle to sustain life. Therefore Satan said to God, “All that a man has he will give for his life” (Job 2:4). If a robber enters a bank, the teller will tell him to take it all but to spare her life. Yet Jesus says, “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.” We simply do not possess the ability to extend our lives. However, “the years of the wicked will be shortened” (Proverbs 10:27b). Without Christ’s resurrection, we would all be doomed to die. As punishment for sin, God promised Adam and Eve death. If Jesus had not been resurrected, we would all be dead in our sins. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says that without the resurrection our preaching would be useless. We would be the most miserable people (1 Corinthians 15:14–19). We would have destroyed ourselves long ago (Titus 3:3). But because Jesus rose from the dead, He now offers us eternal life (John 10:27–30).

But this promise is only for those who believe in Him, who have confessed their sins and asked to be forgiven. They have the assurance of being with Him for all eternity.

Because He Lives, You and I Can Face Tomorrow

Just consider how today’s generation worries and frets about the future. Some are devastated. They have lost everything of value to them. People are being displaced. We hear of wars and rumors of war. Jesus said, hearts will fail “from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth” (Luke 21:26). Yet the children of God are at peace because they know Jesus, who holds tomorrow, the one who upholds “all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3).

The difficult question people ask today is, “What about our children?” Gloria Gaither said, “Without Christ I would not bring a child into this world.” Without Christ our children would face a very insecure future, but with Christ they can face all things because the Lord will bring them through. Jesus has promised to be with us and with them all the days of our lives and is pleading, “Let the little children come to Me” (Matthew 19:14). Others are concerned about the future of the church. Certainly Satan is busy, trying to destroy the church, but Jesus has promised, “I will build my church and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Because He lives, the church has a future. It will be here on planet earth until He comes again. Yes, we are surrounded by deception, seduction, false doc-



trines, and false unity, but Jesus will lead His church to victory until we see Him coming in the clouds.

**Because He lives, You and I
Have an Eternal Mansion Prepared for Us**

Jesus promised us a mansion in glory. Had He stayed in the grave, this promise would be null and void, but He said, “if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again” (John 14:1–3). He wanted to make sure His disciples would see His ascension, so no one could say He just disappeared. We read in Acts 1:10–11 that they would see Him return even as they saw Him leave. My friends, this world has never been a very secure place.

We have no permanent dwelling here below. Even Abraham in the Old Testament realized that, and chose to live in tents because he was waiting for his eternal home. Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words [My promises] will by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35). Whatever may come, He is alive and well and He rules over all things.

Beloved, because He lives, we can live. Because He lives, the future can’t trouble us, and because He lives, we have an eternal mansion prepared in glory. May the Lord richly bless His children.

*Harvey Elke
Kelowna, British Columbia*

I Know

I know that my Redeemer lives
To intercede for me;
His word this blest assurance gives,
His blood now makes me free.

He lives, He lives, no more to die,
Has conquered death for me;
“Because I live,” I hear Him cry,
“Ye too shall live in Me.”

I know that my Redeemer lives
Just now within my heart;
His grace He doth so richly give,
And strength divine impart.

I know that my Redeemer lives,
And bids me faithful be,
That I a crown of life may have
Through all eternity.

He lives, O soul of mine, be glad,
He lives who once was dead;
He lives, oh, yes, I know He lives,
He lives, my Savior lives.

S. E. Donovan

Look and Live

The story of Israel's journey through the wilderness gives us many lessons to learn from, one of which we find in Numbers 21: 4–9.

The Israelites were getting discouraged along the way, and as a result, they began to murmur and speak out against Moses and God. “So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died” (Numbers 21: 6).

These fiery serpents were not uncommon in the wilderness. The desert was home to many of them (Deuteronomy 8:15). It is said they may have been called fiery because of their color, and because of the heat, violent inflammation, and thirst brought on by their bite.

Throughout the Israelites' journey, God had been a hedge of protection to them. However, this protection was now removed. It took a striking judgment for the people to see their guilt and to confess their sin. The consequence of sin can have a sobering effect.

They now came to seek the intercession of Moses, whom they murmured against, and asked that he would pray for God to take away the serpents. God heard the prayer of Moses, but not in the way they desired (they asked for the serpents to be removed). This is the answer the Lord gave Moses: “Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live” (21: 8).

One may wonder how this may remedy the deadly stinging and poisonous effects of these serpents by simply looking at a brazen serpent. Here, the Lord gives a way out, not as the people wanted, but in a way that connects the promised salvation to the faith of the people.

Doubt and murmuring, which come as a result of unbelief, brought them into this predicament. Faith was to be their salvation. A single look at the lifted-up fiery serpent was enough to be healed. The virtue of healing could not come from the figure but from God, Who appointed it to be made. We then read, “And so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived” (21: 9).

The “looking” at the fiery serpent does not have the meaning of intensely looking or staring at it. Our Lord Jesus explains the spiritual significance of this event in His conversation with Nicodemus: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3: 14–15).

If those who had been bitten by the fiery serpents looked upon the raised serpent, they lived. So today, Jesus is telling us that in order to be free from the poison of sin, we should look to Jesus with eyes of faith, and we shall live.

Our Lord then continues with perhaps the most well-known verse, and for good reason. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him [looks with eyes of faith] should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3: 16–17).

This message is presented in the law, in the gospels, and in the prophets. Consider the words written in Isaiah 45: 22: “Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I *am* God, and *there is* no other.” This is the gospel in a nutshell—look to Him, and you will be saved. Do not look anywhere else but to Him alone.

In the wilderness with the fiery serpents, God supplied the means for those who had been bitten to live. Had they sought their remedy elsewhere, they would have died. Had they looked at Moses, they would still have died. Had they scoffed or considered it foolish or too simplistic, they would have died. Had they asked someone else to look for them, they still would have died. Each person who was bitten had to personally look.

The message is simple, yet clear. All of humanity has been stung by the serpent and has been injected with the venom of sin. God sent His only chosen vessel as the remedy for sin: Jesus Christ. Look to Him, and you will live. Simply look. It is much easier to look than to



do something with your hands or feet. The simplicity is what throws people off; they'd sooner do something difficult. God's Word is telling us that you need to only look with confidence and trust in His saving mercy. Don't try to improve yourself through self-effort. The cure for sin and the hope of eternal life is only to be found by looking to, or believing in Him.

The life of faith is a supernatural walk. We must continue to look upon Him in order to walk victoriously. If we stumble and fall, it's because we are looking away, looking elsewhere to our circumstances, our weaknesses, and so forth. Our hope, strength, and salvation lies in Him. Therefore, we are given the simple command: look to Him, for with Him all things are possible.

Yet there is only one door, one entry, one way, one Savior, one name given us whereby we may be saved so we may live. Jesus is the door, the way and the life; no one can have eternal life except through Him. Scripture says that anyone who tries to come in any other way is a thief and a robber (John 10:1).

It is Christ Who keeps us, if we continue to look to Him in faith. Our Savior spoke these words: "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

William A. Ogden sums this message up well in this hymn:

I've a message from the Lord, hallelujah!
This message unto you I'll give,
'Tis recorded in His Word, hallelujah!
It is only that you "look and live."

I've a message full of love, hallelujah!
A message, O my friend, for you,
'Tis a message from above, hallelujah!
Jesus said it, and I know 'tis true.

Life is offered unto you, hallelujah!
Eternal life thy soul shall have,
If you'll only look to Him, hallelujah!
Look to Jesus who alone can save.

I will tell you how I came, hallelujah!
To Jesus when He made me whole—
'Twas believing on His name, hallelujah!
I trusted, and He saved my soul.

"Look and live," my brother, live,
Look to Jesus now, and live;
'Tis recorded in His word, hallelujah!
It is only that you "look and live."

*Jake Wiebe
Waterloo, Ontario*

THE TWELVE DISCIPLES—JAMES

General:

- Oldest brother of John
- Jesus called the brothers Boanerges, meaning “Sons of Thunder”
- His father’s name was Zebedee
- James came from a well-known and probably wealthy family

Vocation:

- Commercial fisherman in his family’s business

Notable Facts:

- The first of the apostles to be martyred, killed by Herod Agrippa with the sword (Acts 12: 1–2)

Special Characteristics:

- A man of zeal and ambition
- He had a special relationship with Jesus
- He burned with love for Jesus, His kingdom, and the truth

Origins and Social Environment

The two apostles James and John were also brothers, like Peter and Andrew. We know James was the older of the two because he is always named first.

Interestingly enough, few other details are known about James. Similar to Andrew, he is mentioned very little in the gospels, never appearing on his own but only in conjunction with his younger and more well-known brother, John. In fact, the one time he is mentioned without John is in Acts 12:1–2, when he was martyred.

The family of James and John seems to have been an important and influential one at the time. They are often referred to only as the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 20:20; 26:37), which suggests Zebedee was a well-known man. He was likely quite wealthy, as the

family’s fishing business was so large, they had enough work for several day laborers (Mark 1: 20). Additionally, the family had such a high status that John was even known to the high priest (John 18: 15ff.). Reports from the early days of the church say that Zebedee was a Levite who had close connections to the high-priestly family.

As the first-born of this wealthy family, James stood to inherit the most. This makes it easy to understand, at least from a human perspective, why he was ambitious and sought a good position in the kingdom of God. Despite these ambitions, he never ended up being the first among the apostles—with one exception: He was the first to be martyred.

This is not to say James was unimportant. When Mark listed the apostles, James is mentioned directly after Peter (Mark 3:17). He was also one of the three disciples who had an especially close relationship with Jesus. James, Peter, and John were the three disciples whom Jesus took along on special occasions, for example when bringing Jairus’ daughter back to life, when ascending the Mount of Transfiguration, or when going to Gethsemane. All this shows us that James was a special disciple who loved Jesus and followed Him sincerely.

A Man of Zeal and Ambition

The few details we know about James include that he was a zealous man. There was a good reason why Jesus gave him and John the nickname of “Sons of Thunder.” He was zealous, fiery, and passionate. In addition, he had a good measure of self-assurance and ambition.

While Andrew was leading individuals to Jesus, James was wishing for fire to fall from heaven to destroy entire villages. The twelve apostles really had very different personalities.

Then, too, consider that James was the first martyr, demonstrating that he was not a calm or passive man. To the contrary, his character, passion, and open manner of telling the truth played a key role in his making deadly enemies. Two events in particular highlight these character traits.

1.) *Fire from Heaven*

In Luke 9:51–56, we find a good explanation of why Jesus dubbed the brothers “the Sons of Thunder.” On His last journey from Galilee to Judea (Jerusalem), Jesus decided to travel through Samaria. That was significant.

The province of Galilee, in northern Israel, was separated from Judea, to the south, by Samaria. The shortest trip from Galilee to Jerusalem led through Samaria, but out of their extreme hatred for the Samaritans, Jews tended to take the much longer route through the desert of Perea, which involved crossing the Jordan River twice.

The Samaritans were a “mixed” tribe, consisting of Jews and Gentiles. Although they worshiped the true God of Israel, they also worshiped idols, so these two ethnicities (Jews and Samaritans) always tried to avoid each other. They could not stand one another! Jesus acted differently. He intentionally chose to travel through Samaria because He wanted to bring these people the gospel message as well.

In light of the enmity between the two ethnic groups, it is really no surprise that the disciples were turned away from the Samaritan village. However, the two sons of Zebedee were incensed. We don’t know how the other disciples reacted, and not even impulsive Peter is mentioned, but James and John took this event very personally.

They were so enraged, they exclaimed, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” James was clearly over-eager here. Jesus sharply rebuked the two of them and, through the example of how He lived His life, taught them that mercy and love mattered far more than seeing justice done according to human standards.

2.) *The First in the Kingdom of God*

James was not only passionate; in Matthew 20:20–24, we see he was also ambitious. He and his brother asked Jesus to promise them the best positions in the kingdom of God. They also recruited their mother to argue their case, which suggests she was in agreement with

them. After all, they were a respectable family, so why should her two sons not have the best spots?

The original idea, however, probably came directly from James and John, as their mother is not even mentioned in the parallel scripture (Mark 10:35–45). This confirms that James and John wanted this at least as much as their mother did.

Naturally, the other disciples were less than pleased with this request, and it led to a real dispute among them. Once again, Jesus had to intervene, this time saying, “Whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave” (Matthew 20:27). Little by little, Jesus was teaching the disciples how to think and act.

The First Martyr Among the Apostles

James was full of vigor and ambition; he was not a passive observer. However, I am certain he learned the lessons Jesus taught, and was further changed by receiving the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

James likely played a key role in the early church because, when persecution began, he was the first to be imprisoned. He was a thorn in their enemies’ eye and had to quickly be removed. He probably held a leadership position in the congregation and had a lot of influence, so Herod had him arrested and decapitated (Acts 12:1–2).

The historian Eusebius relates a report of James’ death that comes from Clement of Alexandria: “[Clement] says that the man who brought him to trial, on seeing him bear his testimony, was moved and confessed that he was a Christian himself. Accordingly, he says, they were both led away together, and on the way the other asked James to forgive him. And he, considering a little, said, “Peace be to thee” and kissed him. And so both were beheaded together.”

Like Andrew before him, James had learned to lead people to Jesus. From Jesus, he learned to forgive, to love, and nonetheless to decisively stand up for the truth. He fully surrendered to God’s control and ultimately found his place in eternal glory.

*Eduard Albrecht
Eppingen, Germany*



I Don't Want To

God is love.

He loves people so much, even those who run away from Him.

Sometimes He uses very interesting means to stop them and return them to Him because He wants to help them. He doesn't want anyone to be lost and separated from Him forever.

I can still clearly recall that week in winter a long time ago. There were church meetings scheduled in our town during that week to which many were invited. Mother reminded us not to forget those evenings. I was a teenager at the time and was no longer interested in God in any way. My parents had already talked to me many times. They wanted me to turn to Jesus and serve God like my sisters did.

You can well imagine that I went to worship services very reluctantly. I only listened to the sermons for the sake of my parents and occupied myself with my own thoughts during

that time. So I was already in a pretty bad mood about the week of evangelistic services.

Mom approached me the day the first evening service was to take place. She begged me once again to go along. I eventually agreed, but on one condition: Mom would never bother me again about such things and would leave me alone once and for all.

Mom was clearly horrified. She told me later she had gone to my dad and talked to him about my demand, and both agreed to let me have my way. But they prayed earnestly for me. Afterwards, Mom spoke to me again briefly, just to let me know that she and Dad would abide by my wishes.

A short time later, I was sitting with many other listeners in a large hall. Naturally, I had chosen a seat in the back row. I resolved neither to sing along nor to listen. So, after the service, I could not even say which Bible text had been preached on.

During that time, I distracted myself with all kinds of things. I studied the entire room, noticed the wooden ceiling and occupied myself with the large chandelier hanging from the center. Of the five bulbs, only four were burning. I couldn't understand why no one had taken the time to replace the defective bulb. I studied the people in the hall, their clothing and hairstyles.

Suddenly, the people started singing a song. I hadn't even noticed that the sermon was already over. Outside, I visited with some of the other boys and then went home. Not a word of the sermon had penetrated my mind and heart.

Yet God began to speak to me. That night, I couldn't sleep. Again and again I had to think about the big chandelier in the hall—the five bulbs, of which only four were burning. The fifth was black, dark, without light, without warmth—just like me. Four lights were also shining in our house: Dad, Mom, and my two sisters. But me? Suddenly, I couldn't help but be introspective about Jesus and my sinful life. There was so much evil in me. So much had to be forgiven. I was not a child of God!

While I was thus preoccupied, I became very sad. I knew God saw me. I knelt down and asked God for full forgiveness from the bottom of my heart. I felt the presence of God very strongly.

There I experienced the love of God. I suddenly saw how Jesus had died on Calvary's cross because of me and my sins. He had taken upon Himself the punishment I deserved. Gratefully, in faith, I accepted this for myself, and God forgave my sins. He saved me from my great distress.

Now all five lights are burning in our family! ■

The Resurrection— *A Senior's Perspective*

Easter. Year after year, we celebrate Easter in the spring. For us, it's not about the Easter Bunny; it's not merely a spring festival. It's about the greatest event in human history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What at times seemed like defeat ended in triumphant victory. Majestically, Jesus says, "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore" (Revelation 1:18).

For Jesus' disciples and also for the early church, the resurrection played a major role. When reading the book of Acts, we repeatedly come across the reference, "God raised" (Acts 2:24; 3:15; 10:40). Peter confirms the appearance in his sermon by saying, "of which we are witnesses," i.e., the resurrection is not a fairy tale but a fact confirmed by eyewitness accounts.

Referring to Himself, Jesus once said to His followers, "Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19). Before that, He spoke of the heavenly mansions (John 14:2) and also mentioned His upcoming departure from them. He also shed light on their future: "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also" (14:3). We don't know how well the disciples may have understood His train of thought. But one thing was definite: they had a future. Jesus had made it clear to them that death was not the end of everything. And to

remove all possible doubts, Jesus added, "I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

At all times, people have thought about death and what happens afterwards. There are probably more questions than answers on this subject. As seniors, no age group is closer to death than we are. Indeed, as is often said, "Young people can die; old people must die." The mortality rate is 100%; out of 8 billion people, 8 billion will die. The Bible confirms this by asserting that "it is appointed for men to die once" (Hebrews 9:27).

And then? We will not be there, but the task of planning our funeral, which will follow after a few days, will fall to the bereaved. Those attending will share memories, a few kind words will be spoken, and then the burial will follow at the cemetery. Sounding grim, the "final destination" is often spoken of. Relatives and friends go home, and only a gravesite remains. Later, a gravestone is placed, on which we may read, "Here lies in peace (and then our name follows)."

Even if the Bible does not provide all the details, it does give us crucial information on the subject of dying. It gives us words of hope. It speaks neither of a "final destination" nor of getting death "over and done with." In John 11:25–26, Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes

in Me shall never die.” The mortal body is indeed carried to the grave, but the soul lives on without interruption. The body is merely our “earthly house,” the “tent” in which we dwell on earth. Paul compares death to putting away the tent and likewise speaks of the soul living on.

You may be asking how all of this relates to the resurrection of Jesus. It’s a fair question. If we look up 1 Corinthians 6:14, we read, “And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power.” This is a direct confirmation of what Jesus said: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life; and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28–29).

The resurrection of the dead is one of the main facets of Bible doctrine. When faced with the question of how it will happen, we can only speculate. Details are withheld from us, but Scripture is clear that it will be awesome. The newly resurrected body we will receive will be far better than our current body, which is predisposed to decay. It will have neither infirmities nor disabilities, nor will it be subject to aging. This is hard to imagine. Paul sums it up and describes it this way in Philippians 3:20 and 21: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which

we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able to even subdue all things to Himself.”

Those alive at the time of His return will simply be transformed without having to die. Paul encourages believers, noting that those who have died in Christ will be resurrected first, and “then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

Christians look forward to a great future. It is this hope that makes us say over and over, “The best is yet to come,” or even “to die *is* gain” (Philippians 1:21). Dying is the door to unimaginable glory.

One final thought needs highlighting. Although all who have died will be resurrected, the same fate does not await everyone. How we have lived our life will determine a person’s participation either in the “resurrection of life” or in the “resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29). As long as the heart is beating, man is permitted to choose between these two possibilities. After that, no more. Are you ready to die?

Harry Semenjuk



Wayward Children

Part 4

Break With the Father

M. Schmelzle

Luke 15: 12–13: “And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me that portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.”

The people in the area wouldn’t have understood how the father could have given in to the younger son’s outrageous demand. At that time, people lived in community. There was no privacy as we know it today. Everyone had a close relationship with their neighbors because each family was also dependent on the other families. Everyone knew everything. The fact that the father paid out his inheritance to his younger son was outrageous, a disgrace. This certainly did not happen secretly and quietly. Many a fist might have swung threateningly as the son left, many an unpleasant word might have been spoken. How could the father give in? He should have cracked down severely on his son! How to deal with unruly and stubborn sons was clearly outlined in the law (read Deuteronomy 21: 18–21). At the least, one would have expected the father to disinherit the son. But this father does the opposite. Since the inheritance at that time was not in money but in property—land and livestock—the father had to sell one third of his property to be able to pay off the younger son—the

share that was due him. (Read Deuteronomy 21: 17. This was also clearly regulated according to Jewish tradition.) Or alternatively, he gave the right to his son to sell his inheritance for money. It’s possible that he sold it below value in order to get money quickly and thus to get away faster. In any case, this would have taken a few days, and everyone would have known what was going on. We cannot imagine today what shame and disgrace the father suffered.

Some may also have been outraged by the older son’s behavior because he seemed to quietly accept this outrageous behavior. We do not read a word about the older brother revolting against it. He does not even step in as an arbitrator between father and brother. We read nothing about him trying to change his brother’s mind. Maybe he was glad to be rid of his brother. Did he resent him? Or was the older son quite happy that he would now receive his share of the inheritance as well and thus become master of the land and all the possessions? Since it states that the father divided his property among them, we can assume the older son also received his share at that time.

Let’s pause for a moment at this point and consider what feelings arose in the listeners to whom Jesus told this parable. They must have been very confused by the younger son’s demands, the father’s capitulation, and the older son’s reluctance. Surely the father

didn't make the right decision! Surely things should have proceeded in a completely different way. Sons and fathers don't behave like this. The father should have punished the son or thrown him out. We find a deep mystery woven into this parable before the son has even left his home. Today, in the modern western world, it is completely normal for children to leave their parents' home and seek their happiness and future in big cities or even abroad. However, during Jesus' time, it was considered a disgrace in that region if the younger son did not fulfill his obligation to care for his father when he grew old. This parable which Jesus told must have been shocking for the listeners. It amazes me that He would tell such a stark parable. The more I think about it, the more I am sure: He told this parable because it is also relevant for us. Jesus knew His story would have practical application across different cultures in different times in history. Some children rebel against their parents and the church. We feel empathy with the father because we understand him. When the Savior told this parable, He knew we would derive encouragement and comfort from it.

Returning to our parable, could we at least say that the son humbly approached the father with his request? Or did he offer excuses to justify his request, or ask in a pleading manner? On the contrary, he sounded very arrogant and confrontational: "Fa-

ther, give me that portion of goods that falls to me." It is evil when people consider God's gifts as owed to them. This is the foolishness of the sinner who is content to have his portion now, to receive his good in this life (read Luke 16: 25). He only looks at the visible things, seeking satisfaction solely for the present, and is not interested in his future salvation.

Sometimes children behave in this way towards their parents. They don't see all the positive aspects of their lives, nor their good life of protection and love. They no longer care to attend services where they hear that someday in the distant future an eternity is waiting for them. They want to have their happiness and joy now—if not at home, then somewhere else. If possible, far away from home so their parents can't admonish them. This is exactly what we are witnessing here in the parable of the prodigal son. The son no longer wanted to have anything to do with his father. The son broke off all contact with the father.

Have you experienced that your daughter or son announces they are moving out and want to live their own life on their own terms? Sometimes there is no goodbye at all. Sometimes the room is just empty, everything cleaned out. A note hangs on the door: "I've left. Don't look for me."

- To be continued -

Jesus Lives

*Jesus lives; this fills my heart with joy;
He is the cause of saving grace.
Though disbelief would fear deploy,
Christ's victory upholds my faith.
I have forever been set free,
For Jesus gained the victory.*

*Be still my soul; look up at the cross
And see the suff'ring there portrayed.
My guilt and sin atoned! But what cost!
What a horrendous price He paid!
Christ was the sacrificial Lamb;
He gave His life, the great I Am.*

*For me He rose. His resurrection
I cannot fully comprehend.
His love was met with such rejection,
And yet it triumphed in the end.
Do not despair, your hope refresh;
All pow'r is His o'er life and death.*

*Oh, I rejoice and bring thanksgiving
To Jesus Christ, the Living Word.
I am His child, by grace I'm living;
I consecrate all to my Lord.
He lives! He triumphs! I'm His own!
And He will guide me safely home.*

Margarete Bör

