

SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF HEARTACHE

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How to put the pieces of your life back together after you have lost a love, a job, your dreams—or whatever. So you've lost something or someone very dear to you.

When you lost whatever it was that you had set your heart on, you felt a sinking feeling deep inside. You didn't want to eat; you couldn't smile. You couldn't even walk as fast as you usually do; you felt as though the end of your world had come. How do you handle this despair?

Tired of carrying guilt? Dead-end life? Amusement surfeit? Feeling like a human discard? Needing a drink (or a fix) so you can cope? There's a life-giving Savior very near you: Already your Savior, if you don't stop Him, has already redeemed you. Has a right to do that; He loved you. Has Himself died as the payment for your sins—the real death.

Has already given you the gift of salvation, not merely offered it. Not sure? Just consider that you are breathing and alive; you wouldn't be, if He had not already died that real death, your second death. Your present life is proof that He has plans for you to find peace now, and eternal life as well.

Jesus, the all-powerful, divine Son of God is someone to take notice of. You can say "no" to Him and beat Him off; He must honor your choice. But if you don't stop Him, He takes the initiative to lead you all the way to happiness here and now, and on to heaven and eternal life.

Too good to be true? Be careful before you turn away. He paid a tremendous price to make it true—the price of His blood.

I have shocking, but very Good News for you: Believers have recently been making discoveries in the Bible. It's like a dense fog has finally lifted and the bright sun is shining through again. This is not about musty manuscripts found in a desert cave or dug out of the sands of Egypt, but about discoveries in the Bible itself, very Good News better than most people have thought it can be.

Enormous progress has been made in scientific discoveries on all levels. Why shouldn't there be equally marvelous progress in understanding the Good News of God? It brings such joy to human lives.

The reason? God is alive! He is more "with it" than the Internet or tomorrow's newscast. He is like a personal Father to everybody willing to let Him be that a Father who can be trusted. He is infinite, and so He treats every one as if he/she were the only person on earth. And He has nothing but good will for undeserving people who desire a better life but don't know how to find it.

The Good News is what the Savior has done, is doing, and will finish doing, for us (and in us). Not what He might do, maybe, perhaps, or *if*. He became the world's Savior, not merely wanting to be provided we do the impossible. He "is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe."

Actually, we humans don't know how to get out of the mess that sin has made in our lives. The Savior has stepped in and taken the initiative to make things right for us.

For a long time most people have thought that after His resurrection Jesus went to heaven to relax on an extended vacation. He did His part a long time ago, now we must get our act together, stop sinning, and do lots of good works. But believers are discovering in the Bible that Jesus has never taken a vacation of any kind. He is on duty in His "office" which the Bible speaks of as "the sanctuary" in heaven, without a break.

His full-time employment is saving sinners like you and me. How does He do that? He is rebuilding human wrecks, reaching for the worst down-and-out backsliders, lifting throw-aways out of the ditch, listening to their distraught cries and prayers at three in the morning, whispering hope to depressed alcoholics and drug addicts, convincing teenagers that He understands and cares, urging would-be suicides not to do it, pricking the consciences of lazy, selfish "saints," melting hardened prostitutes, healing broken hearts, encouraging prisoners, giving abused children hope. He's busy? You're right. He's busy!

But not too busy to be closer to you and more true to you than a best friend could be. The Bible describes His day and night work as that of a "great High Priest." The best modern equivalent of that is Divine Psychiatrist, or Physician of our souls. Although He was sinless, He took our fallen, sinful nature and met temptation as we must meet it. He had to say "No!" to self just as we do. The Bible opens a window into His secret soul:

"Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." "In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest" (Hebrews 2:14-17).

His specialty is healing people of all kinds of hurts, even from their childhood, problems they are not responsible for. But He never excuses us for going on in sin; He heals, forgives, cleanses, sets us free like an inmate walking out of jail.

Many of us have missed the point of what the New Testament says about the realities of life. The common idea is that all men are born doomed to be lost unless they take the initiative to do something right first. In other words, the common idea is that Christ's sacrifice on the cross doesn't do anybody any good until he does something about it, first. If you are saved at last, the idea is, it is due to your own initiative; and if you are lost at last, that will be due to God's initiative. The real truth is that if anyone is saved at last, it will be due entirely to God's initiative, and if anyone is lost at last it will be due to his own initiative in resisting or rejecting what Christ has already given him. And everybody is not born doomed to be lost. He is born to be saved, and will be, unless he

does something to counter or thwart what God is actively doing for him. (This is Rom. 3:23, 24; 5:18; 1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:10, Heb. 2:9; 1 Jn. 2:2), etc).

This boils down to the Good News idea that it is actually hard to be lost and it is easy to be saved, if one understands the “truth of the gospel.” This seems beyond belief to some people’s minds, for they have always thought it was the opposite.

And if one has the idea that Christ has only made a provision for us to be saved, that His sacrifice is only “available” for us, that it does us no good unless we do something right first, inevitably the idea pervades our minds that God is standing back in the shadows leaving us to our own foolish ways, and doing nothing to help us until we first get our lives straightened out and our act together. And believing that, many people say, “So what! God couldn’t care less if I don’t bother Him; I’m not His favorite, I’m a failure, and here’s nuthin’ goin’ nowhere.” The reality is that He is actively taking us by the hand each day and saying, “Come one, let’s go to heaven, and while we’re at it, let’s have a heaven here on earth first.” The only way not to be led there all the way is to resist Him, to beat Him off, to slap Him down. “The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God’s dear Son.” *Steps to Christ*, p. 27.

He is “touched with the feeling of our infirmities so He can “sympathize with our weaknesses.” The Bible urges us, “Come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:14-16). We just need to learn how to come.

But yes, there is a catch. It’s not that you have to do something first. Rather, you must see something. You’ve got to realize that you are a sinner before your coming “boldly” can make any sense, for He is a Savior who doesn’t save anybody but sinners. If you think you’re a decent, good enough person on your own, you’ll feel out of place trying to come. To Him, it’s sinners who are first-class people. He says, “I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance” (Matthew 9:13).

He must have said that tongue-in-cheek, because He knew very well that the only kind of people there are on this planet are sinners, even if they think they are not. But they have known it, because God’s holy law has penetrated all the barriers they have erected around their souls, and it has convinced them of sin. They are all “called.” Jesus was pressing a thorn into the self-complacent thinking of the so-called “good” people, making fun of those pathetic “saints” who think they are righteous and don’t know what a mess they are, in the sight of heaven and on the stage of life before others. In honest truth “there is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way” (Romans 3:10-12).

There are times when the fog lifts and we see this truth more clearly than at other times because the Holy Spirit presses home the conviction that we’re all the same by nature sinners who can’t save ourselves. Not one of us by nature is any better than all the rest, because we’re all made of the same dough, as Martin Luther wisely said. “All the world [has] become guilty before God” (Romans 3:19).

It's written all over all of us. Our very name is "Adam," which is the Bible name for all mankind. Adam was a sinner. When he sinned in the beginning, he was the entire human race in himself, so that the whole human race sinned "in him." All the sin in the world was therefore included in Adam's sin when he sinned. There is not a human on earth who has not come from Adam, with his sinful nature. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (verse 23). But the Good News comes in the next half of the same sentence: and "[all are] being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (verse 24). Thank God! The second half of that sentence more than cancels the first half. How?

The word "justified" means to be straightened out, put right, or vindicated. (Remember, only sinners need to be straightened out!) Please look carefully, because all this was done before we ourselves could possibly do anything good. He justified us, put us straight, redeemed us, saved us as the human race, without any contribution from ourselves. It's wrong to say or think that our faith saves us. Faith is not our Savior. "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). That agrees with what we just read in Romans 3:24, we were saved before we had faith, but our faith is what grabs hold of that blessed fact and makes it real in our own personal experience. This Good News is clear in Romans 3:23, 24:

"All" are "justified." That means the entire human race. This truth is the cure for depression, despair, low self-respect. Believe it, and henceforth you cannot help but hold your head high anytime, anywhere. But how does this change come about?

These "all" are justified "freely." No admission ticket required. Anything "free" is for everybody, no exceptions. No one can say, "This isn't for me" (unless of course you are from Mars or you haven't sinned preposterous assumptions). Stop wasting precious spiritual energy worrying about whether God has accepted you. Come into His presence like the prince or princess that you are in His sight. You've already been adopted into His family "in Christ"!

Someone says, "How can that be? I'm not a real Christian and never have been!" The answer is that the entire human race was in Christ as the second Adam just as it was in the first Adam. Therefore you were included. When Christ was baptized, the Father said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). He was talking about us all, for He counted us "in Him." A writer who understood says that word "embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative."

The "all" are justified "by His grace." Note that the word "faith" is not there. Your faith or your lack of faith had nothing to do with Christ giving His life for you, justifying you by His sacrifice. And remember that "grace" is not meant for good people but for those who don't deserve it. "To him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness" (Romans 4:4, 5). This accomplishment redeems everyone "in Christ Jesus."

“Wait a minute! All this is given free to bad people?” Yes, the Bible says, “all.” If “your Father in heaven makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matthew 5:45), it must include bad people. That has to be the meaning of “grace,” or it isn’t grace.

Imagine the surprise that this is going to be. Many millions haven’t realized what the Son of God has done! The very shock of learning this will capture their attention, for most have never been told that Christ accomplished such a feat as this. (Even atheists are going to be shocked, for no one could have invented this idea).

By now we’re taking a deep breath. This is shocking to all of us as well. What evidence do we have in the Bible that the Good News is this good?

When the Father sent His Son into the world, He was given explicit instructions that His job was to “save the world” for He says, “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world,” and “to give [My] life a ransom for many” (John 12:47; Matthew 20:28).

And when He was about to die He prayed, “I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 12:47; 17:4).

Probably the first people to recognize this amazing truth were the Samaritans of the village of Sychar who said, “We know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). They got the idea He’s not only the Savior of the Jews or of a handful of Gentiles who believe and obey, but He is everybody’s Savior!

As the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), He became “us” as truly as Adam was us. Thus when He died in our place, He actually died as us. “You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10). You died “in Him,” were resurrected “in Him,” and will live eternally “in Him” (see Romans 6:3, 4, 5, 6; 8:9; Ephesians 1:3-12).

He won’t force you to be saved against your will. You can say “No!” and forfeit your birthright even as Esau sold his for a mess of lentil stew (see Genesis 25:29-33). Many will. But the “birthright” has been yours because you are a member of the human race.

You are not an exception. Are you a sinner? You are the reason why He came to do this. Can you believe that you have been redeemed? That’s what the Bible is saying. Is the gift given to us already? That’s what the words “grace” and “given freely” mean.

“Now wait a minute,” someone says, “isn’t there something I must do?” Yes, of course. Something big and very important: you must believe this Good News that you have heard and let it move your soul. “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” (John 3:16). It’s true, and no one has a right to add any words that Jesus did not say, such as “you must do this” or “you must do that,” or that “nothing happens unless you take the initiative.” He has taken the initiative; He has loved; He has given.

But this does not mean that faith is a mere mental assent to an equation like believing that $2 + 2 = 4$. To believe means to appreciate what it cost God to love us like that and to give His Son to die for us. This is the much bigger truth that many are now beginning to discover is in the Bible. Such faith takes up the whole heart—nothing left over for the selfishness of the world. The heart-appreciation is big because you realize what Jesus did was big.

The death that He died for us was not merely enduring some physical pain for a few hours, which was terrible enough. He died what the Bible calls “the second death,” the death without personal hope, “the pouring out of His soul unto death” that Isaiah speaks of (Isa. 53:12; Revelation 2:11; 20:14). In other words, out of love for us He gave Himself to go to hell, truly giving Himself forever. (The most wonderful hero in the world who died for somebody else couldn’t go that far!). On His cross He felt to the full the pain of abandonment by God, and sobbed out, “Why have You forsaken Me?” There we see the “width and length and depth and height” of love. It’s *agape*, a love as different from what we call love as day is from night (Ephesians 3:18). When our shriveled up little hearts begin to appreciate that, we begin to live. We are like dead people resurrected. In fact, our hearts have never been so moved. We don’t realize our potential for loving people who we never dreamed we could love, the tremendous capacity for devotion to Christ we didn’t know is buried deep in our hearts. This discovery about yourself is magnificent. It’s a resurrection to new life even now.

To have faith is not merely to trust the Lord like you trust the bank or the insurance company. You can do that and still remain as selfish as you were before, because such trust is a self-centered concern. The John 3:16 idea of faith solves the problem and lifts our naturally self-centered hearts out of a dark cave into the sunlight: faith is a heart-melting appreciation of what it cost the Son of God to save us.

We know this from several texts that tell us what faith is. Those two things that God did in John 3:16 are: (a) He so loved the world that He (b) gave His only begotten Son. Those two trigger (c): we believe. The (a) and the (b) come before the (c)! If your heart says “Thanks!” for (a) and (b), then you’ve already begun (c). But just begun, for one’s selfish heart only begins to come alive; you grow; the hardness is melted day by day. And that faith “works through love” (*agape*). Your motives and your conduct are transformed from the inside out. Don’t get discouraged if progress seems slow. The Holy Spirit is working!

In other words, faith couldn’t even exist unless first of all there was the revelation of that love at the cross (*agape*). All of this is just another way of saying that salvation is by grace, “not of works, lest anyone should boast” (Ephesians 2:9).

So might I hide my blushing face
When His dear cross appears;
Dissolve my heart in thankfulness,
And melt mine eyes to tears.

But drops of grief can ne'er repay
This debt of love I owe.
Here Lord, I give myself away,
'Tis all that I can do.
—Isaac Watts

If faith “works through love,” then there is no end to the good works that it will continually motivate us to do. Here is the victory over every kind of evil the devil tempts us to do. No addict is beyond the Savior’s reach. Stop carrying a load of guilt. Faith is itself a change of heart. It reconciles an alienated, selfish heart to God; and since no one can be reconciled to God and not at the same time be reconciled to His holy law, such faith immediately makes the believer become obedient to all ten of the joyous commandments of God. The love of Christ supplies an infinitely powerful motivation.

From then on, it’s not a matter of “what do I have-to do in order to be saved?” but “how can I say Thank You enough for saving my soul from hell itself?” It’s an entirely new situation, for “behold, all things have become new,” for “all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 18).

That last is also part of the Good News—you will become a “helper,” and in some wonderful way you cannot understand, proclaim to somebody else “the word of reconciliation” that has so changed you (verse 19). Maybe it will seem to you a very tiny bit of help, but the Holy Spirit will enable you to give it. If God picked you up and set you in heaven itself you couldn’t be happier, because there is no thrill known to humans more delightful than that of being the channel through which this life flows to another human being.