



FOREWORD BY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
DAN WALSH

AN

Unfathomable
GIFT!

GOD'S ASTONISHING GRACE

JAN BLONK

An Unfathomable Gift!

God's Astonishing Grace

Jan Blonk

An Unfathomable Gift!: God's Astonishing Grace

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To Jesus Christ
You are my only hope for salvation!

He who did not spare his own Son
but gave him up for us all,
how will he not also with him
graciously give us all things?

(Romans 8:32)

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Foreword

As an author, I'm more known for writing inspirational fiction novels. But I read a good deal of non-fiction books, including a steady diet of devotionals during my quiet times. Before writing novels, I had been a pastor for twenty-five years. Reading and even recommending devotional books to my church members was a fairly common thing. There is nothing more important in a believer's life than cultivating that quiet, abiding relationship with Christ.

If Jan Blonk's book, *An Unfathomable Gift*, had been available then, I would have certainly recommended it. Not only because it's a fine work, but I know the author personally. That may not always be a good thing, especially if the author's life doesn't line up with the things he teaches in his books. Thankfully, that's *not* the case with Jan.

I had the privilege of serving as Jan's pastor for several years. During that time, we also became good friends. I got to see Jan's faith in action, up close. He's the real deal: a devoted husband and a loving father. In the church, he was always willing to serve others any way he could.

During my last year at the church, Jan taught a weekly Bible study. I attended it regularly. Mainly because Jan is an excellent teacher, passionately devoted to the Scriptures, and able to explain them to others in practical, easy-to-understand ways. That teaching gift is certainly evident in *An Unfathomable Gift*.

I heartily recommend this devotional. Read it for yourself and give copies as gifts to your friends.

—Dan Walsh, bestselling author of *The Unfinished Gift*,
The Discovery and *The Reunion*

Acknowledgements

Throughout the years, I've asked several people to read these devotionals for critique and feedback, including the time I spent at Word Weavers Volusia County. The critique and feedback always sharpened my thinking and writer's skills. While it isn't necessarily pleasant for the moment, it does yield a greater ability to communicate words on paper. Thanks for that!

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I want to thank my wife, Rachel, for her continuing support in all my writing endeavors. It's great to be able to say that one part from my first letter to you has now come to pass.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my mother who instilled in me a love for books and reading, as she would read at my bedside daily when I was young. I'm sure that this was one of the factors that also brought about a love for writing when I got older.

Introduction

We're about to embark on an incredible journey, exploring an indescribable gift. Our journey has two goals: to strongly emphasize that God has given us an astounding gift *and* for us to enjoy it throughout our lives and endless ages.

"If you knew the gift of God" (John 4:10). Jesus stated that to a despised outcast. In that culture, it wasn't common for a man to publicly converse with a woman, let alone with a hated Samaritan—a mixed race, despised by Jews. Yet, Jesus did so. Why? He didn't follow cultural norms because God's gift is for everyone. He welcomes anyone who simply desires His indescribable gift. That's good news!

The Bible illustrates the receiving of God's gift as the quenching of our thirst. During a hot summer day, we want to satisfy our longing with something cold and refreshing. Just like our physical cravings, we seek to satisfy the thirst of our heart. God created us with a void only He can fill. When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman, He declared that He alone can truly satisfy our very being. *That* was something she was looking for.

Money, power, possessions, fame, health, and many other things do not necessarily quench the longings of our heart. Even if they do so for a lifetime, they will not do so throughout eternity. For when we die, we leave everything. Our choice is actually not between a lifetime of happiness and after-death happiness. It's about true, lasting happiness and surrogate happiness. Do we prefer the momentary that at most lasts for a lifetime? Or do we desire true and lasting happiness throughout our lifetime *and* eternity? Since I want to be as clear as possible, here are the basics:

1. We've been created for the enjoyment of God's glory, which gives real satisfaction. For example, the enjoyment of a car can only be experienced when we use it according to its design, not when we try to use it as a boat.
2. We live primarily for ourselves and don't want to submit to God's design for our lives. Consequently, we are sinners. To sin means to miss the goal for why we exist.
3. Our creator is holy and just, far beyond our finite understanding. We're accountable to Him, whether we like it or not. Since He's just, He will punish every sin. As a result, we deserve eternal separation from Him when we die.
4. Because "God is love" (1 John 4:16), He sent Jesus to die for our sins and suffer our punishment, so that we can be freely forgiven and fully accepted. That's the gospel!
5. In order to receive God's gift, we need to turn to Jesus by faith as our only hope for salvation. We need to put our trust in who He is and what He has

accomplished through His death on the cross, rising from the grave on the third day.

6. As a result, we're saved from our sins and have the eternal enjoyment of God: "In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). While we have now only a taste of what will be, we're saved in this assurance.

Throughout these pages, you'll read some to-the-point-language about our sins. When our doctor finds some disturbing news about a growing cancer, do we want to hear it or do we prefer to remain ignorant? Obviously, it's far better to discover the cancer in the beginning stages when something can still be done about it.

The same is true with our sins. We can ignore our heart's disease or acknowledge it and seek the God-given cure. If we ignore the facts, it will be to our eternal detriment—to reject God's truth is to embrace deception.

On the other hand, if we acknowledge the reality of our sins and their dreadful consequences, we can still apply the lasting cure God provided through Jesus. That's why to-the-point-language about our sins is an expression of God's love. He doesn't want us to experience the fatal results of our heart's disease.

True love means warning others of imminent danger. Therefore, God doesn't ignore our sins and just "love" us anyway; rather, He expressed His love by giving His Son to die for our sins and urging us to trust in Him. Furthermore, His grace is always greater than our sins: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom. 5:20). No matter how serious our case may be, Jesus is willing and able to save us.

Each devotional has a different Bible verse but declares the same good news. We don't find fault with one who faithfully takes the same medication each day. That would be a wise thing to do, right? The same is true for our spiritual well-being. Each day, we need a good dose of the gospel. We're to live and walk in its liberating truths. Paul stated we are to "hold fast to the word I preached to you"—the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2). Since the gospel is ultimately *God's* message of salvation, I've used numerous Bible verses to declare His glorious truth.

These devotionals are meant to be digested one day at a time. It's so easy to quickly glance over God's word, while not letting it deeply sink in. Often, we deprive ourselves of the profoundness of the gospel by reading it too rapidly without any careful consideration.

Whether you're a believer or someone who has never considered Jesus Christ, I hope this introduction has persuaded you to start our journey, either discovering the gospel in greater measure or for the very first time.

Even if you still doubt its truth, do take time to consider the good news of God's incredible gift. Why neglect such a gift? Perhaps your perception of Christianity has

been severely distorted? My challenge to you is to read these devotionals. May the Lord bless them!

The Gift of His Son

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

This verse is one of the most popular Bible verses. During major sporting events, we sometimes see banners promoting this verse, trying to stimulate our curiosity. Why? It declares God's love for us by giving His Son.

The Bible makes a profound statement about God's nature: "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*" (1 John 4:8). What is our picture of God? Is it accurate? When we check out at the cash register and see the tabloids, we can easily fall for what is fictitious. Many depict a sleazy story in order to sell, completely undermining accuracy. Also, in our own lives, we can easily manipulate our "truth" by leaving out important information or adding some drama to it. The Bible is clear: knowing God means knowing "God is love" and reflecting that through our lives.

He who loves little will express little, and he who loves much will express much. Since God is infinite, His love is also infinite. He expressed everlasting love by giving Jesus. Why is that significant? The answer is related to what comes after the comma: "That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

No matter how healthy we try to live, we're fragile human beings. Death comes to all! Then, the age-old question arises: what happens when we die? Do we come back in some other life-form as taught in reincarnation? Do we go back to nothingness? Or, is there a God to whom we have to give an account? The Bible is unambiguous: "So then each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12). The author of Hebrews stated: "And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

We are guilty because of our rejection of God. We've gone our own way, indifferent to His word: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). The latter part of this verse in Isaiah, however, expresses God's boundless love: "And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Jesus died for our sins. He suffered the just penalty that we deserve. When we believe in Jesus—who He is and what He has accomplished—we have the gift of eternal life. Why would anyone refuse such a gift?

God's Inexpressible Gift

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15

The purpose of this book is to highlight God's amazing gift, which is inexpressible. While no tongue or pen can adequately describe His gift, I want to give you a brief overview of why Jesus is God's indescribable gift. We will consider *who* He is and *what* He has accomplished.

He is God: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). In speaking of Jesus, John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, *and the Word was God*. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made" (John 1:1-3).

God gave His Son as our eternal treasure for our everlasting enjoyment. Who He is and what He has accomplished, obtained, and promised to do has been freely given. Since He is infinite, there will be no end to our enjoyment of Him.

Jesus came to save: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). Since God is holy, He doesn't minimize or overlook our sins. He never shoves them under the rug. Consequently, we're faced with two major dilemmas: we've done things we shouldn't have *and* we've not done things we should have. Jesus is God's gracious answer.

The Father gave His Son to die for our sins: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

Peter wrote: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). This glorious gospel was already proclaimed in the Old Testament: "And the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isa. 53:6). As a result, we can be forgiven.

Not only are we in need of God's forgiveness, we also need a perfect righteous life in order for Him to accept us. Since no one can present such a life to Him, the gospel shines brightly. Jesus lived a perfect life and performed all God's requirements on our behalf. His righteous life is freely given to anyone who receives Him by faith. Thus, we have God's infinite favor.

This mind-boggling truth is even more inexpressible in light of what we deserve. While we deserve eternal separation from our creator when we die, we can freely

receive His eternal favor. Amazing grace, indeed!

If You Only Knew

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

John 4:10

Imagine receiving Sunday's paper, including a flyer, stating a one-time buy-for-nothing sale—no limited quantities. Wow! That would be great if it were true. Would it not have been unfortunate if you saw the flyer one day after the event?

What if you had thrown it away with the junk mail, never noticing this special? If you had only known, you probably would've been one of the first at the store, at least I would have been. There's something far more tragic, though.

God has given an inexpressible gift that is unimaginable. It's free, ever-lasting, eternally-satisfying, and of infinite value. The greatest tragedy is to find out after "the event," or throw it away without ever considering it. When we get to know Jesus as God's indescribable gift, all things will begin to lose their attractions in light of "the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:8).

If you had a choice between an overpriced, poor quality restaurant at a horrible location, and a free, delicious, fully-satisfying meal at an ocean-view setting, what would be your choice?

Isaiah posed the same question: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food" (Isa. 55:1-2). Why do we pursue that which ultimately doesn't satisfy?

Jeremiah stated that as follows: "For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jer. 2:13). Jesus is "the fountain of living waters." Yet, we readily prefer "broken cisterns" that fail to meet our innate desire for genuine, lasting satisfaction.

Simply ask! It cannot be easier. He's not reluctant to supply what He already gave. Do you know the gift of God? If so, pursue Jesus with all your heart. If not, don't neglect His gift, but also pursue Him with all your heart: "Seek the LORD while he may

be found; call upon him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6). Only Jesus can truly satisfy your heart.

God's Testimony

And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

1 John 5:11

How would you respond if someone gave you a brand-new car? Your response would depend on your circumstances, right? If you were the richest person in the world, it would probably not move you as much as someone who tries to make ends meet with a car that continually breaks down. The same is true with God's gift. He offers you eternal life; your response greatly depends on your *perceived* condition.

When you don't realize the seriousness between the eternal enjoyment of God and eternal separation from Him, the gift of eternal life will hardly be considered. If you do realize the eternity of your existence, either in a place called heaven or hell, things are quite different.

Also, when you think you deserve the car, you'll hardly express appreciation. If, on the other hand, you realize you've no claim to the gift, you show far more gratitude. In order to properly appreciate God's gift, you must deeply realize you don't deserve it at all. Actually, you only deserve eternal separation from Him: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). However, as the verse in the book of Romans continues: "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The greatest question in life is rather simple: do you believe God? He has clearly demonstrated His love through Jesus' death on the cross. His death offers you eternal life. To reject God's testimony is to accuse Him of lying: "Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son" (1 John 5:10).

Eternal life is all about Jesus: "I am the way, and the truth, and *the life*. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He used the illustration of a vine and its branches: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned" (John 15:5-6).

It's about our union with Jesus, just like a branch is in the vine and receives life, growth, and fruitfulness from it. The same is true of eternal life. This is "in his Son," and from Him we have life, growth, and fruitfulness. Are you in Him? By faith, you can

receive Jesus and have the free gift of eternal life.

Eternal Satisfaction

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10

Everyone wants to be happy and fulfilled. We crave for satisfaction, whether food, sex, possessions, influence, beauty, or even revenge. We're motivated and sometimes driven by these desires. They control us.

Obviously, it doesn't mean that everything we do is instantly gratifying, but the root of our actions is based on these felt needs. Even when we do things we don't enjoy, we still do them because of the consequences—taking out the garbage, for example.

From the beginning of creation, this desire for happiness has been evident: "But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Gen. 3:4-5).

Adam and Eve's rebellion was motivated by the desire to be like God—to find greater happiness and satisfaction apart from Him. They were deceived into believing that they would find it. That's why the Bible calls sin "deceitful desires" (Eph. 4:22). Sin wants us to believe that we can find greater happiness when we reject God's word.

The Bible actually states that sin can be enjoyable, but *only* for a little while. It talks about "the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25). It's like a hook with delicious bait. God, however, gives infinitely more joy than any short-lived, sinful pleasure.

Satan is the great deceiver who promises a beautiful garden, but he has only weeds. He acts like a friend, but only seeks your destruction. The Bible doesn't portray his strength, but his cunningness. Those who follow him in his rebellion think he'll bring satisfaction to their soul. In the end, though, there will only be eternal misery. He wants to rob you of all true enjoyment.

Jesus, on the other hand, desires and seeks your eternal well-being. He's the good shepherd who gave His life for His sheep. He left heaven's glory for a cross, so that we "may have life and have it abundantly."

What is this abundant life? It's the enjoyment of having God as our God. It's the delight of His presence: "You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11). Who do you believe for your everlasting satisfaction?

A Free Gift

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

The gospel means good news, which can only be clearly understood in light of bad news. If we expect a loved one not to make it, we experience great joy when the doctor announces a last-minute recovery. The same is true regarding our sins and God's salvation. Today's verse states why the gospel is such good news for us.

Sin is a hard and deceiving taskmaster. It promises satisfaction but gives us emptiness. It allures us with its neon-lit billboards, but, inside, there's only darkness. We eagerly "work" for sin, while it only pays devastation and death. Apart from Jesus, we are sin's slaves: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). Just like we're physically bound by the law of gravity, we're spiritually bound by the law of sin. It dominates us!

The Bible is crystal clear about our accountability to our creator and the consequences of our sins: "Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die" (Ezek. 18:4).

This death refers to our eternal separation from God when we die. It applies to everyone: "For *all* have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). This means we don't deserve the everlasting enjoyment of God and His excellence.

Because we don't properly know God's holiness and infinite goodness, which means He passionately hates evil, we don't clearly see that He cannot accept sin: "You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong" (Hab. 1:13). Our mind is so darkened by sin that we don't perceive what's true. We're sinners and deserve our wages. We'll reap what we've sown.

The case is stated and the verdict is given. We are, so to speak, on death-row, awaiting our execution. Our only hope lies in God's amazing grace and infinite mercy. Our only hope lies in His free pardon.

God gave Jesus to die for our sins, so that we don't have to be eternally separated from Him, the fountain of life and joy. Eternal life is a free gift! We don't deserve it nor can we earn it. We have to simply receive it by faith. When we do so, we're *freely forgiven* and *fully accepted*. Have you already received God's gift by putting your trust in Jesus? You'll never regret it!

A Brand-New Start

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Have you ever wanted to do something all over again? Whether it's a decision, a day, a week, a month, a year, or even a lifetime? We all wish we could erase certain parts from our past and have a second chance. Unfortunately, that's not possible. Our past decisions are our ever-present companion, whether for good or bad.

Apart from our regretted choices in life, there's something far more serious we cannot erase: our sins, which are the results of our sinful nature. Our greatest need, beyond question, is to become a new person—a new creation—with new desires and, consequently, new actions.

At times, Jesus would say some hard things, especially to the hypocritical spiritual leaders: "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil" (Matt. 12:33-35).

Since we have a sinful heart, we do sinful things. We need a new heart! We need to become "a new creation." Someone needs to "make the tree good." Jeremiah emphasized that need when he stated: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). We don't know the depth of depravity that our hearts are capable of.

In light of Jeremiah's sobering diagnosis, the gospel gives hope: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Matt. 9:12). God has promised to take away our sinful heart and give us a brand-new heart: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you" (Ezek. 36:26). Because of Jesus' death, we can become a new creation.

When we're born again, we receive this new heart and spirit from God. As a result, we have a brand-new start that has a definite outcome: "And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). God not only starts this good work in us, He also brings it to completion when Jesus comes again. When God makes the tree good, we can be sure there will be

good fruit. Have you already experienced this brand-new start?

Saved by Grace

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Ephesians 2:8-9

One of the great truths of the Christian faith is that our salvation from sin and guilt is *solely* by God's grace. This separates Christianity from all other religions and sects. They're defined by man's performance to gain bliss, while we receive eternal life as an undeserved, unearned, and unentitled gift.

The main question is: why do we need to be saved? Our lives are characterized by self-centeredness. This is especially seen in our relation to our creator. Through our words and actions, we reject God's right over our lives and, instead, go our own way. The Bible calls that sin, which literally means "to miss the mark."

We've been created for the enjoyment of God and His glory. We, however, have "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom. 1:25). Nevertheless, God loves us with a love that's wholly based on God Himself.

Grace is often referred to as unmerited favor. While that's a good definition, the better one is *demerited* favor. Not only do we have no claim to God's favor, we deserve His *disfavor*. Yet, in spite of what we deserve, He offers us eternal life.

How can we receive His gift? While one of the great truths of the Christian faith is *grace alone*, the other one is *faith alone*. It's through faith that we receive His indescribable gift. The Bible defines faith as follows: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). It's genuine trust in who Jesus is and what He has accomplished and obtained through His life, death, and resurrection. This kind of faith is evidenced through a life that's wholly devoted to Him.

God wants to make it unquestionably clear that salvation isn't based on anything we've done or will do. While salvation is a gift, someone paid the price. When we receive presents, they don't cost us anything, but they did to the one who gave them. The same is true with our salvation, which brings us to our third great truth: *Christ alone*. Jesus paid the price for our eternal life, both through His righteous life and sacrificial death on our behalf.

In order not to miss the main point, God emphasized that our salvation is "not a result of works, *so that* no one may boast." Isn't it a relief to know that our salvation

isn't based on our performance since we always fall short?

That brings us to our last great truth: *to God alone belongs all the glory*. We can never boast in ourselves, but only in the giver—in the one who worked and paid for our salvation.

Jesus Is Our Propitiation

Whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Romans 3:25

The book of Job is believed to be the oldest book in the Bible. He lived around the time of Abraham. Job expressed man's greatest dilemma: "How can a man be in the right before God?" (Job 9:2). How can an infinitely holy God relate favorably to those who continuously sin against Him?

All other dilemmas are *nothing* in comparison to this one. For all other problems are limited to our lifespan, while our standing before God is of an eternal matter. How can this dilemma be solved?

God gave Jesus as our propitiation. To propitiate means to receive the punishment on behalf of someone else. It means a satisfaction of God's justice. Jesus received the punishment for our sins; He endured God's wrath on our behalf.

As a result, we're reconciled with God. The age-old dilemma was solved by God when Jesus shed His blood for our forgiveness, for "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22).

The main question is: do we believe what Jesus has accomplished on the cross? Paul wrote that many consider the cross foolishness: "But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1:23). What do you believe? Is it folly or God's gracious answer to man's greatest need?

God will always do what's right. He's righteous! That means He will punish every sin. He will either execute His righteous judgment on the sinner *or* on the sinner's substitute.

Jesus' death solved this dilemma between a holy God and sinful man. He took the Father's hand and our hand, so to speak, mediating between us. When we receive Jesus as our mediator, we're reconciled with God and have His infinite favor.

Because of Jesus' death, God is righteous in forgiving and dealing favorably with us. John stated that with these words: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and *just* to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

When we receive a speeding ticket and someone pays our fine, we're free because justice has been met. In the same way, the cross—Jesus paying for our sins—

demonstrates God's love *and* justice.

A Perfect Illustration

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

John 3:14-15

Some of the basic questions of life are: where do I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? Our belief system determines our answers. Do we believe in a personal, relational God, or do we believe in nothing—some great random big bang that has no intelligence, but, wonder of all, intelligently designed creation?

When we believe in God, who has wisely created this universe, we believe in someone who acts supernaturally. One of my favorite stories in the Bible is when Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. Jesus confirmed that story in today's verse. Do you believe Him?

The Israelites had greatly provoked God after He had only shown kindness, and, "the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). They turned to Moses for prayer. He prayed and the Lord graciously provided salvation: "And the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live'" (Num. 21:8).

He couldn't have made it easier—simply look. No matter how much poison (a picture of sin) had affected a person, the answer was to look to the serpent on the pole. It didn't matter if one had been the ringleader of the rebellion or only a follower, the prescription was the same. Or, if one had been bitten by twelve fiery serpents or just one, there was no other remedy. The question was: would they believe God's way of salvation?

It was God's freedom whether or not to provide salvation, and it was His freedom to choose the manner in which people could be saved. While many looked and lived, there may have been quite a few who thought Moses had lost his mind and made fun of him. One thing is for sure: it couldn't have been easier.

This story corresponds with Jesus' death on the cross. He was lifted up so that you could be saved from your sins and be made whole. No matter how far you've fallen into sin, there's hope! No matter how rebellious you are, you can be forgiven and spiritually restored. Simply look to the cross—Jesus dying for your sins—and you'll have eternal life. There's no other remedy!

We Are in the Same Boat!

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:6

Tragedy has a way of bonding. We can be in an airplane, flying smoothly, and have no concern for the welfare of others. When the plane has to make an emergency landing, however, and we hear the screeching cries, things are seen in a different light. Hopefully, we'll do everything possible to help those in need. The same is true with today's verse: we're all in the same tragedy.

Sheep can be pretty stubborn; they don't follow instructions very well. That's an accurate picture of mankind. Instead of following the shepherd—Jesus—who has the sheep's best interest in mind, we wander off into the unknown and become prey to ferocious animals. From the very beginning, this is our story: "The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies" (Ps. 58:3).

God, however, is infinitely gracious. John Newton, author of *Amazing Grace*, said at the end of his life: "My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior." We're great sinners, having no consideration for our creator. We don't honor Him or give thanks. Rather, we go astray, having no desire for His will for our lives. Yet, in spite of that, "the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

In His infinite love, God has laid our sins on Jesus, so that we could be forgiven, restored, and have the eternal enjoyment of our creator. He was under no obligation to do so; it's by His sheer mercy! Jesus suffered the punishment for all the times we have turned our backs on God: "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, *for my anger has turned from them*" (Hos. 14:4).

We're in the same boat because we've all gone astray, and "we have turned—every one—to his own way." We're also saved in the same manner—Jesus bearing our sins. Peter wrote: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Pet. 2:24-25). Entrust yourself to Jesus and all will be well, both now and forevermore.

Jesus Is Our Mediator

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

1 Timothy 2:5-6

Conflicts are a definite part of our lives. From our early days through our latter years, we have clashes, whether a mild disagreement or a heated argument. While some can be easily solved, others are an unending feud.

All human conflicts fade into nothing compared to our conflict with God. We're all involved in a huge dispute with our creator, whether we realize this or not. The conflict goes as follows: God has created us to live for His glory; we, however, want to live for ourselves. We "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Rom. 1:25). Instead of glorifying God and serving Him, we do as we please, rejecting the one who "gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" (Acts 17:25).

Our conflict isn't just a mild disagreement. We've clearly violated His commandments and are guilty. The Bible refers to our sins as debts. We're in debt to God, which we can never repay. Our sins hold us captive! We're as "free" as a man jumping from an airplane without a parachute.

As in every conflict, there are consequences. We're in utter need for a third party—a mediator who seeks to solve our conflict. The gospel is the good news that *God* gave us a mediator. While we started and continue the conflict, God initiates the solution and solves it through Jesus. As in any dispute, we can refuse the mediator and the conflict remains unsolved.

Jesus resolved our fatal conflict by giving "himself as a ransom for all." Jesus paid our debt, so that we can be reconciled with God. This glorious truth will one day be eternally evident when all those who have received Jesus will honor Him in a song: "For you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Have you already been reconciled with your creator through His Son?

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?

Acts 11:17

The gospel is the good news that God gave Jesus as our infinite treasure for our everlasting enjoyment. In the gift of His Son, we also have the Father: "Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Not only do we have the Father, we also have the Holy Spirit.

Before we move on, we want to emphasize that the mystery of the triunity of the Godhead far exceeds our finite understanding. The Bible, however, clearly states there's only one God, who has revealed Himself in three distinct persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the gift of Jesus, we have the fullness of God.

Not only does God's indescribable gift secure our forgiveness and reconciliation with Him, He also gives us the Holy Spirit. Jesus' exaltation to the Father's right hand made way for God's promise: "Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing" (Acts 2:33). What's the significance of the Spirit?

He regenerates and renews us: "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). He also transforms us into Jesus' image: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

All godly characteristics are His work: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). All right living, joy, and peace come from Him: "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17).

Our hope in God is through Him: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom. 15:13). It's through Him that we know the things God freely gave us: "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Cor. 2:12).

When we receive the Holy Spirit, we'll have abundant and overflowing satisfaction. Jesus said: "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.' Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive" (John 7:38-39).

Royal Declarations

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Ezekiel 36:26-27

God's good news is about what He has done *and* has promised to do. Before we consider God's *I wills*, we want to emphasize that these promises are ours when we receive Jesus by faith: "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory" (2 Cor. 1:20).

All promises have and will come about because of Jesus, which is to God's glory. He obtained them through His righteous life and sacrificial death. While many have definite fulfillments during our lives, most find their ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and on the new earth.

Not only do we need to be reconciled with our creator, we also need to be changed to become more like Jesus. God's ultimate goal in creation and salvation is for us to reflect His Son. Regarding creation, we read: "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). With respect to salvation, it is: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29). God starts and sustains this process by giving us "a new heart, and a new spirit."

By nature, we have a "heart of stone," indicating spiritual deadness. Apart from God removing our stony heart, we'll never respond favorably to the gospel. Unless God gives us "a heart of flesh," we'll be cold and callous to God's love and grace.

Not only do we need to be renewed, we also need God's Spirit in our lives. Once God has given us "a new heart, and a new spirit," He also puts His Spirit within us in order to live as Christians, implying humble dependence instead of self-effort.

Today's verse explicitly states that God causes us to walk in His statutes and makes us careful to obey His rules. The Holy Spirit is the cause of all spiritual growth and obedience. This is most humbling to our proud, sinful nature. Apart from God's Spirit, we'll never walk in obedience. God, however, has promised to do so for Jesus' sake.

Spiritual Health

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

1 Peter 2:24

Our society is saturated with the emphasis on physical health—from ads encouraging us to take our daily vitamins to the commercials persuading us to buy the latest fitness equipment. Obviously, it's great to have good physical health. Life is so much more enjoyable. What about our spiritual health, though?

Billy Graham once said, and I paraphrase: we work a lifetime for a good retirement, while not taking five minutes to think about our eternity. Is that not true? While it's fantastic to be in good physical shape, it's far better, to say the least, to be spiritually in a right relationship with God. Our physical health is only related to our lifespan, while our spiritual health is of an eternal matter.

Sin has a devastating effect on us. It destroys our spiritual health. It numbs us to the point that we don't realize how devastating sin is. It hardens our conscience and brings about a fatal alienation from our creator, even to the point of denying His existence.

Jesus came to restore us. He said: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick . . . I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:12-13). He's the great physician who came to save us from our sins and make us whole. We are to only hope in Him!

When Jesus died for our sins, He also secured for us a life in accordance with God's will. In today's verse, we have a declaration of what Jesus' death *will* bring about for all who receive Him by faith—a righteous life. This is not about trying to do what's right by our own efforts, but a growing fruit of what He did for all who entrust themselves to Him.

His death is the greatest love story ever told. His wounds have brought about reconciliation *and* recovery. While its perfect enjoyment will only be in glory, from the moment we receive Jesus by faith, we start to experience newness of life. Do you want to be made spiritually whole? Trust in Jesus!

The Greatest Transaction

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21

Why do I constantly emphasize the gospel? I do so because every day we are in desperate need of it. We continuously sin and are in need of forgiveness and the reality of the cross. Furthermore, the gospel displays God's infinite love for us.

Jesus came to die for our sins. While we may easily state this great truth, the reality is astounding. We have no clue what it means to bear sin's punishment. An eternal separation from God, the fountain of life and joy, is unimaginable. Eternal darkness and damnation are beyond our understanding. That's why the gospel is the best news ever.

It's a transaction between a holy God and a sinful human being. An exchange takes place. God placed all our sins on Jesus—He suffered our punishment—and He freely gave us His Son's righteous life—so that we can enjoy the Father's infinite love and favor throughout endless ages. Let's consider this exchange.

Jesus always did "the things that are pleasing to him [the Father]" (John 8:29). The Bible states that He came to "fulfill all righteousness" (Matt. 3:15); He came to fulfill God's law on our behalf. Not only did He never sin in his actions, He also "knew no sin"—not in his thoughts or affections. He's the perfect Lamb of God "who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Because of Him, we never have to bear the punishment for our transgressions.

We, on the other hand, are sinners. We continually rebel against God's commandments—in our thoughts, affections, words, and actions. Consequently, we deserve eternal separation from Him when we die. Because of His love and mercy, however, He treated Jesus like we deserve to be treated, and He treats us like Jesus deserves to be treated. Isn't that incredible?

When we receive this transaction by faith, which is entirely based on God's grace, we're *in Him*. That means we've been united to the one who's perfectly righteous and, as a result, God treats us accordingly. Our standing before God is now the same as His Son's standing. While we will still sin throughout our lives, our standing *in Him* is eternally fixed and, one day, we will be perfectly righteous in our practice like we are now perfectly righteous in our position.

A Glorious Argument

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Romans 5:10

There are numerous verses in the Bible that are my favorites. This is certainly one of them. The apostle Paul loved to argue, “to give reasons for or against something” (Webster). Today’s verse is one of the greatest arguments in the Bible: if God did the *greater* will He not also do the *lesser*?

God’s love is only clearly seen when we recognize that, by nature, we’re at enmity with Him. One of the most confronting truths in God’s word is the fact that we don’t want to submit to His will: “For the mind that is set on the flesh [our sinful nature] is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot” (Rom. 8:7).

Just like Adam and Eve, we reject God’s word and, thus, we reject God. Unless we recognize our perilous state, we’ll never seek the only way by which God has provided reconciliation. Also, we’ll never appreciate why Jesus came and what He did for us. Why go to a specialist unless there’s a real concern?

The greatest anguish for our lives, families, cities, countries, and this world is God’s just wrath. Whether we believe it or not, we rightfully deserve His wrath. Just like He judged the world in Noah’s days with a flood, even so He has stated He will judge the world by fire: “But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly” (2 Peter 3:7).

We face two *major* issues: our hostility toward God *and* His coming wrath. In His great love, though, God has provided salvation. Just like He offered a way of escape in Noah’s time—the Ark (an excellent picture of Christ)—even so He offers salvation through His Son.

Through Jesus’ death, God has brought about reconciliation for all who turn to Him by faith: “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them” (2 Cor. 5:18-19).

Since His wrath will come on a God-rejecting world, we need to be saved when that happens. Here’s the good news: since God reconciled us *while we were His enemies*, He’ll certainly save us from the coming wrath. This will happen when Jesus returns for all

who entrusted themselves to Him.

Then, we “will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:17-18). Have you already been reconciled with God? Or, will you reject His message like the people in Noah’s days?

Our Great Physician

But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick . . . For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 9:12-13

Why do we go to a physician? We're either sick or believe we're sick. Those who are healthy have no reason to go *at all*. Wouldn't it be deeply tragic, though, if we believe we're in good health, while a serious disease is continually getting worse? That would even be more tragic if a cure was readily available. How many died because they didn't realize the seriousness of their disease and, as a result, didn't seek proper help?

The most severe disease of all is called sin. Unfortunately, we don't realize how serious sin is. Actually, one of its symptoms is to take it very lightly. It's like a finger that has lost its feeling. When it touches a hot object, no pain is felt, but damage is done. True love is expressed when we point out the fatality of sin *and* the cure by the great physician. They go hand in hand.

Jesus came for those who are spiritually sick in order to make them well. Obviously, unless we recognize the seriousness of our spiritual maladies, we won't pursue Him. Or, perhaps, we do realize our detrimental condition but try to find our own cure. Many travel that road.

Years ago, a physician would make house calls. Jesus does the same. He came to this earth to die on the cross, so that we can be made spiritually whole: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus, so to speak, knocks at our door, and we only need to receive Him by faith. How many times has he knocked on your door?

No matter how serious our spiritual condition (e.g. no love for God and our fellow man, no desire to serve God, no longing or strength to please God, greed, pride, jealousy, lust, or various other spiritual maladies), Jesus is able and willing to heal our sin-sick heart. Trust Him and He will most certainly do so.

No matter how great a sinner we are, Jesus calls us to come to Him for spiritual health, which is a life in accordance with God's word. While this will only be fully experienced in heaven, the moment we receive Jesus by faith, the healing process starts.

Why wait any longer? Jesus invites you to come: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I

am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). Will you accept His invitation?

Two Definite Results

Who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Titus 2:14

In God's dictionary, the word *perhaps* doesn't occur. There are no probabilities in the works of God: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" (Isa. 46:9-10). Or, as the apostle Paul stated: "Him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph. 1:11).

In today's verse, we see the certainty of God's purpose coming to pass. When Jesus cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30), He stated an absolute fact. His finished work accomplished God's purpose: our redemption and purification.

A fireman is greatly honored when he rescues a child from a burning building while losing his life in the line of duty. His story would be all over the media, receiving an honorable memorial service. What about Jesus? For the most part, He's greatly dishonored and mocked while He gave Himself for us.

Jesus didn't give His life for the good and righteous—there are none—but for those who are lawless and ungodly: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8).

By nature, we show no concern for God's law. We do what we please. Our lawlessness subjects us to God's righteous sentence. Jesus came to rescue us from God's just wrath against our transgressions. He did so by living a perfect life on our behalf *and* by dying for all our sins. He paid the penalty we deserve. *That* is God's love!

Not only does Jesus deliver us from God's wrath, He also purifies us, so that we'll be pleasing to Him in who we are and what we do. He changes us into a people "who are zealous for good works." This purification process, called sanctification, is *His* work! Let's fully rest in His sacrificial death, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

An Everlasting Covenant

I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.

Jeremiah 32:40

One of the great realities of God is that He's completely free to do as He pleases, when He pleases, and how He pleases. There's no governing authority over Him: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me" (Isa. 46:9).

Paul stated: "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:34-36). The Psalmist sang: "Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps" (Ps. 135:6).

Obviously, such sovereign freedom cannot belong to mere creatures. The gospel is the good news that God has freely chosen to save sinners. He does so by making a unilateral covenant—a one-sided agreement. He makes the covenant, sets out the terms, and executes them.

Jesus ratified this covenant when He died on the cross. In His infinite mercy, God made an everlasting covenant with all those who belong to Jesus—those who receive Him by faith. This is an unconditional covenant. We don't have to meet any conditions! By the way, the context shows that God addressed those who deserved His anger, wrath, and indignation (see Jer. 32:37).

The gospel is such good news that it goes beyond our comprehension. God's gracious covenant states He will *only* do good to us. Paul exclaimed that truth when he wrote: "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:31-32). The psalmist expressed it with these words: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Ps. 23:6).

Within this unilateral covenant, God has also secured our faithfulness to Him. Why do we stay faithful to the Lord? Can we be sure we will continue to believe in Jesus? Here, we clearly see that part of God's covenant includes our allegiance to Him. It's ultimately not our determination, but His gracious promise and work in our hearts. Are

you a beneficiary of His everlasting covenant?

A New Covenant

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.

Hebrews 8:10-12

God relates to us based on a covenant—an agreement. The Bible is made up of two major covenants: the old and new covenant. The new covenant replaced the old one: "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb. 8:13). The old covenant was meant to highlight and direct us to the new covenant—to Jesus.

What are their basic distinctions? The old covenant—the Law of Moses—is conditional: if you do "A" then God will do "B." The new covenant—Jesus' death on the cross—is unconditional: if you believe Jesus has fulfilled "A" then God will do "B."

The old one is about our *works*, while the new one is about our *faith* in Jesus. In Romans, we see the essence of the old covenant: "For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5).

The new covenant, however, contains God's gracious declarations of what He has promised to do. Salvation isn't only our deliverance from the guilt of sin, it's also a change of heart. God has promised this change in this covenant—writing His laws on our hearts. Instead of being governed by an external code, He makes a decisive inward change. As such, He is our God and we are His people.

In the new covenant, we also have the true knowledge of God, which is the essence of eternal life: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The new covenant has secured our true, deep, and intimate knowledge of our creator, in whose presence is "fullness of joy" and are "pleasures forevermore" (Ps. 16:11).

Jesus inaugurated the new covenant when He died: "For this is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28).

When Jesus died, God showed mercy toward our iniquities and forgave us our sins. *That* is the very foundation of all God's blessings. By faith in Jesus, we become the eternal beneficiaries of this new covenant.

Jesus Gave Himself for our Sins

Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Galatians 1:4-5

The world is on a set course—away from its creator. We only have to turn on the television and see that God is nowhere to be found. Even on much of religious broadcasting, there seems to be an emphasis on prosperity, having “God” as the means to our end, rather than we as the means to God’s end. What about today’s school curriculum? There’s a definite denial of God’s existence and creator rights.

In Ephesians, Paul shows that we, by nature, follow “the course of this world” and “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). The Bible states that “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

Thinking we’re free from God and His word, we’re actually enslaved to unrighteousness. Jesus came to deliver us from our fatal way of life and, in the end, create “new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).

Are you still set in the world’s ways, drifting away from your creator with all the devastating consequences? Or have you turned to Jesus and have been set on a new path toward your maker? Which track do you follow? As long as a train stays on its track, no harm is expected. At the moment a train is derailed, inevitable injuries are only a matter of time.

From the beginning, God has given us the track to follow—His word and will for our lives, expressed in the Bible. We, however, have followed our own course—we’ve been derailed and are going nowhere, even though they may still be much motion. Jesus came to put us back on track.

His death delivers us from “the present evil age.” It brought about reconciliation between God and us. Paul wrote: “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13-14). It’s through Jesus that we become citizens of His kingdom, which consists of “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

The Father purposely planned Jesus’ death from before the foundation of the world. Isn’t it incredible to know that He desires your temporal and eternal well-being? Why

not follow His track? There's nothing to lose, but everything to gain.

God Declares the Ungodly as Righteous

And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Romans 4:5

Christianity is a unique religion. It stands in sharp contrast to all other religions and sects. Why? It's the only true faith! That's obviously a major controversial statement in a pluralistic and politically correct society.

Jesus, however, made an exclusive claim: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He also stated: "Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him" (John 5:23).

Christianity is also unique in how a person is saved. All other religions and sects teach that man has to perform many good works in order to gain bliss—salvation is dependent on man. The Christian faith is the opposite. It's God who works salvation on behalf of man—salvation is wholly dependent on God.

There's no other religion where God came to those who are at enmity with Him, performed all their good works for their eternal glory, and also took on Himself the penalty for their sins, suffering His own just wrath. That's unheard of!

The Bible is clear that man cannot be saved by his supposed "good" works. So many think they will go to heaven because they are overall good people. Nothing is further from the truth: "None is righteous [good], no, not one" (Rom. 3:10). In that same chapter, Paul wrote: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). By nature, we are ungodly. We have no love for His word. Our affections are set on earthly things, not on heavenly things. We simply live our lives without God, being ungodly.

The good news is that God declares ungodly people as righteous. That's the great mystery of the gospel—how God's justice and love for sinners can be at peace with each other. God loves us while we rightfully deserve His wrath. Jesus' righteous life and sacrificial death is *the* answer. That's the only way to be saved. Amazingly, when He declares an ungodly person as righteous, He will treat him accordingly.

God demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die for our sins. Thus, God's justice is fully satisfied. If someone has a significant speeding ticket and no money to pay, a friend can express his love by paying the ticket. What if the judge loves the violator? The judge cannot just let the offender go without violating what's right.

However, if the judge's son pays the ticket, justice is met and the lawbreaker goes free. The same is true for us! God justifies us—declares us righteous—when we trust in Jesus' finished work on the cross. There, His love was fully expressed *and* His justice completely satisfied.

One Act of Righteousness

Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Romans 5:18-19

Our actions have consequences, not just for ourselves, but many times also for others. For example, when we don't do our household chores, someone else has to step in. When the quarter back refuses to throw to the open running back, the running back runs in vain. We don't realize how "influential" we are. The best saying is, perhaps, like father like son. Children pick up both the good and bad from their parents.

The Bible shows that Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, had a devastating effect on us. Our first parents decided to commit high treason. They attempted to overthrow God. By nature, we do the same.

Ultimately, we wish there was no God to whom we have to give an account. Their revolt had irreversible results for the human race because their offspring would act in the same manner. God gives us His good and righteous commandments; yet, we purposely reject them.

Adam and Eve's rebellion plunged us into ruin. While we may not like this truth, it's a reality. Because of sin, we stand condemned. We're reaping the results of "one man's disobedience." Before we start throwing our judgment stones at Adam, would we not have done the same? The good news is that Adam "was a type [figure] of the one who was to come" —Jesus (Rom. 5:14).

He came to forgive and restore us. The "one act of righteousness" refers to His perfect life and sacrificial death. He fulfilled all righteousness, both in living a righteous life *and* suffering God's righteous judgment for our sins. Consequently, believers are justified—declared righteous—and have eternal life.

Not only did Jesus come to deliver us from our condemnation, but He also came to make us righteous. All our righteous living is a direct result of Jesus' obedience. Just like we "were made sinners" because of Adam's disobedience, even so we "will be made righteous" because of Jesus' obedience.

In Job, we read how God "restores to man his righteousness" because He "found a ransom" (Job 33:24, 26). While we will only be perfectly righteous in heaven, when we

receive Jesus by faith, this process called sanctification starts. We owe everything good to Jesus and His ransom.

God made Jesus Our . . .

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

1 Corinthians 1:30

Substitution is a common term in sports. When a player is injured, he's substituted for one who is eager to play. Mankind has been fatally injured by its fall into sin. While its deadly outcome may not happen this very moment, the injuries are fatal.

The gospel is about substitution. Jesus became a Man, born in a manger, in order to gain eternal life for us. Our fall into sin left us helpless, incapable to do what's right. We became subject to sin and death, awaiting the final whistle, which is eternal separation from God.

In His infinite love, God gave Jesus as our substitute. He fulfilled all God's requirements, both in His life and death. He has become the source of our salvation. From the very beginning and throughout eternal ages, Jesus is our salvation. *That* is true wisdom. All our righteousness, sanctification, and glorification are in Him!

As God's creatures, we owe Him a life of undivided devotion, which is characterized by living according to His will. We, on the other hand, go our own way: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way" (Isa. 53:6). In Romans, we read: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). In order for God to accept us, we need a flawless life. Jesus came to fulfill all righteousness. *He* has become our perfect standing before God.

Not only do we need to be declared righteous in order to be accepted by a holy God, we also need to be changed. God doesn't leave us in our sinful state. He's also the one who makes us righteous. That's a lifelong process called sanctification.

When we're saved, we're united to Jesus as a branch is united to a vine. As the branch receives all life, growth, and fruitfulness from the vine, so do we from Jesus: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for *apart from me you can do nothing*" (John 15:4-5). He has become our sanctification.

The final aspect of our salvation is glorification, also referred to as redemption. Glorification is the completion of our sanctification when we'll be perfectly righteous. That will happen when we die or when Jesus comes back. Then, we'll forever enjoy the

finished work of Christ, who brought in “everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24). That’s our glorious hope in the midst of a fallen world.

Jesus Came to Save Sinners

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

1 Timothy 1:15

John Newton, a former slave trader and author of *Amazing Grace*, stated that he only knew two things when he was about to die: I'm a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior. That is also true for us, whether we realize this or not.

Paul introduced one of the greatest hope-giving statements in the Bible with a strong emphasis. While all God's words are "trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance," he wanted to make it abundantly clear in what he was about to write.

Jesus left heaven's glories to save sinners. What does it mean to be a sinner? The word *sin* literally means "to miss the goal." We've been created for the enjoyment of God's glory, which gives the greatest happiness. Sin, however, deceives us into believing that the grass is greener on the other side.

Rather than trusting God, we reject Him. To be a sinner is to rebel against God's rightful claim on our lives. It's to commit high treason against the king of the universe. Consequently, we're in a perilous state and desperately need salvation from our just condemnation.

To be saved means to be forgiven and accepted into God's favor for time and eternity. Jesus came to save us: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). We can be freely forgiven and fully accepted into God's favor by trusting in who Jesus is and what He has accomplished on the cross.

Salvation isn't only about our forgiveness and acceptance, but also about a major change in how we live. When Jesus saves us, He begins to change us, so that we will start doing things that are pleasing in God's sight.

Here's the true test whether or not we're really trusting in Jesus: is there spiritual growth? If there's no change in how we live our lives, evidenced by a growing conformity to God's word, we may not be saved at all.

The apostle Paul formerly persecuted the church. God saved him. Charles Spurgeon made a comment that it was not a coincidence that Paul referred to himself as the *foremost* sinner. If God saved the chief of sinners, there's hope for everyone. Have you already trusted Jesus to save you?

God Is My Portion Forever

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

Psalm 73:26

One of the sobering realities of life is that we're frail human beings. While we like to think highly of ourselves and our abilities, we're like a flower that fades: "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades" (Isa. 40:6-8). No matter how great and glorious we may seem, we're only like "a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

It's astonishing how much we boast in ourselves, while a simple virus can disable us and frustrate our plans, not even considering more severe diseases. When I was younger, I watched *The World's Strongest Man*. What a display of human power! Yet, if they were to dislocate their shoulder, they would cringe with pain and their boasting would fall to the ground. What if God were to take away their breath? They would accomplish *nothing*. Consider Mohammed Ali, who once boasted to be the world's greatest boxer. Later on, he was barely able to speak or walk.

It's fitting for frail human beings to be humble and deeply realize that it is God who gives us life and breath. He's also the one who takes it away when He pleases: "When you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust" (Ps. 104:29). It's good to know how utterly dependent we are on Him. Having said all that, let's look at today's verse.

We don't know what we'll be like in ten, twenty, or thirty years. Our bodily functions may have greatly diminished, or we may have suffered a stroke. One thing is certain: sooner or later, we'll become less strong and active. Our physical weakness may create great disillusionment, for we cannot do what we were once able to do. How will we relate to an ever-increasing infirmity? Or, what if our lives may not have been according to what we had hoped and planned?

When we become weak, it's God who will sustain us by His power—not so much physically, but mentally and spiritually. He'll encourage and strengthen us when our physical abilities begin to diminish and we realize we're nearing our end. Then, the only thing that's left is God as our eternal portion.

Our identity will no longer be based on our work, sports, wealth, physical abilities,

or anything else, but on God alone. When life is vanishing, we'll find comfort and joy in God as our eternal portion. Is He already your portion?

God's Promise

And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself."

Acts 2:38-39

When Jesus died, He obtained eternal glories for "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." From the beginning, right after Adam and Eve's fall into sin, God promised a savior—one who would conquer sin and death. When Jesus finished His work and ascended to the Father, the reality of that promise had been accomplished. On Pentecost, this was evident in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the believers.

God's salvation plan has always included "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). The promise is for those who heard Peter preach, their descendants, *and* "for all who are far off," both by distance and time. While the gospel is freely offered to everyone, there's no automatic salvation. Only those who repent and are baptized are the eternal beneficiaries.

To repent means to turn away from sin *and* turn to Jesus by faith. This process is called conversion. It may seem that repentance is a will-power decision, making a "new year's resolution" to simply stop sinning. That's not true.

While repentance is a turning away from sin, it's also a turning to Jesus as Savior, which includes His gracious work in our lives to change us. When we exercise faith, we acknowledge our need *and* confidence in God's grace and ability to save us.

Why does Peter also include baptism? Does baptism save? Baptism is our identification with Jesus in His death and resurrection. When we go down in the water, we identify ourselves as having died with Jesus. When we come up from the water, we identify ourselves as having been raised with Him to newness of life. Baptism is a faith-identification with Jesus' death and resurrection on our behalf.

So, what's the promise for those who repent and are baptized? Peter stated two eternal benefits: the forgiveness of our sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. When we believe in Jesus, we'll have complete forgiveness and God's eternal presence, dwelling within us. Have you already received God's promise?

The Greatest Gift

And are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 3:24

We're all in the same boat, whether we like it or not: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). It doesn't matter if we're rich or poor, powerful or weak, known or obscure; no one has any claim to God's favor.

We've lost the eternal enjoyment of His glory and deserve eternal separation from Him. Yet, God has provided a way of salvation: His Son Jesus Christ. It's through Him that we become eternal beneficiaries of God's grace and glory.

The greatest dilemma in our lives and the world is: "How can a man be in the right [stand righteous] before God? (Job 9:2). How can we approach an infinitely holy God without being consumed? The Bible is unmistakably clear that only perfectly righteous people can approach God.

Today's verse has the answer. God graciously gives us the righteousness of His Son as a free gift: "And are justified by his grace as a gift." This gift can never be earned or repaid. It's *grace alone!* That's why Christians, of all people, ought to be the humblest, realizing they deserve God's just wrath against their sins. Nonetheless, they freely receive His infinite favor.

When we receive God's indescribable gift by faith, God counts us as righteous, not for what we've done or will do, but for what Jesus has done. It's for *His* sake! To be declared righteous includes two aspects: to have never sinned *and* to have only done what's right. Jesus died for all our sins and lived a sinless life on our behalf. He's the righteous one. Therefore, when we receive Him by faith, God declares us righteous.

Redemption refers to a payment—a ransom. With His perfect life, Jesus paid for all the righteousness, blessings, provisions, and promises we freely receive through Him. Later on, Paul expressed that with these words: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). With His death, Jesus paid for all our sins: "Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). He satisfied God's justice!

By faith in who Jesus is and what He has done, we have His perfect righteous life and *everything* He's entitled to! Let's dwell on this glorious truth, realizing that this is a *free* gift to undeserving sinners. Have you already received God's unfathomable gift?

An Infinite Treasure

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Matthew 13:44

What's your perception of Christianity? Often, the Christian faith is perceived as a *do's* and *don'ts* religion, whereby the *do's* are a great burden and the *don'ts* rob us of all enjoyment. That view is completely wrong. Unfortunately, we do sometimes perpetuate that kind of view by our lack of excitement.

The Christian faith is about an infinite treasure that's freely given. It's a treasure that will bring temporal and eternal joy. If we have to choose between that which has hardly any value and only lasts a little while, and that which is of infinite value and lasts forever, what would be your choice?

Throughout His ministry, Jesus often spoke in parables, which are physical illustrations of spiritual truths. They help us understand the spiritual realities of life that we cannot perceive with our physical eyes. In today's verse, we have such a parable.

The kingdom of heaven is Jesus' rule and reign. Whether we like it or not, we're subject to certain spiritual realities, just like gravity in our physical world. We're either subject to sin and death or to Jesus and His reign.

Like gravity, we cannot escape these realities. What if we just decided to reject the law of gravity and jump from the Empire State Building? It's no surprise, then, that mankind has fallen into ruin, incapable of restoring itself, even though we may try.

Jesus said: "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). He also stated: "So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). We're either slaves to sin with eternal separation from God as the end result, or we're beneficiaries of Jesus' gracious rule and reign in our lives, having eternal life and everlasting joy.

When we truly discover Jesus, there are definite results. There's great joy because Jesus is infinitely more valuable than all the things in this world. He's an infinite treasure! Paul made that clear when he wrote: "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8). Jim Eliot captured that with these words: "He is no fool who gives

[up] what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.”

The Christian faith is both a sobering *and* exhilarating reality. It's sobering because sin and death are real, and we are its subjects by nature. It's exhilarating because Jesus came to save us from our sins and conquer death. His resurrection demonstrates His victory. Have you already discovered this infinite treasure? It is too great to ignore!

The Gift of Repentance

God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.

Acts 5:31

Salvation is free! We can never deserve or earn it. Jesus purchased our salvation; His finished work is perfect and complete. Yet, salvation is conditioned on our repentance and faith. There's no universalism where everyone automatically gets saved. One must have a favorable response to the gospel. There are two sides of the same coin: repentance is a *turning from* sin and faith is a *turning to* God through Jesus. This process is called conversion. Today, we'll see that these conditions are also gifts from God.

In Acts, we read: "Who *through grace* had believed" (Acts 18:27). Jesus is "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Paul wrote that our faith in God is "through Christ" (2 Cor. 3:4). While summing up salvation and faith, he wrote: "It is the gift of God . . . so that no one may boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

When Jesus ascended to the Father, He stated: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18). The Father highly exalted His Son "and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:9-11).

Since Jesus has all authority and power, He can change the hardest and most callous heart. No one is beyond His ability! Were it not for Him, there would be no hope for anyone's conversion. This deeply humbles us, showing our dependence, as Paul also wrote: "God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim. 2:25).

However, it's also encouraging because *He* is able. Jesus summarized salvation as follows, including the conditions of repentance and faith: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).

While this was specifically addressed to the Jews at that time, we know that these gifts are for every nation and language: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Ultimately, Jesus' efficacious death secured these gifts for His people. Entrust yourself to Him.

True and Everlasting Rest

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

Life can be hectic at times. As frail human beings, we can only take so much. How easy it is to snap at those we love when we're overwhelmed. Sometimes, we're on a roller coaster or in a downward spiral that knows no end. Sooner or later, our burdens become too heavy and we try to find relief.

Jesus invites us to find rest for our troubled soul. He alone can do so. Every other relief is only temporal and not real. Even Christians easily forget this truth. The old hymn is accurate: "Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we're to bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer." It's comforting to know that His invitation is timeless.

The greatest burden we can bear is the burden of sin, whether we realize this or not. In the olden days, preachers would refer to it as an awakened conscience. Our conscience can be seared, though (see 1 Tim. 4:2).

Then, we're not aware of the dreadful reality of our sins. Consequently, we don't feel its awful load—a (spiritually) dead man doesn't feel anything. When our conscience awakes to the reality of our sins and God's just wrath against them, there's no greater burden. It can easily crush us. Jesus invites us to experience lasting relief and rest.

This is in sharp contrast to every other religion and sect, which is about our supposed good works. Many try their best in order to gain heaven, following certain rules and regulations to ease their conscience. That can also become an unbearable burden or a major disillusionment.

The Christian faith is about Jesus' righteous life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection. It's about *His* good works! Jesus can give true rest because He lived a righteous life on our behalf and died for all our sins. We can enter into His rest—share in His finished work. We simply have to put our whole trust in Him.

When we look at the context of today's verse, we see that Jesus states that no one knows the Father but He alone, "and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt. 11:27). His next statement is today's invitation: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

In other words: come to me and I will reveal the Father to you, and you will find rest for your soul. When we receive Jesus by faith, we're adopted into God's family and will

experience His loving care. *That* is our true and everlasting rest.

Our Daily Food

Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

John 6:54

Jesus made numerous controversial statements throughout His life. It's fair to say He's the most controversial person in history. One of His most controversial statements is: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). He made an exclusive claim that He *alone* is the way to God. We either embrace or reject Him. With Jesus, there are no grey areas. It's all or nothing! In today's verse, we have a similar controversial claim.

Unless we eat each day, we'll become weaker and weaker. The same is true for our spiritual vitality. In order to help us understand spiritual truths, Jesus used plain and ordinary illustrations we can relate to—eating and drinking.

Many were perplexed when Jesus made that statement and said, "How can He give us His flesh to eat and His blood to drink?" They were offended and left Him. His disciples, though, stayed with Him and said: "You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).

Faith is sometimes referred to as the hand that receives. Here, Jesus used a metaphor for believing, illustrating it by our eating and drinking. He specifically referred to His death on the cross and the blood He would shed. It's by faith we receive His sacrifice and have eternal life.

Notice the present tense of feeding and drinking. It's not just a one-time act, but a life of faith, realizing His death and blood is our very life and strength. We're to daily dwell on this gracious and glorious reality for our soul's temporal and eternal well-being. Many who have walked down an aisle and made a profession of faith have never understood this. That's not the kind of faith that saves. The faith that saves is a faith that continually dwells on Jesus as our very life and only hope.

When we believe with saving faith—perseverant faith—we have eternal life. That doesn't mean we won't physically die, but it means that Jesus will raise us up with glorified bodies when He comes back. This is our hope: not death, but Jesus has the final say!

Believing Is Receiving

But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13

Charles Spurgeon likened faith to a pipeline. When we open the faucet, water flows out. While it's the pipeline that brings the water from the source, it's the water that quenches our thirst and cleans the dirty dishes. Faith is like that. While faith is crucial, it's only the water that satisfies and cleanses.

When we open the faucet, we don't honor the pipeline but enjoy the water. The same is true with Jesus and our faith in Him. In essence, we are to be oblivious about our faith and only look to Jesus. By its very nature, faith doesn't focus on itself but on the Savior. In that sense, the amount of faith isn't the main issue—Jesus is.

To believe in Jesus is to receive Him. The gospel is rather simple: we deserve eternal separation from God in a horrible place called hell, which doesn't disappear when we deny its existence. God gave His Son to die for our sins and, as a result, we can be *freely forgiven* and *fully accepted*, having eternal life and pleasures forevermore. The only thing we are to do is receive His indescribable gift by faith, which means we trust Him.

When we receive Jesus, we're adopted into God's family: "In love he predestined us for adoption as sons *through Jesus Christ*, according to the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5). The Bible refers to salvation as being "in Christ," which means we're partakers—shareholders—of who He is and what He has accomplished. Paul wrote: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The new birth is solely "of God." While scientist can do a lot of things, they cannot create life out of nothing, which is what the new birth is all about. Only God can do so! The only answer I can give is for you to trust in Jesus: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" (1 John 5:1). Why wait any longer?

True Peace

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

John 14:27

The world is crying for peace. Ironically, it rejects the One who is the *Prince of Peace*, Jesus Christ. While focused on wars and calamities, seeking a solution, it ignores the greatest war of all—its war with God.

Our most severe crisis is our enmity toward God, expressed through our sins and indifference toward Him. We're desensitized from our true state of affairs. Sin deceives us into thinking we're fine, while nothing is further from the truth: "While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). As long as we persist in our sins, God's judgment is hanging over our head.

Our greatest need is to be at peace with Him. We may have everything going for us, but if we don't have peace with God, it's just an optical illusion. Our wealth or wisdom won't save us.

That's why the gospel—Jesus' death and resurrection—is such good news! While we rebelled, God offers eternal peace and complete restoration. Why reject such an offer? Amazingly, it will be extended till our last breath. Why wait, though?

Notice in today's verse that Jesus gives us *His* peace. He came to save sinners and bring about reconciliation. He did so by living a sinless life on our behalf and by dying for our sins. Through the cross, God judged His Son for our sins. When we trust in Jesus, we're reconciled with our maker and have peace with Him—a peace that isn't based on our feelings or performance, but solely based on His Son.

That doesn't mean that no difficulties or disasters will come our way. What it does mean is that we can rest in the Father's love and care in the midst of it. To whom will an atheist flee for comfort?

While we will face various troubles throughout our lives, we can have "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Have you already been reconciled with God? Why wait any longer? Simply turn to Jesus and receive Him by faith.

Definite Hope

In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began.

Titus 1:2

Here's one of the most fundamental questions: is there life after death? Do you continue to exist, or is there no reality after you exhale your last breath? Death is obviously not a favorite topic. It's surrounded by mysteries. The Bible, however, makes it clear there's continuous conscious existence when you step into eternity.

Then, the most vital issue is: how have you responded to God's abundant grace, expressed and freely given through His Son? Have you ignored and spurned His infinite mercy, or have you gladly embraced Him? As believers, we have the assurance that death is the doorway to our eternal bliss.

We all like to have certainties in life, whether a good pay check, a loving family, or anything else that sustains or increases our comfort. Uncertainties easily lead to anxiety and stress.

While many things may give us some level of certainty, the most solid truth upon which to build our lives is God's word. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have the definite hope of eternal life. By the way, the biblical definition of hope doesn't mean probabilities but certainties.

Why can Christians have this kind of hope? The answer is plainly given: God never lies. In Hebrews, we read: "So that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us" (Heb. 6:18). Christians have "fled for refuge" — fled to Jesus—to hold fast to the certainty of God's unfailing word.

Christians are believers in Jesus who bank on God's promises. They believe that "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19). They entrust their lives to Jesus—who He is and what He has accomplished, obtained, and promised to do.

From before the foundation of the world, God knew we would rebel against Him and lose the sweet communion with our maker. Death entered the human race, including eternal separation from God as a result. While knowing what man would do, God already promised eternal life—the eternal enjoyment of God—even "before the ages

began." His love and grace are infinitely greater than our rebellion. What kind of hope do you have?

Joy and Pleasures

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11

There's no one who has been more slandered, mistreated, and misrepresented than God. Most views portray Him as gloom and doom. The general view seems to be of a God who only tells us what to do, wanting to make our lives miserable by all kinds of restrictions. Nothing is further from the truth. God is a God of joy and pleasures. The proper view is: "In your presence there is *fullness of joy*; at your right hand are *pleasures forevermore*."

Everyone follows a certain path of assumptions, convictions, ideas, philosophies, hopes, etc. The Bible talks about "a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death" (Prov. 14:12). We're either on "the path of life" or in "the way of death." By nature, we're in "the way of death"—alienated from our maker with eternal separation from Him as the end result.

Which way are you travelling—toward or away from your maker? How would you feel if you travelled the wrong road, believing it's the right one? Jesus stated that many are on this road. In His infinite mercy, God has provided "the path of life." He's also the one who makes it known to us.

When Peter made his confession of faith, believing that Jesus is the Christ—the one whom God, the Father, had promised would come to save His people from their sins—Jesus stated: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17). God is the one who makes "the path of life"—the path to the eternal enjoyment of God—known to us: "Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in the way" (Ps. 25:8).

The "fullness of Joy" will ultimately be experienced in heaven and on the new earth. But even now, we can have such joy: "Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

Not only will we experience the "fullness of joy," but also the "pleasures forevermore." Sometimes people consider heaven a boring place. That's completely false. Heaven is all about God's presence with "fullness of joy" and "pleasures forevermore." Since God is infinite—without limit or boundary—even so are the joys

and pleasures we'll experience. When we receive Jesus by faith, God is our eternal portion.

All Things!

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Romans 8:32

This is one of the greatest verses in the Bible. It overflows with infinite love, grace, and mercy. If we were able to continually live in these glorious truths, our lives would be radically different.

Unfortunately, many times our faith is weak, unable to consistently hold fast to these wonderful gospel truths. The Bible makes it clear that our faith needs to be constantly fueled by God's word. Today's verse is one of the best faith-fueling verses.

No one has any claim on God. He doesn't owe us *anything*! The Bible makes it clear that we're under His wrath because of our sins. That reality obviously doesn't make it on *The New York Times Best Sellers* list. "Isn't God a God of love?" is a common response when His just wrath is emphasized.

Some even stay away from this subject in order not to offend or make people feel uncomfortable. Is that love? True love warns of danger. The gospel truths are only clearly seen in light of our just condemnation. It's only then that we see the amazing grace of our creator.

Today's verse expresses the heart of the gospel: God sent Jesus to suffer the wrath we deserve. When Jesus died, He "bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). He suffered the punishment for our rebellion. There's no greater love story! God gave Jesus over to suffering and death, so that we can be *freely forgiven* and *fully accepted*. That is genuine love!

We also have one of the great biblical arguments: if God expressed infinite love to those who only deserve His wrath, will He withhold any good from them? Horatius Bonar wrote it as follows: "He that has already given the greater gift, will he deny the less? He that has already given us the whole ocean, will he refuse us a single drop? He that has given us unfathomable mines of gold, will he deny us a single particle? He that has given us the full sun in the firmament, will he deny us a solitary beam?"

The Bible defines salvation as a marriage. If the richest man in the world were to marry the poorest woman, she would then become the richest woman. Even so with us! When we receive Jesus by faith, we will share in everything He has accomplished and obtained as the Son of Man. A blessed union, indeed!

Three Distinct Responses

But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:23-24

One of the more interesting lessons I learned in school was verbal and non-verbal communication. We “speak” all the time, including by not responding. Our yes or no can be as easily communicated by our actions as by our words. We continually communicate to our surroundings as to who we are and what we stand for. Today, we see three distinct responses to Jesus Christ. These responses can be expressed by our words and, even more so, by the way we live our lives.

Paul’s message was simple: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He always emphasized the cross of Jesus Christ. It was the heart and essence of his ministry. He didn’t come with “lofty speech or wisdom” (1 Cor. 2:1), but with the confronting *and* comforting reality of Jesus’ sufferings and atoning death. He listed three responses to his message. To which one do you adhere to?

The Jews were religious. They believed they could gain heaven by their own supposed goodness. They lived by the rule of the law that states: “The person who does the commandments shall live by them” (Rom. 10:5). They were seeking to establish their own righteousness and so obtain God’s favor and glory. When Paul preached, “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Rom. 3:10-12), they were greatly offended.

They couldn’t accept that their only hope for salvation was in a Messiah who died on the cross. Their pride wouldn’t allow them to humbly acknowledge that all their “good” works were worthless and weighed *nothing* in the scale of God’s justice. They stumbled over their own supposed self-sufficiency.

The second category wasn’t religious at all. They lived for pleasure. If it feels good, just do it—indifferent about morality or any accountability to their creator. When they heard about Jesus dying on the cross for sins, they laughed at it—perhaps not audibly, but definitely with their actions. They considered Jesus’ sacrifice as foolishness.

The last category is related to those who consider the cross as their only hope in time

and eternity. They are the called-ones of God, having responded with faith in Jesus. They cast their whole being on the truth of the gospel, trusting in God's power and wisdom to save them. Is that also your response? Until your last breath, it will not be too late to respond in faith. Why wait?

Saved or Condemned?

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

John 3:18

How much do you value truth? Do you consider it important? Should you pursue it? At times, we have a tendency to bend truth to our liking in order to advance our cause. While these little “white” lies may be seemingly harmless, there are certain truths that must be known and respected.

For example, the law of gravity is an unfailing reality. What about the truth that you will be arrested, tried, and sentenced if you kill an innocent person with premeditated intent? There are many truths that are daily realities even when we’re not aware of them—the police officer who checking your speed. Truth is synonymous with reality. One of the greatest realities is found in today’s verse.

When we read the Bible, it’s always important to consider the context. John wrote: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:16-17).

After these statements, we have a summary of our reality: “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:18). Plain and simple: if we believe in Jesus, we won’t be condemned for our sins, but if we don’t believe in Him, we are *already* condemned.

Notice the “whoever” in both the salvation and condemnation. No matter how great a sinner and rebel we may be, if we believe in Jesus, we won’t be condemned. Such faith isn’t just mental agreement, but a wholehearted trust in Jesus as one’s Savior. On the other hand, we may be the most religious or moral person who has ever walked this earth; yet, if we don’t believe in Jesus, we are “condemned already.”

The sobering reality is that those who don’t believe in Jesus are *already* condemned. Their sentence has *already* been pronounced. They’re awaiting their execution; it’s only a matter of time. John confirmed the same at the end of this chapter: “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but *the wrath of*

God remains on him" (John 3:36).

When we reject Jesus, there's no hope for the forgiveness of our sins, but only a pending judgment. In his first letter, John also defined the essence of everyone's daily reality: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12). Have you already received Jesus by faith, or are you still condemned?

A Final Word to those Who. . .

Responded with Faith

There's great joy in heaven when you respond with faith to the message of the gospel. When you believe in Jesus, you're freely forgiven and fully accepted, enjoying God's favor. These gospel truths aren't dependent on your feelings or frame of mind. You have become God's adopted son or daughter. The Bible tells you to hold fast to the gospel: "Now I would remind you, brothers [and sisters], of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1-2). There are three vital things you need in your new life as a Christian:

1. Read God's Word

In Romans, Paul wrote: "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). Our faith in Jesus needs to be constantly fueled by God's word. There are many good resources available to help you understand what God is saying in His word.

2. Pray to Him

You are now God's adopted son or daughter. You have a relationship with Him. Besides listening to Him through His word, He also wants to listen to you. The Bible tells you to "pour out your heart before him" (Ps. 62:8). Since He's now your Father, He will listen and respond.

3. Worship Together

The Christian life is not a lone-ranger experience. We need each other. The Bible likens Christians to a body where every part is indispensable *and* dependent. Find a good church where the gospel is preached and where you are encouraged to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18).

Responded with Unbelief

I want to express my appreciation for reading this book. I sincerely regret that you haven't accepted the gospel message. If you have any questions or if anything wasn't clear, I would love to hear from you. The gospel is extended to you till your very last breath. It will never be too late to respond with faith while you walk this earth. I do

hope and pray that some good seeds have been planted that will, one day, grow into your eternal salvation.

One Question...

If you've been blessed by this book, will you please write a review? I greatly appreciate that. Click this link to go to the review page.

Also, if you would like to receive encouraging devotionals and free Christ-centered books, you can join my blog at www.thecauseofchrist.com/blog

About the Author

I love to write devotionals—taking a Bible verse and diving into its truth and application, especially how it relates to and testifies of Jesus.

I was born and raised in the Netherlands. Jan is the Dutch equivalent of John and is pronounced “yawn.” When I was 19, I entered the U.S. for the first time and volunteered at Times Square Church, working on the Raven Truck and at The Upper Room, reaching out to the homeless. I did that for one year.

When I returned home, I started my external undergraduate degree program with Global University (at that time known as ICI University), while working at the Salvation Army at a homeless shelter in Rotterdam. In 2001, I had the opportunity to pursue my graduate degree program on a work scholarship in Florida. I taught at a Christian academy and a seminary for six years.

In 2007, I married Rachel and we have two children—Hannah and Isaiah. We reside in the Daytona Beach area and attend Christ Community Church. I invite you to check out my websites at www.thecauseofchrist.com or www.christ-centered-books.com

Books by the Author

You can purchase these books at [Christ-Centered Books](#) or the major online retailers (75% royalty goes to the spread of the gospel through reputable ministries).

An Unfathomable Gift!: God's Astonishing Grace

A Glorious Sacrifice: Seeing and Savoring God's Matchless Love

Battling Sexual Temptations and Sins: Overcoming through God's Word and Spirit

Joy to the World: Christmas throughout the Year

The Glory of Christ: Discovering Ultimate Meaning – Finding True Fulfillment

A Christ-Centered Identity: Discovering Your God-Given Identity in His Son

In Christ Alone: What Every Christian Needs to Know More Deeply and Experience More Profoundly

Meeting God at Wits' End: Hope for the Weary

God's Triumphant Mercy: A Reflection of Psalm 51

When Good Things Happen to Bad People: A Fallen World and a Faithful Promise

It's All about Jesus: The Bible's Grand Testimony

His All-Sufficient Blood: Living in the Daily Reality of What Jesus Conclusively Accomplished and Obtained

What Does It Mean to Be Filled with the Holy Spirit? A Crucial Consideration of the Ministry and Message of John the Baptist

Adam and Jesus: Two Men, Two Roots, and Two Destinies

Jesus: God's Inexpressible Gift to You