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Q
2005

The Meaning of It All



A Devotional Bible-Study Guide
for Young Adults



<http://cq.adventist.org>

The Meaning of It All



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CQ is written by Seventh-day Adventist young adults and their friends around the world.

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Welcome to *CQ's* World



The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writers who have participated in *CQ's* writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School Bible study guide, four hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000. It is published in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Indonesian, and Finnish.

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This Quarter's Illustrator



Evangeline G. Tayamora—"Vange," as she is called by her friends—grew up and was educated at Adventist University of the Philippines. She is currently working as one of the in-house artists of Philippine Publishing House where *CQ* is reprinted for Philippine distribution. She does book layout, cover designs, and illustrations for *Health and Home* magazine.

Getting the Most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject. Circulation of *CQ* is about 70,000.

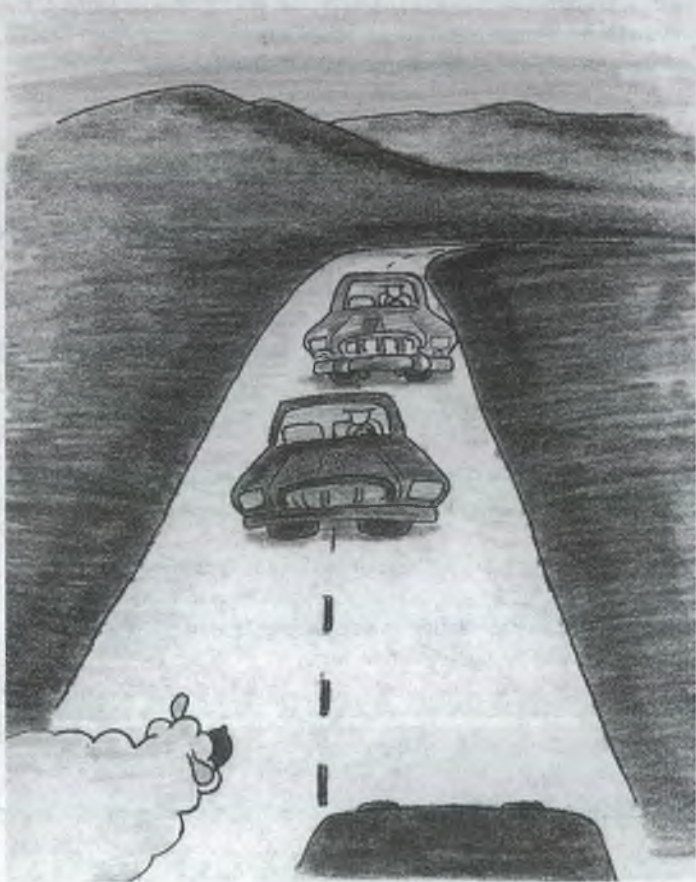
POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.
3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.
4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:
 - "Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
 - "Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.
 - "Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
 - "Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
 - "How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
 - "Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.
 - "Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

The Provocation and Provision



“The LORD God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ ” (Gen. 3:9, NKJV).

Predestination or Free Will?

INTRODUCTION

Gen. 3:9

If you have ever been to New Zealand, you will remember the sheep. Thousands of them. Sheep all over the hills. Sheep all over the mountains. And they, of course, have the right of way. When you come across a flock of sheep on the road, you just stop your car and wait for them to go by. And that happens often.

A friend of mine told me about an experience on his sightseeing tour in New Zealand. He came across an enormous flock of sheep. There were sheep everywhere, as far as he could see. They were in the care of two shepherds and one dog. The dog seemed to be everywhere at the same time, rushing this way and that, keeping his eyes on every single sheep, making sure that none strayed from the flock.

As the flock drew near to the waiting car of my friend, it turned left onto a side road that led to new pastureland up in the green hills.

Hundreds and hundreds of sheep passed by, an unforgettable sight. As the last of the sheep turned off the main highway onto the side road, and as the drivers of waiting cars were starting their motors, ready to go again, a small lamb suddenly turned and ran back toward the highway. It came between the cars and headed down the road along which the flock had just come. Maybe it thought that, seeing it had been at the back of the flock, nobody would notice if it ran away.

Just like the little lamb, our ancestors, Adam and Eve, turned aside from the road. Our loving God had created them with the possibility to choose between trusting Him and obeying what He said, and trying the other way of disrespect and disobedience. They weren't predestined or programmed to choose only the right way. They had free will to make their own decision. And they exercised their free will without realizing all the consequences that were to come thereafter.

But God in His infinite love had already prepared a way out: the plan of salvation. He first sought Adam and Eve and didn't leave them in despair. Regardless of their unfaithfulness, He didn't give up. He reached them with His helping hand and offered to give them a new chance to live a life of freedom in Him or to go on without Him. Love never intrudes. It always gives the right of choice and freedom. Love seeks and finds; love never gives up; love never ends. Love is the theme that inspires and is of interest for the people of all generations. The theme of God's everlasting love will be the focus of our reflections this week.

**A small lamb suddenly
turned and ran back
toward the highway.**

Love and Obedience

LOGOS

Genesis 1-3; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37; John 15:9-11

Matthew 22:37

Asked about the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus replied briefly but very clearly "Love the Lord" (Matt. 22:37, KJV). Only three words, which contain the sense of the whole law. It seems to be so simple: Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 6:5.

"There must first be love in the heart before a person can, in the strength and by the grace of Christ, begin to observe the precepts of God's law. . . . Obedience without love is as impossible as it is worthless. But where love is present a person will automatically set out to order his life in harmony with the will of God as expressed in His commandments."*

In relationships between humans, love is one of the main sources of inspiration and motivation. It has the power to help us see everything in a different light. It

**Jesus wants us not only to
love Him but to remain
in His love.**

changes the point of view and makes the impossible seem easily done. In our relation to God, love is the most important element. Everything that God has done for us would have been impossible without love.

Everything that we are trying to do without love doesn't make much sense. Only when we open our hearts and accept God's illimitable love can we be capable of reflecting that love to others and of accomplishing all the other commandments. It is all a response to that love.

John 15:9-11

Abiding in obedience and in the love of Christ cannot be separated. Obedience produces fellowship and nearness that could never be produced by all the zeal in the world. Someone has said that obedience is the key that unlocks the door to the indwelling Christ. Obedience is the test of whether we have faith in Jesus. "By their fruits you will know them" (Matt. 7:20, NKJV).

A favorite song goes like this: "Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." We have our Savior's example. He was obedient to His Father's commandment, and He abode in His love. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NKJV). Everything goes back to love. "Love is fulfilling the law" (Rom. 13:10, KJV), not its breaking, denial, or neglect.

Jesus wants us not only to love Him but to remain in His love. There are many

relationships nowadays that end. And it's not so easy for a friendship to remain unchanged and as strong as it was in the beginning.

It has become difficult for a relationship to remain strong. But Jesus offers us a solution: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10, NKJV). This looks a bit strange at first glance. Obey His commands. How can this help us remain in love with Him? In all relations between business partners there are certain laws to be considered. In the relations between a man and a woman there are also principles, without which a relationship would be unthinkable. Nothing works without laws. In order to remain in a living and loving relationship with God, we also need to obey His commands. "His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3, NKJV).

Deuteronomy 6:5

Although there is a common understanding that the God of the Old Testament is despotic in His requirements of man in contrast to the notion of a New Testament loving God, the biblical reality and the historical facts are quite different. On every page of the holy history of the Old Testament, we find again the God of the New Testament—the God of love. As such He reveals Himself in the most significant record, disclosing His will and moral principles, "showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments" (Exod. 20:6, NKJV). This idea is included in the sermon of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (6:5, NKJV). As in antiquity and so today, the full value relationship between God and humanity is based on unselfish, pure, and sacred love. Only it can bring our thoughts, feelings, and will under control. Then life is fulfilled and the spiritual experience complete.

REACT

1. How would you answer a friend who thinks that God limits your acts and behavior?
2. Point out at least three examples from the Old Testament proving that God is love.
3. What is it that people have frequently missed by seeing the Old Testament God as severe in contrast to a loving Jesus in the New Testament?
4. In what way is love, ultimately, the fulfilling of the law of God?
5. How would you summarize the kind of love spoken of in today's article that is the basis of all of God's "commands"?
6. How can we experience that kind of love? Be specific.

* *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 484.

The Provocation and the Provision

TESTIMONY

Gen. 3:1-6

“Our first parents . . . were to enjoy communion with God and with holy angels; but before they could be rendered eternally secure, their loyalty must be tested. At the very beginning of man’s existence a check was placed upon the desire for self-indulgence, the fatal passion that lay at the foundation of Satan’s fall. The tree of knowledge, which stood near the tree of life in the midst of the garden, was to be a test of the obedience, faith, and love of our parents.”¹

That is how “God placed man under law, as an indispensable condition of his very existence. He was a subject of the divine government, and there can be no government without law. God might have created man without the power to transgress His law; He might have withheld the hand of Adam from touching the forbidden fruit; but in that case man would have been, not

“There can be no government without law.”

a free moral agent, but a mere automaton. Without freedom of choice, his obedience would not have been voluntary, but forced.”²

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve did not pass the test of obedience—they violated God’s law. Are we ready to pass this test today? Will we be among the winners in the end? In our daily fight against evil, let us always have in mind that

● Satan “cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control.”³

● “Satan watches to see his bait taken so readily, and to see souls walking in the very path he has prepared!”⁴

● “If we venture on Satan’s ground, we have no assurance of protection from his power. So far as in us lies, we should close every avenue by which the tempter may find access to us.”⁵

REACT

1. Why must freedom include the possibility to do wrong?
2. How do love and obligation fit together in God’s plan for our lives?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 48, 49.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

3. *Messages to Young People*, p. 60.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Freedom to Choose?

EVIDENCE

Gen. 3:22

The condition and the development of our world may be compared to an avalanche, sweeping and destroying everything in its way and at last destroying even itself. Genesis 3 shows us when this avalanche loosened and the reason that caused it. How did Satan succeed in deceiving an unfallen creature?

Usually we observe that Satan had provoked doubt in Eve. Doubt appeared, but later. When he started this conversation he had another aim: to create a false picture of God in her mind, to induce her to do what he wanted in a way she would think it was her exercise of independence. This is Satan's aim even today. He continues creating false pictures of God in the minds of the people.

God had told Adam and Eve not to eat from the forbidden tree. But the snake was in the tree and touched the forbidden fruit, took a bite of it, but didn't die. It even demonstrated qualities not typical of it—the possibility of speaking. What Eve saw was contrary to what God had said. That amazed her and attracted her. This opportunity was immediately used by her enemy

How did Satan succeed in deceiving an unfallen creature?

(Gen. 3:4, 5). Adam and Eve's eyes truly opened but only to realize their nakedness. Did they know good and evil? Actually, does God know evil? God knows good, but He had never known evil by experience until the first humans experienced it.

God realized this: " 'Man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil' " (verse 22, NKJV). Did man actually become like God?

The Hebrew word *hayah* can be translated also as "was." Then the verse would be "The man was as one of Us, to know good and evil." Before the Fall the humans were able to discern between good and evil. We don't have this ability anymore. The Holy Spirit gives it to us as a gift.

Satan could deceive a pure being to sin when he presented God's character falsely: " 'Has God indeed said . . . ' " (3:1, NKJV).

Today we have a wonderful revelation of God's character in the personality and the life of Jesus Christ. Satan's aim is to pervert our concept of God. Jesus not only shows us the true image of God but also empowers every Christian to reveal Him.

REACT

Is the freedom to choose, apart from God, really freedom? Explain your answer.

HOW-TO

Genesis 3; Rom. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 2:16; Heb. 5:13, 14

Decision-making is a most difficult process for Christians because we must counteract our natural tendency toward evil. We point out the difficulty by quoting the numerous negative biblical examples beginning with Adam and Eve, who chose the wrong in the state of perfect innocence. However, there are a lot of positive stories: Enoch, Joshua, Naaman, King Jehoshaphat, Paul, etc. It's even more encouraging because they chose the right in the state of moral degradation. When we see people "conceived in sin" like us, yet choosing righteousness, we can be sure to achieve the same.

Naturally the best psychological advice for victorious decision making can be received from the best Therapist, our Lord, in His Word.

The more we perform an action, the more easy it will become to repeat it.

As with our body, so with our soul, exercise is the answer from above:

1. Have the right idea about God as a Father. Deep down in your soul there is an image of the parent, based on the experiences in the family. If we have felt valued and loved unconditionally, this image is positive. If we have been intimidated and severely restricted, the image is negative. Either way it influences our trust in God as our heavenly Father and determines our decision making for good or bad.

2. Use your will to believe in God's promises. When our feelings are down, it seems impossible to think positively. Here comes the master of the decision making: the will. If our thinking about God is objective, based on trust in His benevolence as a parent, we are able to oppose the downward feelings with our conscious decision to say, "I don't feel like believing You, but today I consciously choose to trust what You have said in Your Word." "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Ps. 50:15, NKJV). If you fail this time, you have lost the battle but not the war.

3. Exercise your senses to discern good from evil. Sin has the power to desensitize us to evil. Therefore we are sometimes surprised at our pitiful surrender to weaknesses. As with our body, so with our soul, exercise is the answer from above. With the right ideas about God and the conscious acceptance of His promises, we are able to choose the right thing to do. It is a psychological fact that the more we perform an action, the more easy it will become to repeat it. Moreover, in this way our senses will be taught to like the good and dislike the evil, because the change in senses is determined by the change in thinking and acting.

The Way of Separation

OPINION

Eccles. 4:9, 12; Heb. 10:25

"The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband while occupied in their daily labor in the garden; with him she would be in less danger from temptation than if she were alone. But absorbed in her pleasing task, she unconsciously wandered from his side. On perceiving that she was alone, she felt an apprehension of danger, but dismissed her fears, deciding that she had sufficient wisdom and strength to discern evil and to withstand it."

Even from its first pages the Bible presents a great truth: When Eve and Adam parted, they didn't resist the temptation.

We can apply this truth in the life of the modern Christian in two ways:

In the family. In the beginning God created man and woman to complement one another. They had to help, to encourage, and to love one another. Two personalities were to become one yet to retain their identity. Today many people do not understand correctly what it means to have freedom, and that is one reason for the growing percentage of the divorces not only in the world but among Christians also.

"The angels had cautioned Eve to beware of separating herself from her husband."

In the church. It is similarly related to the church. There are many today who think they can live as representatives of Christ in the world but not worship God in the church or participate in its initiatives. The danger today is to neglect Paul's words in Hebrews 10:25. And the church is God's family. In many ways in the Bible God presents the meaning and the importance of the church for the people who comprise it. It is the body and the bride of Christ, the temple, the family, the organization, the pillar and ground of the truth, the army. It is created first for those who are part of it and second for those who are not. Satan separated Eve from Adam; he separates families; he also separates (divides) the church. Separation—that is what he seeks. Thus he weakens families and the church, and as a result the connection between humans and God. If the relations between Christians and God are weak, we cannot expect that the society we live in could be different.

On the contrary Jesus strives to unite people. See John 17:21.

May His desire be ours. And may we not repeat Adam and Eve's mistake.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 53, 54.

2. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 132.

All You Need Is Love?

EXPLORATION

John 14:15, 23; 15:9-11

CONCLUDE

When I was a child, I thought as a child: My parents were ruthless, power-hungry dictators. Then I learned that the stove did, indeed, burn my skin, and the logic of loss inspired obedience. Then I saw through a glass darkly, but now, at the foot of the Cross, a Christian sees face to face, not by merit or fear, but by love. I do what my parents ask because they have sacrificed for me, and I obey the laws of God because I trust and understand that He first loved me.

CONSIDER

- Observing a busy intersection. Consider the same scene without traffic laws, lights, or signs. Think about these questions: If you imagine order still, even without laws, why? If you imagine chaos, why? Is it the possibility of such chaos that motivates you to obey God's laws?
- Interviewing an attorney about his or her motivation for becoming a lawyer and what he or she considers to be the most helpful and most destructive thing about the presence of laws in our society. What do they think are the motivations for their clients in breaking/keeping the laws?
- Making a list of your motivations for following God's laws. Try to be as honest as possible. Think about these questions: If there were no heaven, would you still obey God's laws? Would you still obey state laws if there were no jails or courts? Why or why not?
- Drawing a picture that represents your perception of your parents when you were 6, 13, and now. How do the pictures differ, if at all? If the pictures differ, how can this difference be applied, if at all, to the apparent differences between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament?
- Brainstorming on a piece of paper for words that first come to mind when you think of the word *love*. On another piece of paper, brainstorm words that first come to mind when you think of the word *law*. Are there words that appear on both lists? Why? If there is no overlap, why not?

CONNECT

Matthew 19:16-26.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Book III-Christian Behavior).

His Glorious purpose



“Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together” (Gen. 22:8, NKJV).

Why Isn't This Making News Headlines?

INTRODUCTION

John 10:17, 18

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32, NKJV).

Suppose an authentic, 1,000-year-old prophecy were found, containing explicit details of the life of a famous political leader.

Imagine the news reports of this discovery reading something like this: “The Smithsonian Institution announces that an ancient stone tablet has been found in a Central American temple ruin, near the remains of an early Mayan settlement. The stone was sealed inside a room and has been kept in a remarkably good state of preservation. After the most rigorous scientific testing, Smithsonian archaeologists

The Old Testament writings amount to a remarkably detailed “biography” of the Son of God.

are agreed that the stone is indeed from the Mayan period and contains an authentic prophecy of the life and labors of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Imagine the waves of excitement in most of the countries of the world! Suppose details of King's birthplace,

early childhood, inauguration, character, achievements, popularity, opposition, betrayal, assassination, etc., were all spelled out on the stone with remarkable accuracy even to the exact year, month, day, and hour of the leader's death! And all this one thousand years in advance!

That news story is of course a fictional one, but this one is fact: The claims of Jesus Christ are supported by just such a series of predictions!

The Old Testament writings, all of them completed hundreds of years before Christ's birth, contain over three hundred prophecies of Jesus Christ—amounting to a remarkably detailed “biography” of the Son of God—written many centuries in advance. This gathered prophetic witness could be likened to an assembly line of Old Testament prophecy. Like a car in the making—built up piece by piece as it passes slowly through the car-making factory—the image of the promised Deliverer, the Messiah, gradually takes shape and definition as the pages of the Old Testament are turned.

It can also be described as the overmastering phenomenon of Bible prophecy; this combined prophetic testimony provides Jesus Christ with unique credentials. No other religious leader—and no other personality in all history—ever stepped out of such an incredible background!

What Is Your Blood “Type”?

EVIDENCE

Heb. 10:17-19

Recently there has been a surge in popularity in the news, magazine articles, books, and television shows regarding the processes behind solving crimes. DNA testing has become a widespread topic of conversation, and stories appear almost daily in the news that reveal DNA information essential to discovering the identity of persons responsible for crimes.

Occasionally, however, years later, through DNA testing, a prisoner is found innocent. Just this week a popular talk show host interviewed a guest wrongfully imprisoned for a crime. After nine years in prison, he was declared innocent as a result of DNA testing. He was released just days following the death of his mother, who had been his strongest supporter during that time. Imagine having evidence against you altered, spending nine years of your life in prison, and all the while, being completely innocent!

Unfortunately we are
all guilty.

Unfortunately we are all guilty. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23, NKJV). Not only are our fingerprints, blood samples, and DNA matches found at the “crime scenes” of our lives, but weapons of premeditated passions, strangling sins, two-edged tongues, and acid-laced attitudes are found in our possession. Our collective sentence is death.

But our story does not end there. God promised Abraham that through his lineage, or his DNA (“seed”), the Messiah would come. The antitype of the animal sacrifices, and the blood of animals, pointed to the future, redeeming type and Jesus’ death on the cross. (See Hebrews 8.)

Blood tests can reveal many things about a person. Blood tests are used to diagnose disease or to gain information to offset potential health problems. DNA tests are used to get information regarding genotype, or genetic makeup, and physical characteristics. Blood tests also determine compatibility of blood types for the purpose of donating blood or receiving blood transfusions.

We were destined to a life sentence of sin, pain, and misery—and to living our lives on death row. Through the blood transfusion of Jesus, however, we are pardoned, released from our death sentence, and now have eternal life. Praise the Lord for DNA tests and blood tests, altered at the Cross, which now reveal that we are joint heirs with Jesus!

Monday
January 3

The Power of Sacrifice

LOGOS

Gen. 4:1-8; 22:1-19; Num. 21:4-9

Jesus came to die. “My Father loves Me,” He said, “because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father” (John 10:17, 18, NKJV). There is incredible power in the idea of a loving God willing—determined—to die for us.

A year before its release, I saw Mel Gibson’s much debated film on the Passion of Christ in a private screening given to board members of an influential public policy group (I was a guest only!). It was a visceral experience, somewhat akin to actually experiencing the physical agony of Christ’s last hours. The group sniffled, wept, and moaned throughout the screening. As we shared reactions afterward, it was obvious that all were moved by the experience. It gave new meaning to onscreen violence!

But is the story of Christ’s passion significant primarily because of the suffering He endured? Is it necessary, or even possible, to put the savagery of His last hours into a class beyond all human cruelty? I’m troubled to know that even in today’s world

**He revealed the gory
without the glory.**

people are tortured beyond belief for long periods of time, body parts mutilated or sliced off, organs cut out and eaten by torturers, family members brutalized and killed before their eyes, before they are at last themselves

bludgeoned to death. It is enough for me that Jesus was put to the end of human endurance. His death—and resurrection—is of transcendent value to me because He was God come to save. The value lies in what was symbolized by that suffering.

We must always keep this distinction between the glory of sacrifice and the glory of true sacrifice. Paul, in elaborating on true love, wrote that “though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing” (1 Cor. 13:3, NKJV). Certainly the type of religious exercises that hopes to gain merit from self-denial and votive candles is deluded at best. It can no more succeed than the self-assigned sacrifice of Cain reported in Genesis 4:1-8. Cain thought that his act was of value, losing sight of the fact that the specified act was symbolic and of value to him only through obedience (“To obey is better than sacrifice” [1 Sam. 15:22, KJV]). In rising up against his brother Abel, Cain revealed his absolute lack of understanding of the purpose of the ritual. He revealed the gory without the glory.

Abraham must have wondered at the command to sacrifice his son. This must have seemed like a strange act of God’s requiring, since it was out of character for

any of God's previous dealings. But he was willing to give all to God. And this was the key. He was a wealthy man, but even a cursory reading of the events leading to Isaac's birth would show that this son was his earthly treasure. Just so was the Godhead willing: Just so was Jesus willing to endure any and all suffering for us. How much of the cosmic symbolism of the occasion Abraham comprehended we can only surmise, but he cannot have failed to note God's approbation for not "withholding your only son."

But from Adam to Abraham the patriarchs knew that the death of a lamb symbolized the substitutionary penalty for their sins. It symbolized the mechanism by which God was removing the death penalty from sinners.

The rather curious story of the bronze serpent could not have failed to take on meaning even at the time of early wilderness wandering. Then as now the serpent had taken on a symbol of evil and temptation. By oral tradition the Israelites would have had the Eden narrative and the promise of God, given in the curse of the serpent, that the seed of the woman "shall bruise your head" (Gen. 3:15, NKJV). So when the literal snakes bit many who had murmured against God, they of course would see it as punishment for sin. Then when, at God's command, Moses made the bronze serpent and held it up on a pole for all to look at for healing, the symbol must have connected to that of a serpent vanquished. To us, of course, it adds so much to the words of Jesus when He said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32, NKJV).

If ever we need a lesson on the danger of adopting the symbol as literal, then we have it in the bronze serpent. Today we see it as a rich coming together of the promise of Satan's defeat with the promise of Christ the Redeemer and His sacrifice. Back then the people were inclined to view it as a talisman of faith at first, and then as an object of worship. Many generations later King Hezekiah "broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it" (2 Kings 18:4, NKJV).

In the *Passion* film, there is a scene that strays a little from the biblical narrative but is so rich in telling what the whole story is about. Jesus is in Gethsemene agonizing with His Father on how to proceed, battling His humanity for the willpower to proceed with Their plan to redeem humanity. As He kneels, a lurking figure we understand to be Satan releases a serpent. When Jesus proclaims, "Nevertheless, not My will but Thine," and stands up, the serpent slithers toward Him. He lifts His foot and stamps its head under His heel.

REACT

1. Was it the suffering of Christ that had value or the fact that He bore our penalty? Explain your answer.
2. As you contemplate anew the story of Christ's crucifixion in the Gospels, imagine yourself there in Jerusalem on that fateful weekend. Where do you think you would be in the story? How would you fit into this picture?

Tuesday
January 4

A Glimpse Into God's Heart

TESTIMONY

Gen. 22:1-19

Abraham and Sarah were so excited finally to have a son that they named him "laughter." This was the child they had waited a lifetime for. But God chose to use this close bond between father and son to give Abraham, and us, a picture of the depth of His love for us.

"Abraham believed that Isaac was the son of promise. He also believed that God meant just what he said when he bade him to go offer him as a burnt-offering. He staggered not at the promise of God; but believed that God, who had in his providence given Sarah a son in her old age and who had required him to take that son's life, could also give life again, and bring up Isaac from the dead." Even though he could not see it, Abraham trusted that God must have a bigger plan.

"The offering of Isaac was designed by God to prefigure the sacrifice of His Son. Isaac was a figure of the Son of God, who was offered a sacrifice for the sins of the world. God desired to impress upon Abraham the gospel of salvation to men; and in order to make the truth a reality, and to test his faith, He required Abraham to slay his darling Isaac. All the agony that

**"Abraham learned of God
the greatest lesson ever
given to mortal."**

Abraham endured during that dark and fearful trial was for the purpose of deeply impressing upon his understanding the plan of redemption for fallen man."² Not only was God testing Abraham's faith, but He was also offering a deeper understanding of His incredible gift of salvation.

"Abraham learned of God the greatest lesson ever given to mortal. His prayer that he might see Christ before he should die was answered. He saw Christ; he saw all that mortal can see, and live. By making an entire surrender, he was able to understand the vision of Christ, which had been given him. He was shown that in giving His only-begotten Son to save sinners from eternal ruin, God was making a greater and more wonderful sacrifice than ever man could make."³

REACT

How could Abraham identify with both God the Father and God the Son in being willing to sacrifice Isaac?

1. *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 99.
2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1094.
3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 469.

How to Go Cross-Eyed

HOW-TO

Isa. 64:6

Ever tried to find the image lost in a 3-D puzzle? You stare for minutes, transfixed on a repetitive pattern, hoping to see a 3-D image appear.

Finding meaning in the Cross is similar to a 3-D puzzle. The image is always there, just as Jesus is. Both require us to focus our eyes on them and go “cross-eyed.”

The Israelites in the wilderness faced a dilemma that shows us how to look at the Cross. After wandering in the desert, they grew impatient and began to complain. Poisonous snakes then arrived on the scene to give them something really to complain about. God, in His infinite mercy, provided healing by having Moses place a bronze snake on a cross. All the Israelites had to do was look at the cross. Our cross is Jesus, lifted up to give us eternal life. Simple? How then do we look at the Cross?

1. We recognize that we need changing. When the Israelites saw people dying because of the snakes, they realized the gravity of their situation. All humanity has been bitten by a poisonous snake—Satan. Sin infects all of our lives. “We are all infected and impure with sin” (Isa. 64:6, NLT). Isaiah goes on to mention that even our best efforts are but filthy rags. We are poor, naked, miserable, and blind without Jesus’ grace to cover us.

How then do we look at the Cross?

2. We recognize that we can’t change ourselves. Once the Israelites accepted the fact that the best medical facilities would not cure them, a change had to occur. They had to go to the Cross, which provided the antidote. We also need to change. We need to come to a place that we accept that nothing we can do will ever take us to live forever with Jesus. No amount of good work, cheerfulness, kindness, or holiness will ever get us there. Only God has the power to cure us from sin. Life will never be the same when we accept God’s life-changing power. He gifts us His Holy Spirit, who breathes within us to create a new life. We are not able to see the Holy Spirit, but we can see His effect on a person’s life.

3. We look to the One who can change us. Simply look. That was the command given to the Israelites. Once they raised their eyes to the cross, they were healed. Our snakes of sin are nailed to the cross through Jesus. His grace enables our salvation. Looking requires us to remove distractions that will stop us seeing the “image,” as in a 3-D puzzle. Once we look to Jesus to save us, fear and guilt depart on wings of hope.

Thursday
January 6

Sacrifice: the Greatest Price!

OPINION

Matt. 26:36-46; Luke 9:23

“Lest I forget Gethsemane; lest I forget Thine agony; lest I forget Thy love for me, lead me to Calvary.” This is the chorus from a song that resonates just what the Christian experience is all about. The author of these simple yet powerful words, Jennie E. Hussey, knew the true meaning of taking up her cross daily to follow her Savior. She devoted much of her life to taking care of an invalid sister and “through Gethsemane she came to understand the true meaning of obedience and surrender to God. This made her service not a burden, but a joy.”*

When reading Matthew 26:36-46, one must go down history lane to that moment in time. If you look, you can see the Savior who up till now has been unfaltering in His service to His Father. He has walked in the light of God, but now His heart is heavy and darkness seems to surround Him. He cannot see the light. See Him walk away

**We should never forget
the agony or the love.**

from His disciples, bidding them to pray with Him. Maybe He even stumbles and then He kneels. His back is bowed under a grief so unimaginable that He prays to the Father saying, “‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will’” (Matt. 26:39, NKJV). Reading these words should fill the heart with sorrow yet with joy. Why? Pain for the sorrow that we caused our Redeemer, but joy because He is our Redeemer.

Each of us has a Gethsemane experience. Whether it be asking God to take some burden from us or becoming weary. How many times have we gone to the garden to pray for ourselves and felt that the cup was too bitter to drink from? How many times to pray for others only to sleep while our brothers or sisters were thinking they were alone? Yet we have a Friend who never sleeps—who is constantly pleading on our behalf.

When we look at the Cross, we should never forget the agony or the love. Jesus says, “‘Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’” (Matt. 11:28, NKJV). What a mighty God we serve and how undeserving we are of the sacrifice made on Calvary. Each day should be a daily testimony to the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. We should take up our cross and count nothing as a sacrifice, but true and supreme joy.

*George W. Sanville, *Forty Gospel Hymn Stories* (1943), p. 44.

It's Personal

EXPLORATION

John 3:16, 17; 4:9, 10

CONCLUDE

Reading about it, studying about it, even watching graphic movies about it doesn't count. It's got to be personal. Christ's life, His gruesome death, His glorious resurrection are meaningless until we accept them as a personal gift.

God promised Abraham that he would father a nation as vast as the stars, but it wasn't until Isaac was in his arms that he fully accepted that promise. The story of Abraham's faith as he poised on the brink of sacrificing his one true son is a small vignette of God's sacrifice of His own Son. It was personal for God too.

CONSIDER

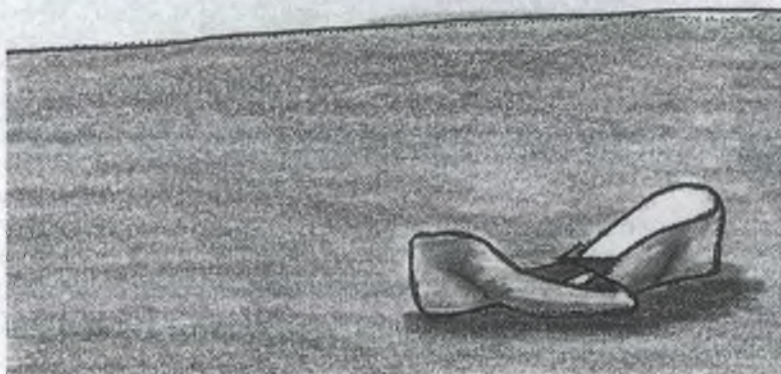
- Donating blood. Consider the blood that Christ gave for you and the promise of salvation that came with the gift.
- Writing a short story or play based on Isaac's perspective of that trip up the mountain. (See Genesis 22.)
- Spending an evening looking at the stars. Compare current population figures with published estimates of known stars. Think about the scale of the promise God made to Abraham.
- Looking up the definitions for "hope" and "faith." What is the difference between having hope of Christ's salvation and having faith in Christ?
- Starting a journal in which you list the ways God has fulfilled His promises to you in a special way. Have you ever had God provide a last-minute miracle for you the way He did for Abraham?
- Writing a poem about faith without actually using the words "faith" or "trust."
- Telling someone what God has personally done for you today. Tell someone what God has personally done for them.
- Making a sacrifice. Give away something that has great worth to you, maybe even something irreplaceable.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chap. 13.

Robert K. McIver, *The Four Faces of Jesus*, chap. 26.

Jesus and the Sanctuary



**“By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many,
for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa. 53:11, NKJV).**

The King's Four Wives

INTRODUCTION

Isa. 53:3

Once upon a time, there was a rich king who had four wives. He loved the fourth wife the most. He also loved the third wife very much and was always showing her off to neighboring kingdoms. He also loved his second wife. She was his confidante and was always kind, considerate, and patient with him. The king's first wife was a very loyal partner. However, he did not love the first wife, and although she loved him deeply, he hardly took notice of her. One day the king fell ill, and he knew his time was short. He thought of his luxurious life and pondered, *I now have four wives with me, but when I die, I'll be all alone.*

Thus, he asked the fourth wife, the third wife, and the second wife, but they couldn't promise to be with him in his death. Then a voice called out: "I'll stay with you and follow you no matter where you go." The king looked up and there was his first wife. She was thin because she suffered from malnutrition.

He did not love the first wife.

In truth we all have four wives in our lives. Our fourth wife is our body. No matter how much effort we lavish in making it look good, it will leave us when we die.

Our third wife is our possessions, status, and wealth. When we die, it will all go to others.

Our second wife is our family and friends. No matter how much they have been there for us, the furthest they can stay by us is up to the grave.

Our first wife is our spiritual life, often neglected in pursuit of wealth, power, and pleasures of the ego. Our spiritual life, however, is the only thing that will lead us to know Christ more. Our way to know Christ is to understand the sanctuary system.

Isaiah 53 portrays the suffering of Jesus—despised, hated, reviled, and rejected of men.

"'Let Him be crucified.' . . . 'Let Him be crucified'" (Matt. 27:22, 23, NKJV). These shouts of condemnation by the multitude before Pilate ring down through the ages. Jesus, the innocent One, is to die by crucifixion for the sins of which He knows nothing. Yet in perfect obedience He willingly obliged, even on the cross. Jesus the Lamb of God took death to Himself as an offering for the salvation of men. The only begotten of the Father came down to save men; He perfected the sin-offering service in the sanctuary. Sinless as He is, Jesus " 'takes away the sin of the world' " (verse 29, NKJV)—no more earthly sanctuary, rituals, or services. All are gone and finished. Jesus now as the High Priest is in the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, to which the plan of salvation is set for eternity.

Sunday
January 9

Steps to Christ: the Sanctuary Service

LOGOS

Exod. 24:5-8; 25:8; 29:12; 30:10; Lev. 10:18; Isaiah 53

It is characteristic of God to use the known to explain the unknown. In His wilderness classroom, the unexpected appearance of manna taught the first lesson in faith and obedience. Then followed a second lesson as He handed down His law on Mount Sinai. The third lesson, the center of this week's study, was inextricably woven into His instructions to Israel to build a sanctuary and establish a priesthood and attendant divine services. The sanctuary, its priests and its services (the known) would help Israel understand the unknown (God's great plan of salvation). The levitical system of daily and annual sacrifices pointed toward a better sacrifice, toward Jesus, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8, NKJV). Through obedience to each divine ritual, the sinner took one step away from sin and moved toward Christ, redemption, and everlasting life.

Step 1: Making a Deal—a Promise to Obey (Exod. 24:5-8)

In Exodus 24:5-8 Moses read God's law to the children of Israel. Twice the children of Israel agreed to do "all that the Lord has said" (verse 7, NKJV). So Moses slaughtered an animal to ratify the Lord's promise and the people's acceptance of the covenant God had established. As with any

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covenant, the parties made their vows and proceeded to live out the terms of their agreement. The marriage between God and Israel had begun.

Step 2: Knowing and Dwelling With Them (Exod. 25:8)

In Exodus 25:8 God commands Moses to "make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (NKJV). With deliberate instruction God gave Moses the blueprint of the heavenly sanctuary to build an earthly shadow of "the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" (Heb. 8:2, NKJV). "The [wilderness] tabernacle was so constructed that it could be removed from place to place; yet it was a structure of grand magnificence." The Creator of the universe was willing to come down to His children so that they might know the true and living God.

Step 3: A Holy Priesthood (Exod. 29:12)

God chose Aaron and his sons to serve as priests. Through them He adminis-

tered lessons in confession, redemption, and atonement. In Exodus 29:12 God commanded the priests to place the blood of bullocks on the two horns of the altar and pour the remaining blood on the base of the altar. The priests, though God-ordained, were human and sinful. Consequently, they must offer blood to atone not only for the people's sins but first and foremost for their own sins. All of this foreshadowed Jesus, our sinless High Priest and Mediator. He was the Lamb without blemish or spot (1 Pet. 1:18, 19). By using the blood of animals, "the sinner expressed his faith in the sacrifice of Christ, by whose [incorruptible] blood our sins [are] blotted out."²

Step 4: The Golden Altar—Intercession Made Plain (Exod. 30:10)

In Exodus 30 God commanded the construction of the golden altar of incense. The brazen altar in the courtyard was reserved for slain animals, but in verses 7 and 8 Aaron is instructed to burn only sweet incense upon the altar morning and evening. Aaron is told to place the blood of the sin offering on horns of the altar during the annual service on the Day of Atonement. "The fragrant incense represented the righteousness of Christ, which . . . gave assurance that prayers were answered. The incense also represented the prayers which Christ offers in heaven for us."³

Step 5: Crucial Ritual—the Transfer of Sins (Lev. 10:18)

The symbolic transfer of sins is perhaps the most crucial part of the daily service from the standpoint of the repentant sinner. The ritual ordained by God required the priest to (1) take the blood from the animal slain by the sinner into the Holy Place, or (2) to eat the flesh of the animal in the Holy Place, figuratively transferring the sins from the sinner to the sanctuary or the priest. What grace that our confessed sins are transferred to our sinless Substitute, Christ Jesus.

Substitute Teacher (Isaiah 53)

The Levitical system was incapable of solving the sin problem. Its purpose was never to provide a permanent solution, but to point toward a far better system. Unlike the Aaronic priesthood, flawed in substance and form, Jesus' sacrifice is forever valid and effective. Aaron was priest alone, but Jesus is both our permanent Sacrifice and our High Priest. Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would suffer greatly to bring salvation to humankind. In the end Jesus has promised to share His reward with those who are faithful and to intercede for them in heaven.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 412.

2. *God's Great Plan*, p. 133.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 134.

Monday
January 10

The Gospel via the Sanctuary Message

TESTIMONY

Isaiah 53

When one thinks of the sanctuary, it is not unusual for the mind automatically to reflect upon the building constructed under the direction of the Lord Himself. However, more important than its extraordinary beauty was the message God intended to communicate by way of the services, in particular, the place His only Son, Jesus Christ, would play in the fulfillment of the sanctuary services.

"The matchless splendor of the earthly tabernacle reflected to human vision the glories of that heavenly temple where Christ our forerunner ministers for us before the throne of God. The abiding-place of the King of kings, where thousand thou-

**The sanctuary inspires us
with hope and assurance.**

sands minister unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stand before him [Daniel 7:10]; that temple, filled with the glory of the eternal throne, where seraphim, its shining guardians,

veil their faces in adoration, could find, in the most magnificent structure ever reared by human hands, but a faint reflection of its vastness and glory. Yet important truths concerning the heavenly sanctuary and the great work there carried forward for man's redemption were taught by the earthly sanctuary and its services."¹

"A substitute was accepted in the sinner's stead; but the sin was not canceled by the blood of the victim. A means was thus provided by which it was transferred to the sanctuary. By the offering of blood the sinner acknowledged the authority of the law, confessed his guilt in transgression, and expressed his desire for pardon through faith in a Redeemer to come; but he was not yet entirely released from the condemnation of the law. On the Day of Atonement the high priest, having taken an offering from the congregation, went into the most holy place with the blood of this offering, and sprinkled it upon the mercy seat, directly over the law, to make satisfaction for its claims. Then, in his character of mediator, he took the sins upon himself and bore them from the sanctuary. Placing his hands upon the head of the scapegoat, he confessed over him all these sins, thus in figure transferring them from himself to the goat. The goat then bore them away, and they were regarded as forever separated from the people."²

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 414.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 420.

A Lamb Slain for Me!

EVIDENCE

Exod. 25:8

Exodus 25 clearly describes to us the importance and sacredness of the sanctuary, particularly in its structure. While Moses was on the mount, God clearly commanded: "Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them" (verse 8, NKJV). God gave Moses the plan of that structure, because the Holy Place was to be a representation of the heavenly sanctuary and its instruments (Heb. 9:23, 24). It was to be a dwelling place not for humanity but for the Lord God (1 Chron. 29:10).

Let's take a look at the patterns of the Old Testament sanctuary. "Sanctuary," from the Hebrew *miqdash*, means "Holy Place." Israel's earliest sanctuary was a portable tent known as the tabernacle, which housed the ark of the covenant (Exod. 36:1). A high priest officiated in the sanctuary, and his duty, along with ministering, was to bring the sacrifices of the people before God. He also had to examine every sacrificial offering brought for the services and reject any that was spotted. God expressively revealed that every offering brought for the services of the sanctuary should be "without blemish." The priest could not enter the sanctuary with shoes upon his feet because dust cleaving to it would desecrate the sacred place. Man constantly had to offer up a perfect offering for his sins, but amidst the lambs and bullocks, the shewbread was continuously on the altar of sacrifice, not only as part of the daily offering, but also a symbol of man acknowledging his dependence upon God.

Today the sanctuary still
applies to us.

"The law of God, enshrined within the ark, was the great rule of righteousness and judgment. That law pronounced death upon the transgressor; but above the law was the mercy seat, upon which the presence of God was revealed, and from which, by virtue of the atonement, pardon was granted to the repentant sinner."*

Standing between the altar of sacrifice and humanity's eternal doom is Jesus Christ. He has unselfishly paid the ultimate sacrifice for humanity, placed as a lamb before the slaughter for you and me.

Today the sanctuary still applies to us. It stands as a representation and a reminder of the heavenly sanctuary, where Christ is interceding on our behalf. Though sacrificial offering is no longer required, we need to offer daily doses of thanksgiving through prayer and supplication in gratitude to God for His Son Jesus. He sacrificed Himself for our sins. Let us therefore sacrifice ourselves to the work of God, dedicating our whole being to preparing others and ourselves for His coming.

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**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 349.

HOW-TO

Isaiah 53

While growing up in my homeland of Jamaica, I frequently watched my grandmother, or “granny” as I called her, when she washed my clothes. She would take each piece and wash it by hand. As I got older, I had to take on the duty of washing my clothes, and before long I was doing it all by myself. I must admit that after doing it for sometime I got lazy and I wished that there were some other way that it could be done. Because I wanted my clothes to be clean, however, I would do the washing as often as it was necessary. For years this remained the only means by which I could clean my clothes—until I met the beautiful invention of the washing machine!

What joy filled my heart as I sat and watched this awesome machine twist and

**She would take each piece
and wash it by hand.**

turn my clothes in ways I never could. I watched as it mixed detergent with water, blending the two together, making it visually impossible to separate both. Now there was no need for me

to wash by hand anymore. Whenever I have dirty clothes, all I need to do is to take them to the washer, knowing that all my clothes will be made clean again!

Jesus is the One who has now taken over the washing for us—not the washing of our clothes but even better, He is willing to wash our sins away.

In bringing a lamb to the sanctuary, one admitted that he or she is a sinner in need of God’s grace. We bring dirty clothes to the machine because we see that they are in need of washing. So too should we bring our lives to Jesus so He can clean us up (1 John 1:9).

The sins of the individual were symbolically laid on the Lamb. Christ knows how dirty we are, and instead of having to bear our own dirt, He took it upon Himself and carried it all to the cross.

In the sanctuary service the lamb had to die. It’s not until you cannot see any trace of the detergent, when it has vanished or “died,” that you truly know that your clothes must surely be clean. For us to be assured of God’s grace, it was necessary that Christ should die, taking our place, bearing our grief and carrying our sorrows (Isa. 53:3).

REACT

1. What is the difference, if any, between being recycled and being made new again?
2. What do we mean when we say “our sins are washed in Jesus’ blood”?

Make Me a Sanctuary

OPINION

Exod. 25:8

Too often in today's world we tend to forget that God Himself called His sanctuary into being (Exod. 25:8). It was not something humanity decided to build on its own. God gave careful instructions as to how His sanctuary should be built and for what specific purpose.

"The Lord is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him" (Hab. 2:20, NKJV). Therefore, one purpose of the sanctuary is to meet with the Lord and bask in His glory. "The glory of the Lord went up from the cherub, and paused over the threshold of the temple; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of the Lord's glory" (Ezek. 10:4, NKJV). God's glory can be seen in the sanctuary, not God Himself. He is in the Most Holy Place, interceding on our behalf.

When Moses was commanded by God to build Him a sanctuary, he was told to "make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain" (Heb. 8:5, NKJV). But God not only gave directions as to the building of the sanctuary, but also selected priests to serve in it and directed their preparation. Directions were also given as to the anointing of the sanctuary, the purification, and the dedicatory services of the sanctuary.

Now, with all this being known, our imaginations still cannot even begin to understand just how holy is the sanctuary where the Lord dwells. Most people just see it as a building where we get together for church, but it is far above and beyond that.

The sanctuary is built for many purposes, the most important being communion with our Lord. It is also a place where we can ask for forgiveness and dedicate our lives to Christ. But in the midst of all that excitement, we must not forget two very important purposes of the sanctuary: thanksgiving and praise! How often do we step into the sanctuary with these things in our hearts and on our minds?

Reverence in God's house is of paramount importance; we are always to be aware of His presence, that His purpose is having us worship after this fashion, to spend quality time with His children. If we respect and in some cases revere our homes, how much more should we revere the presence of the Lord in His sanctuary; may we keep this as our will: reverence before the Lord.

The sanctuary is built for
many purposes.

Friday
January 14

Sanctuary: the Path to Holiness

EXPLORATION

Exodus 24; 25; Isaiah 53; Heb. 10:4

CONCLUDE

How would you explain the experience of salvation to a group of iron-age desert nomads? How would you tell the story of redemption to space-age postmodern pilgrims? And, here's the catch, could you accomplish both tasks at once? God did. He painted a picture for all our spiritual senses that unveils His plan for you and all humankind. As Christians we have much to learn from exploring the meanings and promises revealed in the sanctuary.

CONSIDER

- Reading Exodus 24; 25, then drawing or sketching what you believe the sanctuary furniture looked like.
- Researching how much gold is contained in ancient jewelry and artifacts. Compute how much was donated to create the raw materials for the sanctuary.
- Creating a prayer that incorporates the stations of the sanctuary. At each station of the sanctuary, add an element to your prayer that reflects the purpose of that station.
- Viewing the Disney video *Beauty and the Beast*. Think about Belle's offer to take her father's place in captivity. How is this like and unlike Jesus' willingness to take our place?
- Memorizing Hebrews 10:1-22. Recite it to your Sabbath School and then discuss with them why the blood of bulls and goats can't possibly take away sins.
- Getting a group of people together from your church and building a life-size replica of one of the pieces of furniture from the sanctuary.
- Listening to Ray Boltz's song "Watch the Lamb." If possible, learn to sing the song and perform it at your church.

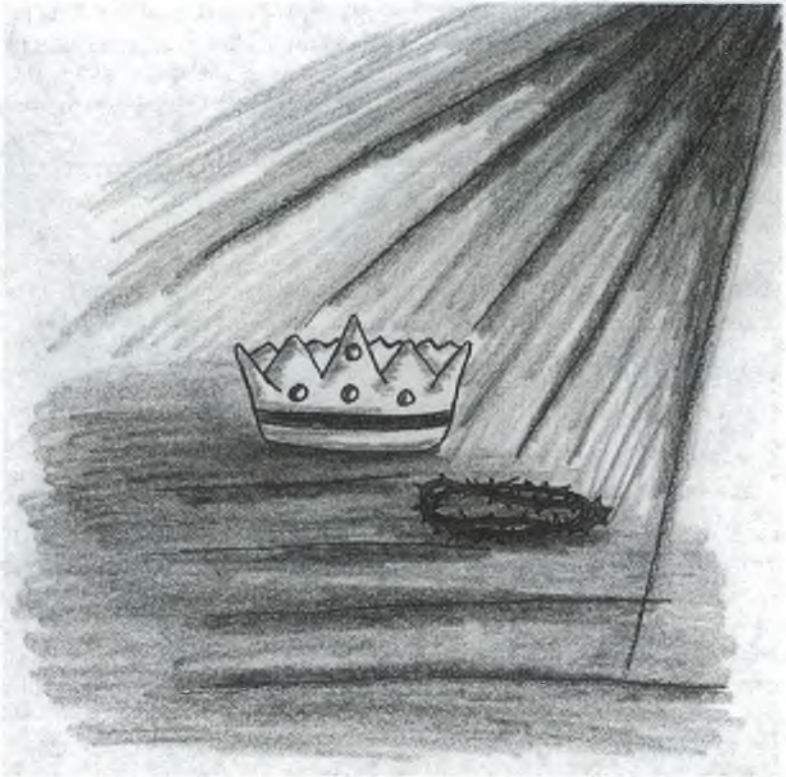
CONNECT

M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service*.

Ray Boltz, *Moments From the Heart*.

<http://www.nisbett.com/sanctuary/sanctuary_prayer.htm>

A Body you have Prepared



“When He came into the world, He said: ‘Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me’ ” (Heb. 10:5, NKJV).

Jesus: the Riches to Rags Story

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 53; Phil. 2:5-7

September 6, 1997, saw London, England, come to a standstill. Millions of solemn mourners gathered to witness the funeral of Diana, Princess of Wales. Some 16 years earlier, the world had also stopped to watch her marry Prince Charles, heir to the throne of Britain. In her time as a member of the British royal family, Diana came to represent the fairy tale of royalty that is so irresistible to us: the pomp and circumstance, the dignity, the aloofness. Indeed, royalty is special because it is elevated from normal society and represents the power and prestige of its kingdom. For centuries monarchy has been the highest of human offices. Even in today's world of multinational corporations commanding more money than whole countries, or political positions wielding ultimate power, royalty is still revered, simply by virtue of its name.

But, if the splendor of the House of Windsor is impressive, our minds cannot even begin to conjure up the image, before the creation of the world, as the Father

God's plan was not to reveal Himself through the glory and power of kingship.

in heaven planned with the Son how humanity could be saved, even before the Fall. From the majesty of heaven the real royalty of this world made a plan to save each of us. But God's plan was not

to reveal Himself through the glory and power of kingship. He had a different plan.

Hollywood movies regularly depict the classic "rags to riches" story: The poor kid grows up to become a prosperous man; the ugly duckling matures to beauty; Cinderella marries her prince. But the story of Christ giving up heaven to come here is the reverse. "Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:5-7, NKJV). Isaiah prophesied the depths to which Christ would go for us: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (53:2, NIV). Quite simply, He became one of us, a poor, ordinary one at that.

This week we will study this most incredible story: how the divine became human. By understanding Christ's divinity and humanity, we can claim the confidence we can have in our salvation. Jesus left the grandeur of heaven to walk in our shoes, die in our place, and pay the ultimate price for each of us.

A Mind Bender?

EVIDENCE

John 8:32

During April 1982 the Falkland Islands—Isla Malvinas, sovereign British territory, were invaded by Argentine forces after diplomatic negotiations failed between the two countries. Near the end of May, the Royal Navy was suffering severe losses because of the numerous combat sorties by the Argentine Air Force from a captured Falkland airfield at Port Stanley and from the Argentine mainland itself.

The British were looking for a swift, decisive victory on the mainland. Although not of military significance, the settlements of Darwin and Goose Green to the south of East Falkland, which were not on the route to the Argentine garrison at Port Stanley, were decided upon to achieve such a victory. The 2nd Battalion of Her Majesty's Parachute Regiment was tasked to capture these.

But the Argentines had sufficient resources to withstand an attacking force. The "raid," which was meant to last a few hours, extended into an entire day. With four companies pinned down by Argentine gunners, a single act of bravery inspired the British troops. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel H. Jones, without prompt, launched himself out of his covering position toward an Argentine gunner, to their total surprise, but to his sure death. This act marked a turning point in the battle and resulted in the capture of the settlements.

The climax of the story of redemption was finely balanced on a knife blade.

Another act in human history was of infinitely greater risk and daring. The single act of God becoming man to die in his place bore such a weight that if the keystone of man's redemption failed, the repercussions were too severe to contemplate. This was physically manifested when Christ cried out in Gethsemane because the carrying of man's sin was reaching its limit especially because the relationship between God and Man, where our humanity was shrouded with divinity, was under the greatest strain that the devil could produce.

The climax of the story of redemption was finely balanced on a knife blade. But Christ demonstrated that humanity, when surrendering to complete control by divinity, can achieve anything. This is aptly illustrated by Christ's words: "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39, NKJV).

The evidence that Christ died for us is found not only within the Bible but within everyday human life. Each selfless act of courage, bravery, and loyalty, not just to loved ones, but to life itself, is testament to the sacrifice of Christ. And to the knowledge that humanity can achieve all things through God.

Monday
January 17

Down, Down, Down . . . Up, Up, Up

LOGOS

John 1:1-3; Phil. 2:5-8; Heb. 1:8, 9; 5:7-9

See the cross. Who is that on it? Who dies there like a common criminal? Is this a good man who merely ran afoul of the petty politics of His time? Or are we seeing Someone more?

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:5-8, NASB).

Here we look at Paul’s great poetry. The theme moves us. It is more than mere poetry. God, in all ways equal with all that we know of the divine, steps down, down,

**He has carved a path up
the walls of the pit!**

down. He empties Himself of eternal majestic power. Such a step down! But He steps further down. He becomes a mere human. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound! It reaches so far down to

save the wretch I am. The King emptied. God to human. Freeman to slave. Down, down, down!

But He is not finished. He allows them to put Him to death. This is no political foul-up! This is sacrifice! But watch! He steps down even further. This death is that which we reserve for the vilest of criminals. Down, down, down! How low can He go? He plunges down to the deepest hellhole of human misery.

See the cross. On it, the Majesty of glory writhes in the agony of the vilest, guiltiest sinner-slave. In the bottom of the pit of human rebellion, there He is! From the highest to the lowest. Down, down, down.

As a sinner I suffer from the panic-driven guilt of despair. I look around and find myself alone in the mire of a deep hole. As low as man can get—my sins are taking me there. I feel alone. Sin separates me from my friends, my companions, and my love. It leaves me alone at the bottom of my personal bottomless pit. In the darkness I search to see if anyone understands. Is there anyone here? In that darkness I see a cross, and on it, the sin-scarred Majesty of heaven.

So low! Can He escape? Did He come down here only to comfort me by dying with me? Do we gently slip away together in the darkness? Does He raise His voice with me to scream at my bedarkened fate? No! He has carved a path up the walls of the pit!

“Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered; and having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:8, 9, NASB).

Amazing grace! The Son of God “learned obedience.” How can the perfect, powerful Son of God learn obedience? It is because He stepped so far down, down, down. It was one thing to be obedient where all was power, peace, and harmony. When He stepped down to the chaos that is earth, it was different. When He became vulnerable, disenfranchised, the recipient of prejudice, obedience was quite a different thing. His performance remained perfect, but He learned on the bitter path of pain.

Now from the cross He shines the beam of His grace on the path He has carved. It leads up, up, up. The worst, loneliest, most hopeless hellhole is not hopeless. He has been there. He has carved a path of hope in the walls of our bitterness.

We refugees of sin and hopelessness follow Him up, up, up. He has won. He has obeyed when all the odds said He could not obey. He gives His obedience to us for free. We emerge with Him. We rejoice. He rejoices more. The Eternal Word, who is with God and is God, becomes the Last Word. “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions” (Heb. 1:9, NASB).

Who could have done it? Who could have led us up, up, up? No less than the Majesty of heaven. My sin demands a cure that only God could create. The cure of the Cross is not provided by any creature. This is God Himself, stepping into our crisis. This is God Eternal, so filled with love that He risks everything to save the vilest human wretch. This is Jesus—my God—my Savior.

REACT

1. Where is the bottomless pit of human experience?
2. Why would Jesus rejoice more than the people He has rescued?
3. How is the Word of God and about God expanded by the Cross?
4. How is the Cross like a beam of grace?
5. Have today’s advances in science and technology affected the intensity of temptations that we encounter? Explain your answer.
6. How does the incarnation of Christ directly affect your life today?
7. How would you define sacrifice?
8. The symbol of the Cross has been sanitized through the ages. How can we fully understand both its horror and its beauty?

Tuesday
January 18

Incarnation: the Essence of Our Salvation

TESTIMONY

Phil. 2:5-8

"The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden linked chain which binds our souls to Christ and through Christ to God. This is to be our study. Christ was a real man, and He gave proof of His humility in becoming a man. And He was God in the flesh."¹

"In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind cannot comprehend. The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear. How wide is the contrast

"This is to be our study."

between the divinity of Christ and the helpless infant in Bethlehem's manger! How can we span the distance between the mighty God and a helpless

child? And yet the Creator of worlds, He in whom was the fullness of the Godhead bodily, was manifest in the helpless babe in the manger. Far higher than any of the angels, equal with the Father in dignity and glory, and yet wearing the garb of humanity! Divinity and humanity were mysteriously combined, and man and God became one. It is in this union that we find the hope of our fallen race."²

"Christ alone had experience in all the sorrows and temptations that befall human beings. Never another of woman born was so fiercely beset by temptation; never another bore so heavy a burden of the world's sin and pain. Never was there another whose sympathies were so broad or so tender. A sharer in all the experiences of humanity, He could feel not only for, but with, every burdened and tempted and struggling one."³

As we strive to be like Him, we should always remember that "Jesus was in all things made like unto His brethren. He became flesh, even as we are. He was hungry and thirsty and weary. He was sustained by food and refreshed by sleep. He shared the lot of man; yet He was the blameless Son of God. He was God in the flesh. His character is to be ours."⁴

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 904.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 7a, pp. 443, 444.

3. *Education*, p. 78.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

To Know Christ

HOW-TO

Luke 2:52; John 14:12

Two of the most difficult questions in Christianity seem to be (1) What is the nature of Christ? and (2) Can we really reflect His nature in our lives? An understanding of these two questions requires prayer and study. It is difficult to know where to begin when studying topics of this magnitude. Here are some suggestions.

Begin by studying the first four books of the New Testament—the Gospels. I suggest the Gospels first because they are easy reading and tell the most about Christ's earthly ministry. But by no means should you limit yourself to them. The rest of the Bible—especially the apostles' writings, the earthly sanctuary, and the book of Revelation—broadens the picture of Christ beyond His physical time on earth. Invest in a good concordance—and use it. (*Young's Concordance* is good for giving the context of words.) I have found Ellen White to be very insightful. *The Desire of Ages* is a very good book to assist with a study of this type, but you can find others.

A good thing to do is to ask focal questions. Some suggestions: (1) What does Christ say about His nature? (2) What does God say about Him? and (3) How was Christ's ministry an example of what we must do? Why can't we do certain things that Christ did? Another thing that I have found helpful is to break

**When I internalized that point,
it boosted my self-esteem.**

the topic down into sections, e.g., Christ's temptations, Christ's interaction with God the Father, Christ's approach to witnessing, and the sacrifice at Calvary. Each of these sections can provide answers to the focal questions.

Most important is the application of this study to your life. Whenever you learn or rediscover something about Christ's nature, ask yourself how it is relevant to you. For example: The sacrifice of Christ on Calvary, while certainly not something that we could do as mere humans, shows us just how important God chose to make us. When I internalized that point, it boosted my self-esteem. Christ's statement that His disciples would do greater things than He did on earth led me to ask why I wasn't doing great things. Consequently, I began to pray about my purpose and study about the Holy Spirit and His power in my life.

Christ's nature will be studied throughout eternity. But our understanding and application of His life and principles can redefine and focus us like nothing else could.

Thursday
January 20

What Would Jesus Do?

OPINION

John 1:14; Phil. 2:7, 8; Heb. 4:15

You've seen the letters WWJD on everything from bracelets and necklaces to stickers and key chains. (I've even seen them on a pair of socks.) Just in case you don't know what those letters stand for, let me spell it out for you: "What would Jesus do?" An interesting question meant to make you stop and think about your actions in all sorts of situations.

But the amazing thing about this question is that we can actually ask it and get an answer. This week's lesson focuses on Jesus' two natures—that of mortal man and divine deity. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14, NIV). This is a ground-shattering principle. Jesus, the King of kings, came to

**Jesus has a vested interest
in us as humans.**

this dust ball of a planet to subject Himself to the crazy circumstances we as humans face on a daily basis. We have a Savior intimately familiar with the grit and grind of the rat race, "one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15, NIV).

It's difficult to comprehend, but obvious, that Jesus has a vested interest in us as humans. He "made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:7, 8, NIV). His sacrifice to assume our daily routines is a source of unending hope. His obedience to the Father's will that led all the way to the splintery cross is a source of unending life.

This mind-bending idea of the Divine taking on humanity offers more to contemplate than all the books in the world could cover, but it gives us undeniable proof that Jesus cared for us enough to walk a mile in our shoes. The Bible tells us that He had to put up with bratty siblings, pushy people at the market, and even the Roman equivalent of the IRS. So we can ask what would Jesus do and know in full confidence that He really did face the same situations we find ourselves in. How Jesus became man, I don't know. Why He would is even further from my grasp. But I thank Him every day that He did.

REACT

The Gospels deal with Jesus' last three years. Why do you think there is so little on His earlier life?

Preston Smith, Loma Linda, California

All That I Have

EXPLORATION

Phil. 2:5

CONCLUDE

He stepped out of His grand home to spend time in a dirty sin-filled world. He climbed down from His throne of grace to be lifted up on a cross of embarrassment. He risked all that He had and gave up all that He was to wear our humanity. He became one of us in order to show us that by depending on power from above and taking on His character all that belonged to Him was ours. That's love!

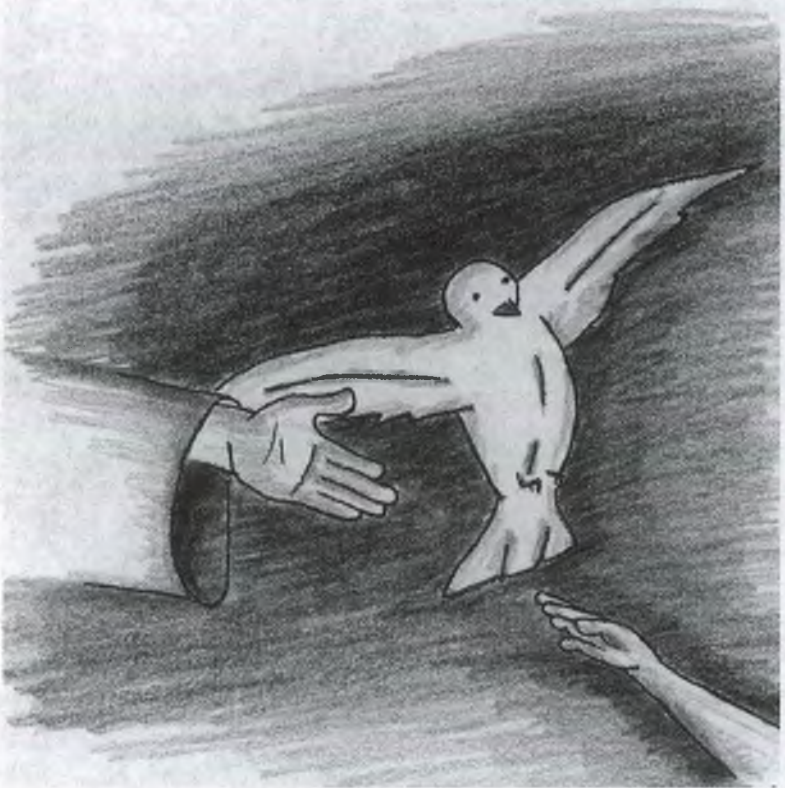
CONSIDER

- Writing a short story based on this week's Introduction article—"Jesus: the Riches to Rags Story," telling what Jesus coming to earth from His heavenly home means to you. Share it with someone this week who you feel may need a lift in spirit.
- Baking a loaf of bread or some cookies and give them as a gift to someone who may not know the story of redemption and explain God's plan to save us.
- Picturing yourself in Jesus' place, as you are leaving home, leaving behind your family and friends. What emotions are you feeling? Journal your thoughts and reflect on them during your devotional time.
- Viewing the film *The Patriot*. Consider the importance of sacrifice in the life of the central character. What did he give up? Why?
- Creating a bookmark for your Bible (or another book) and personalize it with Philippians 2:5 to remind you that your attitude should always be that of Christ.
- Drawing a cross and beneath the cross list any sins that you want to give to Christ as you accept or remind yourself that you have accepted salvation and that you no longer need to struggle with these sins because Christ has struggled for you.
- Composing a letter to Jesus, thanking Him for His amazing grace and sacrifice.

CONNECT

Steps to Christ, chap. 1.

In the Shadow of Calvary



“John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, ‘Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’ ”
(John 1:29, NKJV).

In the Shadow of the Cross

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 3:1, 2; John 1:29; 16:7

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!'" (Matt. 3:1, 2, NKJV).

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29, NKJV).

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you'" (16:7, NKJV).

He was standing right at the bank of the river. The real prophet. I had been following him for seven months now, and he taught me many things. I was glad when he baptized me, because all of a sudden the heavy duties of obeying the law became immensely light—not because I forgot them, but because he said that the kingdom is near! Oh, how I longed to see this kingdom. But out of the blue sky came a Man, and suddenly all attention moved onto Him.

The Lamb of God? He was certainly not a lamb. He was a living, human, creation. All my life I have been suffering with trying to be suitable for every requirement. I was struggling with my physical pains, with the burden of a household, with the loss of one of my children, and with the ever-haunting remorse of my sins and guilt. Oh, how thankful was I when I met this Lamb: Jesus. Finally I have understood His importance, and He relieved me from all of my sorrows.

**He was standing right at
the bank of the river.**

I was walking with Him through trials and persecutions, but after two years of constantly being with Him, one night Jesus left me. I was sitting in the dark shadow of a wooden cross. The sun was setting, I was crying, and . . . He was dying.

This was the most terrible story in my life, but John told the truth. Yes, John, the Baptist was right: The kingdom has arrived, and I am convinced, because the One on the cross told me that "it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you" (John 16:7, NKJV).

He has arrived. The Holy Spirit is now living in my heart—thanks to Jesus and His death on Calvary!

LOGOS

Matt. 17:1-9; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:28-36; 24:7; Acts 10:38, 39; 1 Cor. 15:13-18

"This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matt. 17:5, NIV).

Have you ever been caught by surprise? It may be the way your grades turn out. It may be your sweetheart's unexpected response to your invitation for a date. When you are caught by surprise, you are floored. You become speechless.

God is in the business of surprises. He does not operate the way humans do. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8, 9, NIV).

God's plan of salvation caught humans by surprise. First the religious elites were utterly unprepared for the first advent of Christ. Only a few lowly shepherds witnessed the dawning and unfolding of God's redemptive acts on planet Earth. The promise made in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15) was being fulfilled. Not only were the religious leaders not ready, even the disciples had a hard time understanding the plan of salvation and Christ's ministry. It was difficult for the elites to imagine a system of teaching that had a greater antipathy to their pre-

God is in the business
of surprises.

conceived scheme of the Messiahship than the one presented by Christ's preaching. It was so alien that the elites dismissed Christ's teaching from the outset. In fact they decided to get rid of Him because He did not quite fit into their plan.

The disciples had their plan all worked out. They had a vague idea of Jesus the Messiah, but they were not sure what to make of Jesus' statements of the forthcoming suffering. Jesus had predicted to the twelve that He would be mocked, insulted, spit upon, scourged, and killed. But the disciples "did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about" (Luke 18:34, NIV).

On the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9), again the disciples were caught by surprise. Jesus took Peter, James, and John with Him to the mountain. God the Father brought Moses and Elijah to encourage Christ to go through Calvary. So sacred was the occasion that Jesus was transformed with the light of heaven. The disciples awoke just in time to witness the magnificent panorama before them. They were surprised to see Moses and Elijah in their presence. Peter spoke up, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah" (Luke 9:33, NIV). The moment Peter began talking, the vision was removed from him. Only Jesus remained. God the Father immediately rebuked Peter, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him" (verse 35, NIV).

The disciples had sincerely believed that Christ's kingdom was just about to be set up and that Moses and Elijah had come to announce the inauguration of the new kingdom. Christ was about to be proclaimed king. But obviously their agenda was not God's agenda. God's way of redeeming humans was through the Cross, through shame and suffering so that they might understand the depravity and consequence of sin.

They Missed Him

They were looking for a lion;
He came as a Lamb, and they missed Him.
They were looking for a warrior;
He came as a Peacemaker, and they missed Him.
They were looking for a king;
He came as a Servant, and they missed Him.
They were looking for liberation from Rome;
He submitted to the Roman stake, and they missed Him.
They were looking for a fit to their mold;
He was the mold maker, and they missed Him.

When we submit to the Lamb, we will meet the Lion.
Join with the Peacemaker, and we will meet the Warrior.
Work with the Servant, and we will meet the King.
Walk with the Submitted, and we will meet the Liberator.
Concern ourselves with the eternal, and we will have the temporal.

If Jesus is not fitting into the mold you have, then come to the mold maker and get a new one. Submit to His plan for your life and you will see the eternal need met first; then all the other things you have need of will be taken care of as well.

Author unknown

REACT

1. Salvation is free, but not cheap—it cost Christ everything. Is there such a thing as “expensive love”? Explain your answer.
2. Why is God's kingdom paradoxical? The way up is down, the way to get is to give, the way to be first is to be last. What's the implication for Christian living?
3. In what ways can our own spiritual and behavioral expectations limit God?
4. What is it that signifies to Jesus that He is able to live out His will through us?
5. John tells us in Revelation 3 that one day he will sit on a throne next to his Savior, even though his mother's attempt to achieve that for him failed once before. How should we treat our own spiritual failures?

“Bravely and Manfully Borne”

TESTIMONY

Gal. 6:14

“The cross was to be the center of attraction.”¹ “Through the cross, man was drawn to God, and God to man.”²

“The cross of Christ,—how many believe it to be what it is? How many bring it into their studies, and know its true significance? There could not be a Christian in our world without the cross of Christ. . . . Turn from the examples of the world, cease to extol the professedly great men; turn the mind from the glory of everything save the cross of Christ. Said Paul, ‘God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Let all, from the highest to the lowest, understand

“The cross was to be the
center of attraction.”

what it means to glory in the cross of Christ. That cross is to be bravely and manfully borne. Christ declares, ‘If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.’ And to all who

will lift it, and bear it after Christ, the cross is a pledge of the crown of glory that can never fade away.”³

“This is the highest science that we can learn,—the science of salvation. The cross of Calvary, rightly regarded, is true philosophy, pure and undefiled religion. It is eternal life to all who believe. By painstaking effort, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little, it should be impressed upon the minds . . . that the cross of Christ is just as efficacious now as in Paul’s day, and should be as perfectly understood by them as it was by the great apostle.”⁴

“In the cross all influence centers, and from it all influence goes forth. It is the great center of attraction, for on it Christ gave up His life for the human race.”⁵

“For the joy that was set before Him, Christ endured the cross, despising the shame, and is forever set down at the right hand of God. He died on the cross as a sacrifice for the world, and through this sacrifice comes the greatest blessing that God could bestow,—the gift of the Holy Spirit. This blessing is for all who will receive Christ.”⁶

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 138.

2. *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 74.

3. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 231.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, p. 661.

6. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 242.

No Sight? All Right!

EVIDENCE

Matt. 16:13-23; 17:22, 23; 20:17-19; 26:1, 2

I'm well known to be a logical and rational person. (Actually pedantic and over-confident might be more accurate!) Statistics are my weapons of choice, along with loose recollections of old newspaper articles, vague memories of "expert" commentaries, and the odd quip or quote from an admired mentor—especially when these support my own viewpoint. I respond to out-of-the-test-tube, saw-it-with-my-own-eyes kinds of information.

Peter must have been a logical kind of guy too. But he also had a deep, abiding, and faith-based relationship with his Master. He daily witnessed the power of faith over fact, of love over law, of divine will over earthly might. He walked on waves with the Son of God, watched a fig tree wither in seconds, and saw H₂O become wine "to go." So why couldn't he trust Jesus' words when He warned His friends how awful things would get before they got better?

Jesus had to know if the disciples really comprehended who He was before He could ever hope to explain what had to happen to Him. Peter's confession that Jesus was the Christ, God's Son, was the indicator Jesus had been waiting for. Immediately Jesus explained the reality of His fast-approaching persecution and death. Then, before Gethsemane He showed them four times directly, and at least two other times indirectly, of the events leading to His imminent death.

The disciples have received a lot of bad press over their inability to process the Cross and its implications. Something needs to be said in their defense. These disciples had followed Jesus around for years; listening to His parables about the kingdom of heaven, witnessing His love soak into parts of society long since abandoned by "the church," and leading Him victoriously into Israel's capital as King. Jesus knew they couldn't comprehend the Cross, but in spite of this, and because of it, He wanted to share it with them, at the very least to reassure them during the ordeal that this was God's plan. He loved them and needed to demonstrate that.

Can you and I comprehend what He did, even today? It doesn't matter! Judas wasn't denied his time with Jesus because Jesus knew he would betray Him. Thomas wasn't denied the opportunity to touch Jesus' wounds just because he had been faithless. Peter wasn't denied a visit on the beach from a risen Christ just because he disowned Him. And you and I will not be denied eternity just because we can't see how it could possibly eventuate! Salvation comes, through the Cross, to those who believe—even though they just can't see it.

**Statistics are my weapons
of choice.**

How to Become a Forerunner

HOW-TO

Luke 1:76-79

“The president is coming!” What a scene to observe! The roads will be constructed, offices repainted, schools cleaned, and food prepared. Yes! Someone has to make the preparations, for the president is coming.

“His Highness the King of the universe is coming!” John the Baptist was sent “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17, NIV). Many of the sons of Israel were turned to the Lord their God. Hearts of fathers were turned to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. John prepared people to meet their Lord and accept the gift of salvation He was bringing to them. When he saw Jesus, he pointed straight away: “‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!’” (John 1:29, NIV).

What does it take to be a forerunner of God?

What does it take to be a forerunner of God? His call! All of us who believe have been called to prepare the way for the

Lord’s second coming. Looking at John, Ellen White in *The Desire of Ages* comments on what made him perform his duty perfectly:

- He was holy.
- He was a temple for the indwelling Spirit of God.
- He had a sound physical constitution and mental and spiritual strength.
- He understood what he was called for.

God saw that it was necessary for John to control the appetite and passions and all his powers, so He called him to the wilderness to train him there. You and I need not go to the wilderness, but we need to allow God to make us holy, fill us with His Spirit, and direct our mental, physical, and spiritual strength, for “all who would perfect holiness in the fear of God must learn the lessons of temperance and self-control. The appetites and passions must be held in subjection to the higher powers of the mind. This self discipline is essential to that mental strength and spiritual insight which will enable us to understand and to practice the sacred truths of God’s word.”* Then and only then can we be fit to prepare the way for Him.

REACT

How can our appetite, passions, and powers limit our ability to serve God effectively?

**The Desire of Ages*, p. 101.

Love God, XXX

OPINION

John 12:32

Those three Xs usually stand for hugs and kisses. Crosses. They remind me of Jesus on the cross too. There is something about God dying on the cross that attracts everyone's attention. It's not just us living on earth but the whole universe is still in awe. Ellen White says that the angels are still trying to figure out why God's love is so deep that He came to our planet to die. "The theme of redemption is one that angels desire to look into; it will be the science and the song of the redeemed throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. Is it not worthy of careful thought and study now?"*

For me the significance of Jesus' dying is still sinking in. I am grateful for everyone who saw the light because they made me hungry to understand more. What is Jesus' death all about? Like overhearing a woman on a Friday night Christian radio show say, "The more I fix my focus on what Christ went through for me, the more I respond to Him with gratitude and love." I wanted to know how that might happen to me too. Hearing a choir sing a song about "God was on the cross, dying there for me!" Somehow, I'd had this

foggy idea that Jesus had temporarily lost His God-power while He was hanging on the cross. But this song wakes me up. Hearing a sermon during a foot-washing time:

"Imagine that you're one of the disciples and that the God of the universe, with His strong carpenter hands, is washing your feet today." Wow!—an instant vivid picture for me.

If we focus all our energy on knowing what God really means to us, He says we will find Him. Many personal questions were answered for me: Does God care about starving children? Does God care about me? Does He ever get mad at me? How can I tell He has forgiven me; am I meant to have a special sign or some feeling? How do I know if He heard me above the din of the millions of people talking to Him tonight?

When I watch Him die and when I watch how He lived, I begin to understand just a little about how awesome God really is. I begin to see that I had been missing out on a friendship with a God who will always be there for us. XXX

For me the significance
of Jesus' dying is still
sinking in.

REACT

How do you explain the word *salvation* to a nonchurch friend?

**Maranatha*, p. 365.

EXPLORATION

Gal. 6:14

CONCLUDE

Jesus lived. He lived so that we may know that living a good life is possible. However, in order that we may fully comprehend the consequences of sin, Jesus died on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins. The Cross stands for testimony of God's plan for our redemption. Jesus died on the cross because God values each of us. Salvation, and our self-worth, is discovered at the Cross.

CONSIDER

- Writing a cinquain on salvation. Share it with the members of your class. Details on how to write a cinquain can be found at <<http://www.poewar.com/articles/cinquain.htm>>.
- Listening to the song "Crucified with Christ" by Philips, Craig, and Dean. Reflect on the words.
- Keeping a daily journal for at least a week. Make entries on how the knowledge of salvation changes your everyday outlook.
- Creating a collage of words and pictures cut from magazines and newspapers to create a sense of the meaning of Calvary.
- Interviewing a few friends asking only one question: How does knowing that Jesus died affect you?
- Role-playing an individual who goes back in time to the day of Christ's crucifixion. How would you comfort His followers knowing what takes place a few days later?

CONNECT

Messages to Young People, pp. 137, 138.

Love Unlimited, pp. 13–22.

The Passion week



“Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him’ ” (John 13:31, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 26:53

During Jesus's arrest, one of His disciples pulled his sword and cut off the ear of a soldier. His intention was to save his beloved Master.

In Matthew 26:53 Jesus says to His disciples that if He wanted to back off, His Father could simply save Him, but He was ready to defeat sin, willing to give His life for you and for me.

In a city in England, during the 18th century, a captain was walking one day to the seaport to begin his journey. As he passed by an inn, he saw a boy peering through the window, watching what was going on inside. The boy explained that he was hungry and that he was watching others eat. The captain told him that if he was tidy he would take him to eat all he wanted. Quickly the boy ran his fingers

He saw a boy peering through the window.

through his hair and replied: "I am ready." Thinking that was funny, the captain took the boy to eat. As they went along, the captain asked about the boy's family. The boy explained that his mother had died and his

father had abandoned him soon after that. The captain asked him who took care of him, and he replied it was the Father.

Impressed, the captain told the boy that if he would gather his things, he could come and live with him. The boy immediately ran his fingers through his hair and said: "I am ready."

As promised, the captain took the boy along. The boy grew up and was nicknamed "Ready" for he was always ready for everything. He became like a son to the captain. But one day he got so sick that the doctors were unable to do anything for him. On his death bed Ready was calm. He knew he was ready to meet Jesus at the resurrection day. He told the captain that he wanted to see him in heaven too. With tears in his eyes, the captain ran his fingers through his hair and said: "I am ready."

In Gethsemane, groaning under the weight of sin, Jesus felt lonely. Satan tried to make Jesus forsake His mission. Why should He die for people who had rejected Him? When Jesus sought the support of His disciples, they were asleep. Feeling alone again, He returned to pray and cried out to God: " 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done' " (Luke 22:42, NKJV).

Jesus was ready to pay the debt of sin. On that afternoon, He died for you and me. He was judged and condemned for our error. He said: "I am ready."

The Cross

EVIDENCE

Matt. 27:33-44

The crucifixion was considered the most painful and degrading form of capital punishment. It was common practice among the Romans, but they used it only for slaves and the lowest criminals. It was not to be used for a Roman citizen.

Although it was invented by cruel pagans to punish criminals, the cross has become sacred, a talisman adored and worshiped by many. Millions think that its veneration and exhibition provides divine protection. By superstition, many carry it hanging on the neck or make the "sign of the cross" to repel evil and to chase away demons. Demons fear Christ, however, not a cross. Anyone who is not crucified together with Him exhibits the cross in vain (Acts 19:15).

Paul declares that "the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18, NKJV). The power of the cross is not in its exhibition, but in its preaching.

It's interesting to see the way God works. He made man from the dust. He allowed some to sell their brother as a slave, and then, 20 years later, used him to save his entire family from a famine, thus preserving his descent. He used a cross, a cursed and horrible instrument of physical torture, and turned it into a symbol of real love to achieve the salvation of humankind.

It's interesting to see the way God works.

Sin has perverted the character that God gave us, and we have become proud and selfish. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, crucify our sinful nature, take up our cross, and follow Him.

But for God to work in our lives, first we have to deny ourselves, which I believe is one of the hardest things to do, even for a Christian. There is always something that we want to be in control of. Jesus wants all—all areas of your life.

"To deny yourself means to reject your own desires, self-interests, and priorities. This is extremely unnatural, because our primary interest is to please ourselves. But when we lay aside our pride we renounce the great worth we give ourselves and our accomplishments, and we acknowledge the fact that we are nothing, worthless, there's no merit in our lives (Gen. 3:19; Rev. 3:15-18). You must consider everything that you do on your own as worthless as a pile of garbage (Phil. 3:8), and as repulsive as a pile of filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). When you completely humble yourself before God, recognizing your own lack of value, you have denied yourself."*

*Larry Fox, *Redeeming Your Character—God's Plan to Redeem Your Character From the Effects of Sin.*

Monday
January 31

Frustrated Hopes

LOGOS

Mark 11:1-11; John 13:1-17; 15:9-17

Have you ever gone through a great disappointment? It is common to have people disappoint us, or we ourselves frustrate the expectations of others. But can God disappoint us? You may have a desire in your heart and believe that what you're desiring is God's will for you. Then if all goes wrong, it seems as though you are all alone and nobody in the entire world can understand you. Disappointment makes you think that God has forsaken you. Where lies the problem?

If you were one of Jesus' disciples, you would probably have been disappointed with Him. As a Jew you would be waiting for the Messiah as a great political deliverer who would set Israel free from Roman bondage. The Jews were God's people, so they believed in the only God, Yahweh, contrary to the other polytheistic people surrounding them. Monotheism recognizes only one God, the Creator. Thus, when God promised the Redeemer, no one thought that He Himself would come!

The first disappointment would be to recognize that the Messiah would be born in a stable to a humble couple with no possessions or social status. Had the Lord not made it known, who would say that this was the Son of God?

Jesus knew what was going on in their hearts.

During His ministry and due to many of His assertions, Christ frustrated the false expectations of the religious leaders of His day. Many were offended. Some, as it happens today, would follow Jesus because they wanted something in return: bread, healing, prosperity. Even His closest friends had ambitions regarding the kingdom they expected would soon be established.

Many of Jesus' attitudes left them approving and confused at the same time. Imagine witnessing a dead person come to life! And as if healing a paralyzed man were not enough, Jesus made sure He also forgave the man's sins. Your heart would tremble, for only God can be as Jesus.

After seeing so many wonders, your expectations about what Jesus would do to set Israel free would be much greater than before you knew Him. It is true that sometimes He spoke about His death and being the Lamb of God, but maybe that was just one more of His parables. Influenced by the general euphoria, you would be anxious to see Jesus as King and would do everything possible for that cause.

At last, the disciples thought, the great day had come. Everyone shouted and waved palm branches, praising Jesus, who majestically entered the city, riding a donkey. He was such a surprising person! Everyone was happy, but they were looking for a future that would never come true.

Jesus knew what was going on in their hearts and He also knew how tragic the following days would be. Why did He seem to nurture a false hope in the people He loved, people who were tired of suffering?

The climate began to change when what was to be a celebration of Passover became more like a farewell. Jesus' discourse was not of someone who was about to be enthroned. Only He knew that His crown was not to be of gold, but of thorns.

Feeling like friends of the coming King, the disciples were looking for a servant to wash their feet. Looking at one another, they refused such a humiliating task. Who would be willing to bow down and wash away the dust of those others' feet? In Jerusalem, in those days, it was common to have a servant wash the feet of those who would come into the house.

As if it were not enough to get His feet dusty in this world, Jesus washed away the dust of His friends' feet. Do you think they blushed with shame as they saw that their Master was more humble than they were? When someone dies, we want to know about his last deeds and words. That gesture, before the Supper, was one of the last deeds of Jesus before His imprisonment and death. Surely He wants us to keep that lesson in mind.

The Ultimate Disappointment

No disappointment can be compared to the pain of seeing Jesus on the cross. For the disciples of Christ, the hope of a better life faded away with His last breath. Instead of a throne, He received a cross. His crown was not a symbol of glory, but of pain and humiliation. For His followers, there could not have been a darker night. How could one associate so much grief with such a glorious event as the one that just a short time before had taken place on the streets of Jerusalem?

Had Jesus fulfilled the desires of His disciples, today He would be no more than an historic character. That cross led Him to the truly majestic throne, much superior to what anyone could imagine. Jesus is the King of kings, the Lord of lords. He went all the way and shed His blood to assure us eternal life. (Read Isaiah 53.)

Many times we do not understand God's ways, as the disciples didn't during those moments of sadness. But never forget that God will always do the best for you, even though it may be painful at first.

It was necessary that all of it happen that way. The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem made Him more popular, and when many of those who had acclaimed Him read on the cross the inscription "King of the Jews," they were led to investigate the Scriptures with more dedication and ask themselves what really had occurred on that day. Many later recognized that Jesus was the Savior. The Scriptures had clearly described the mission of Christ, but only after seeing all that had happened to Jesus were the eyes of the sincere opened.

Glory to God, for He "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, NKJV).

TESTIMONY

Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:40-46

"The Saviour's life on earth was a life of prayer. . . . After eating the Passover supper with His disciples, Jesus went with them to the Garden of Gethsemane, where He often went to pray."¹

In Gethsemane Jesus felt the anguish of the weight of our sins. "The guilt of sin was so terrible, He was tempted to fear that God could no longer love Him."²

"Terrible was the temptation to let the human race bear the consequences of its own guilt, while He stood innocent before God. If He could only know that His disciples understood and appreciated this, He would be strengthened. . . . Had they been seeking refuge in God, that satanic agencies might not prevail over them, He would have been comforted by their steadfast faith. But they had not heeded the repeated warning, 'Watch and

"Terrible was the temptation to let the human race bear the consequences of its own guilt."

pray.' . . . They did not realize the necessity of watchfulness and earnest prayer in order to withstand temptation."³

"The experience of the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane contains a lesson for the Lord's people today. . . . Many today are fast asleep, as were the disciples. They are not watching and praying lest they enter into temptation."⁴

"The weakness of His disciples awakened the sympathy of Jesus. He feared that they would not be able to endure the test which would come upon them in His betrayal and death. He did not reprove them, but said, 'Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.'"⁵

"The disciples trusted to themselves. They did not look to the Mighty Helper as Christ had counselled them to do. So when the Savior was most in need of their sympathy and prayers, they were found asleep."⁶

Will we sleep or will we watch and pray?

1. *The Story of Jesus*, p. 101.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 688.

4. *In Heavenly Places*, p. 97.

5. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 689.

6. *The Story of Jesus*, p. 103.

Open the Way

HOW-TO

Zech. 9:9

After being rejected by the religious leaders of Jerusalem, Jesus went into the region of Caesarea, Philippi. There He spent His last private moments with the disciples, giving specific instructions regarding His crucifixion that was about to happen. On the exact day when the paschal lamb was to be chosen, Jesus returned to Jerusalem. In a curious ceremony, riding a donkey never ridden before, with people waving palm branches and laying their robes for Him to ride over, the Savior made His triumphal entry into the city.

Both for the Jews and for the Roman soldiers, palm branches were a symbol of triumph and peace. The shouts heard were not of war, but shouts of someone who enjoyed peace after winning a war. Differently from another occasion when He had attended a party in that same place and insisted on anonymity, this time Jesus planned a very public entry that would attract everyone's attention.

The worshipers' hearts earnestly burned. Such enthusiasm is needed today, as an important condition of power to lift us up to the atmosphere of heaven. Unfortunately, the reason for such rejoicing was wrong. They soon rejected Him with the same intensity.

**The worshipers' hearts
earnestly burned.**

When the disciples saw that Jesus seemingly accepted adulation during the greatest feast of Jerusalem, they wished they could forget the fact that their Master was soon to be beaten, to be reviled, and to die. It was the entry of a king, and He seemed to appreciate it. In reality, Jesus seized the opportunity to call the attention to the sacrifice that would crown His mission in behalf of a fallen world. For this reason it was necessary that the people's eyes were upon Him. As a conqueror, He welcomed the praise of the crowd as if they knew what was about to happen. He did not forget, however, the route that would lead Him to the throne: the cross, not a donkey. He could foresee the moment of His second coming, when He will receive the praise of His children, who will be fully conscious of God's purpose. That was the only occasion in all the ministry of Jesus when He was praised with one voice. This very scene will be greatly magnified at His triumphal entry in heaven: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" (Rev. 7:9, 10, NKJV).

Thursday
February 3

Crucified With Jesus

OPINION

Gal. 2:20

As he opened his eyes on that Friday morning, he knew that he was doing it for the last time. He would finally pay for his crimes, and it could not be different.

Looking at his partner of misfortune, he imagined how it could all have been different had they made the correct decisions and followed the path of good. Memories from his childhood, teenage years, and youth filled his mind and slowly made him realize how he had turned his life into a tremendous shame. He could hear the shouts of the crowd, could feel the anger and blood thirst that moved that mass of men and women. He felt terribly alone, abandoned, humiliated, and ashamed, having to face the cross.

Surely God must not exist. If He existed, where would He be? Why would He have created him only to abandon him to his own fate? Questions like these troubled his mind. At last the inevitable had arrived. Then something incredible happened. He was not alone. Not all was lost, and he realized that his story had not ended yet. It need not end as it had begun. He was crucified with

**Questions like these
troubled his mind.**

Jesus. And right there, as he looked to the cross of Christ, he was attracted by His love and received the promise of forgiveness and eternal life. His shame was gone. And the terrible pain that he had felt no longer meant anything, for he understood the meaning of the Cross. He could feel the extent of the immense sacrifice to which Jesus was submitting Himself because He cared about him. After all, he was being crucified with Jesus. God existed. He loved him and cared about him and about his fate in this world.

Every now and then we feel like the thief on the cross: abandoned, restless, carrying a cross that is the reward for our actions. Who will understand our pain? Who will listen to our plea and wipe away our tears? On Golgotha is the answer. Jesus, on the cross, is the answer. He suffered our pain and wept our tears. However, we need to walk by Calvary, not as mere spectators, but as the thief to be crucified with Jesus. Then, and only then, will we understand, however faintly, the meaning of the nails in His hands and the thorns upon His brow. The shouts of the crowd had ceased and Golgotha was silent. The work of Jesus was accomplished in his life. He slowly closed his eyes knowing he would open them again in eternity. The cross of Christ connected the thief to heaven. And with us it will be no different. Then, when Christ returns triumphantly in the clouds of heaven, we—you, I, and the thief on the cross—will realize at last that the cross does not mean shame, but victory.

A Passion for the Passion

EXPLORATION

Gal. 2:20

CONCLUDE

The last week of the life of Jesus was wrought with personal sacrifice, doubt, loneliness, anger, and incredible love. It is no wonder that we call this week the Passion Week. The symbolism that has come out of this week is undeniable, particularly the concept of the cross becoming a symbol for salvation rather than for torture. As well, we have become familiar with the idea of true servanthood and unflinching love. We see the humanity of Jesus come out of His cries in Gethsemane and on the cross. We also begin to understand the divinity of Christ as we see His grace under duress and His ultimate sacrifice leading to ultimate victory. The Passion Week holds the full spectrum of emotions for us as we look upon a God who suffered and died for us.

CONSIDER

- Taking one week to truly study the Passion Week. Walk with Jesus, in real time, through the last week of His life in your daily study. As well, take the time to model your prayer time after that of Jesus in His last week.
- Organizing a play or series of artistic renderings (of any medium) that symbolize the occurrences that take place in the last week of Christ's life. This activity can be a large undertaking or a very personal journey.
- Listening to "The Hammer Holds" by Bebo Norman and taking time to write out the lyrics, which will entail listening to this song a few times. It is the story of the nail that pierced the hand of Christ.
- Writing the story of the last week of the life of Christ as a first-person narrative, as if it were happening to you. Think about the feelings, thoughts, and fears that Christ might have been experiencing.
- Writing out a timeline of the last week of the life of Jesus Christ. Then spend specific time journaling about the times that would have been particularly hard for you.
- Looking at the main characters in the last week of Jesus' life, then writing short character sketches of each of the main players. Then go for a walk in nature and find objects that remind you of those you have written character sketches about.

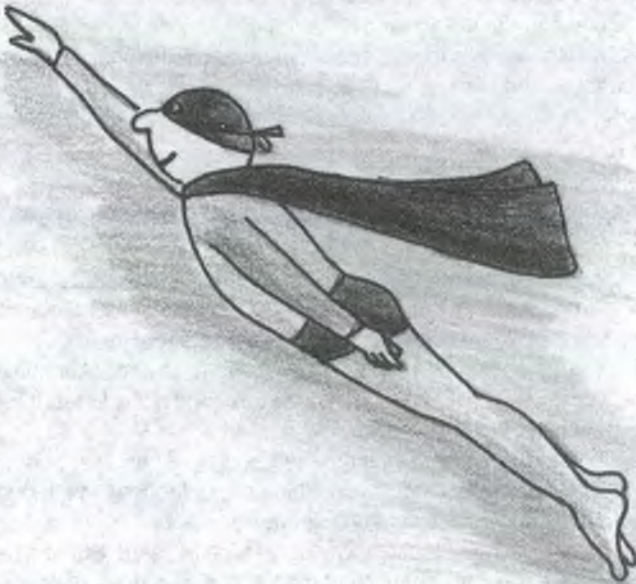
CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chap. 78.

Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*; John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*.

Timothy Gillespie, Riverside, California

Passage to Calvary



“Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, ‘Crucify Him, crucify Him!’ ” (Luke 23:20, 21, NKJV).

No Crying He Makes?

INTRODUCTION

Phil. 2:5-11

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:5-11, NKJV).

In 1988 the theatrical release of Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* was met with a firestorm of controversy. While negative reviews were more than justified, it is interesting to note that what most offended protesting Christians was the portrayal of a Savior whose divinity was contrasted with His humanity. As we study the last days of Christ's life, it would be worthwhile to explore what it is about the humanity of Jesus that scares us.

**Many of us see Jesus as
some sort of superhero.**

First, let's be clear: Our Seventh-day Adventist doctrine of Christology is biblically based (and in my opinion sound). However, we must admit that the ideology of our doctrines at times conflicts with the reality of our personal thoughts and experiences. To this end I wonder if we have at times overemphasized Jesus' divinity at the expense of His humanity. Consider the subtlety of this proposition as manifested in the popular Christmas carol "Away in a Manger." Each year we sing "but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes." What would make us think that Jesus, as a baby, lying in a manger no less, wouldn't cry?

Perhaps a more compelling argument can be found in exploring our understanding of Jesus' miracles. Many of us see Jesus as some sort of superhero who walked the earth "zapping" sickness and death and catering large events and weddings. A closer inspection of Jesus' power, however, reveals that it came from above, and, I would argue, at times was not at His disposal. See Mark 6:5. It seems that Jesus' abilities to do the miraculous were dependent on assistance from on high and the recipient's level of faith. Regardless, it is not disputed that regular human beings have exhibited similar powers throughout history.

Who Jesus was matters. Who we think Jesus was may be just as important.

What Is Your Verdict?

LOGOS

Matt. 26:57-68; Luke 22:66-71; John 18:2-9, 12-23

The historicity of Jesus cannot be denied. History attests that Jesus was a real figure, whose life, teachings, and death still profoundly impact humanity. The gospel theologians Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John invite us to investigate the person Jesus personally and conclude for ourselves what the ramifications and relevance are for us. Before one can fully delve into an investigation of the teaching and activities of Jesus, however, His identity must be established. Who Jesus is is as imperative to the investigation as to what He taught and did.

“[Jesus] asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ . . . Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My

**The historicity of Jesus
cannot be denied.**

Father who is in heaven’” (Matt. 16:13, 16, 17, NKJV).

To Jesus the subject of His identity is not a matter for neutrality. The entire fate of all humanity is totally dependent on their acceptance or rejection of His claim.

The Claim (Matt. 26:63, 64)

The unequivocal testimony Jesus wanted to bear was that He was the Son of God. This claim was regarded as blasphemy by the religious leaders of His time and according to the civil law punishable by death. In *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, Josh McDowell quotes Peter Kreeft: “A measure of your insanity is the size of gap between what you think you are and what you really are. If I think I am the greatest philosopher in America, I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I am fully embarked from the sunny shores of sanity. But if I think I am God, I am even more insane because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite things, even a man and a butterfly.” It is preposterous for anyone who has examined the activities of Jesus to safely conclude that Jesus was insane or a liar. (See 2 Peter 1:17; Matthew 14:33; 27:54.) The decision as to who Jesus is is not one of intellectual gymnastics. It is a matter that affects one’s eternal destiny. The apostle John declares, “These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name” (John 20:31, NKJV).

The Case (Matt. 26:65)

By His own admission Jesus was accused of blasphemy and sentenced to death. This sentence was well in keeping with Hebrew laws and customs (Lev. 24:16). Blasphemy consists of three things: mixing paganism and Christianity, claiming the prerogatives of God, and claiming the ability to forgive sins.

Let's consider the claims to be God and the ability to forgive sins. Was Jesus God or a god? There is abundant scriptural proof of the deity of Jesus classified under the themes of divine names, divine attributes, divine works, and divine honor ascribed to Him. According to the biblical writers' testimonies, Jesus was not only with God from the beginning, but Jesus was God and will always be as much divine as the other Two Members of the Godhead (John 1:1; Ps. 45:6, 7).

Equally important to the case of blasphemy brought against Jesus is His claim to forgive sins. In the account of the paralytic man (Mark 2:9-12), Jesus unequivocally demonstrated that He has the authority and power to forgive sins. According to McDowell, "Lewis Sperry Chafer points out that 'none on earth has either authority or right to forgive sin. None could forgive sin save the One against whom all have sinned. When Christ forgave sin, as He certainly did, He was not exercising a human prerogative. Since none but God can forgive sins, it is conclusively demonstrated that Christ, since He forgave sins, is God, and being God, is from everlasting.'"²

The Choice (Matt. 27:22)

When Jesus responded to the charges and admitted that He was indeed the answer from above, the Messiah, Son of Man, and the Son of God, the high priest Caiaphas rent his garment to express his repulsion of the seeming blasphemy uttered in his presence. This act was a prohibition by Levitical laws and customs (Lev. 10:6). "By rending his garment he cut himself off from being a representative character. He was no longer accepted by God as an officiating priest."³ He had now made the choice for his nation and himself to reject not only the claims of Jesus but also the person Jesus, the Savior of the world (Matt. 26:66). By rending his robe, antitype met type at that moment, and Caiaphas was unknowingly preparing the way for a greater High Priest, a greater sacrifice, and a greater ministry.

1. Josh McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), p. 161.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 149, 150.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 709.

Monday
February 7

Walking With God

TESTIMONY

Gen. 5:22

"After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years" (Gen. 5:22, NKJV).

The account of Enoch's life is encapsulated in a few verses of Scripture (Gen. 4:8-17; 5:22-25; Heb. 11:5), yet his testimony is one of the greatest ever recorded.

"Enoch's walk with God was not in a trance or vision, but in all the duties of his daily life. He did not become

"Enoch's walk with God was not in a trance or vision."

a hermit, shutting himself entirely from the world; for he had a work to do for God in the world. In the family and in his intercourse with

men, as a husband and father, a friend, a citizen, he was the steadfast, unwavering servant of the Lord.

"His heart was in harmony with God's will; for 'can two walk together, except they be agreed?' Amos 3:3. And this holy walk was continued for three hundred years."

It is evident that with the lapse of centuries Enoch's faith waxed the stronger; and his love for God became more ardent. In the same manner, as followers of Christ today we need a deeper and more meaningful walk with our Savior as we prepare for translation. Our daily testimony should be that our lives in every way are pleasing to God.

"Distressed by the increasing wickedness of the ungodly, and fearing that their infidelity might lessen his reverence for God, Enoch avoided constant association with them, and spent much time in solitude, giving himself to meditation and prayer. Thus he waited before the Lord, seeking a clearer knowledge of His will, that he might perform it."²

Consider Enoch's example: To him prayer was as the breath of the soul. What changes should you make in your life to strengthen your walk?

REACT

1. What lessons can be drawn from Enoch's example?
2. How do we balance our responsibility to "Go . . . and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19) with a desire to withdraw from the world?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 85.

2. *Ibid.*

What a God!

EVIDENCE

Rom. 5:6-8

I recently came upon an interesting notion: Jesus' trial, conviction, and execution were a miscarriage of justice, not only by today's legal standards but by the standards existing then, both Jewish and Roman. I had always believed that Jesus, the sinless One, had been wrongfully accused and convicted because of the hatred and jealousy of the religious leaders and the spinelessness of Pilate, the Roman governor. The thought, though, that His conviction was legally indefensible intrigued me. I decided to research it.

Here are some of the things I found out:

1. Jewish law did not allow court proceedings at night. John 18 tells us that they came to the Garden with lanterns and torches (verse 3), arrested Jesus, and led Him to Annas's house then Caiaphas's for trial. Clearly all this took place at night.

2. The Bible did not permit the conviction of any crime on the testimony of one witness (Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

Yet Mark 14:55-59 tell us that the witnesses brought against Jesus could not agree on their testimony. If the witnesses

could not agree, the accused should have been set free. How then could He be convicted?

3. Jewish law did not permit the trial of a capital offense on the day before the Sabbath. Jewish days are counted from sunset to sunset. By the time Jesus was arrested, it was the day before the Sabbath.

4. Jewish law did not permit conclusion of a trial on a capital charge in fewer than two days. The judges were to spend 24 hours reconsidering the case and then convene to vote again. Jesus' trial was concluded in less than nine hours.

5. The crime changes from blasphemy (Mark 14:63, 64) to treason (Luke 23:2). They knew that the Romans would not put a man to death for religious infractions. Besides, the Sanhedrin had no authority to preside over cases of treason.

6. Pilate declared Him innocent (Luke 23:4, 14, 15; John 18:38; 19:4). Yet Pilate had Him scourged (Mark 15:15; Luke 23:16) and eventually crucified.

The real question is: Why did Jesus allow Himself to be treated in this manner? The answer: "When we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:6-8, NKJV).

He knew that there was no righteousness in us. Yet He suffered this travesty of justice because He loved us. He died so that we might live. What a God!

Christ died for the ungodly.

Not a Sham—Just Part of the Plan

HOW-TO

Matt. 26:67, 68; John 18:11, 38-40

We sometimes talk about Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion as one of those action-packed movie sequels with a fascinating story line, each gripping episode of which some spectators were fortunate to watch with bated breath some years ago. Like many who have a daily diet of popular soap operas, some people today occupy their time with pointless debates on what will happen next in this great drama. Others pursue every opportunity to enunciate their intellectual and philosophical perspectives on the sequence of events as they unfold. A great many people don't even care what happens next, while there is yet another group who see themselves as a part of the plot and who claim actually to know how the story will end.

The Bible's account of the arrest, trial, and crucifixion of Jesus embodies the message of salvation in all its awesomeness and wonder. It is easy for us to get

The devil has produced a
lot of sideshows.

caught up in the emotion and passion of the drama, however, in the plots and subplots of the story, and miss out on the good news that every detail of Jesus' experience forms part of a deliberate

plan to save you and me from sin. Let's examine some of the events on His way to Calvary, and see how this applies.

1. "Put up your sword." This command of Jesus to Peter is also applicable to us. We do not conquer our enemies with weapons of hate and destruction. Instead we must allow Jesus, who enables us through His power and love, to help us overcome anything that stands in the way of our salvation.

2. Be careful of the choices you make. When given the choice, the Jews chose a robber over Jesus. We can now look back and say that was a foolish choice. But we too have to make similar choices every day. The person or thing that takes the place of Jesus in our life will likewise rob us of salvation.

3. Don't lose focus. Jesus never allowed anything to distract Him from His purpose to save us. His friends forsook Him, Peter denied Him, and His captors attempted to entice Him to flaunt His power; but Jesus remained focused. We too have a purpose here: to demonstrate that supreme love of Jesus in our lives through service to Him and to those with whom we come in contact from day to day. The devil has produced a lot of sideshows (like entertainment and fashion, disappointments and negative peer pressure) to distract us, but like Jesus we should let nothing cause us to lose our focus. Our salvation and the salvation of others depend on it.

A Father's Greatest Sacrifice

OPINION

John 3:16, 17

Sacrifice. The world is full of sacrifice. We all make sacrifices. I sacrifice having lunch with my buddies to save a few dollars. I have a friend who sacrifices his self-respect to keep a much-needed job.

Of course we all think that our sacrifices mean something. We think that our sacrifices are detrimental to our well-being, that no matter how insignificant it is in the grand scheme of things, it's worth something because we made a sacrifice.

And then we read about the Cross. We read about Calvary and the sacrifice that was made there. God gave His only Son! This wasn't some insignificant, meaningless gesture. God gave to us what was most valuable to Him.

After reading the lesson this week and understanding the unfair persecution and lack of compassion of Christ's enemies, how much more unbelievable is God's sacrifice?

The Bible says, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16, NASB).

What a sacrifice! God knew what kind of persecution and evil Christ would face on earth, the kind of trials His Son would have to endure. It must have been the toughest decision He has ever made.

What does that say about His love for us? We aren't just the science experiment gone awry; we actually have value! Look at what God sacrificed just to give us a fighting chance!

The Bible also says, "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him" (verse 17, NASB).

To save someone of immense value—you—God sacrificed His most valued possession, His Son. A Father's greatest sacrifice.

I sacrifice having lunch
with my buddies to save
a few dollars.

REACT

1. Think of a sacrifice that really moved or impressed you. What makes this incident stand out in your mind?

2. Since the word *sacrificed* seems to be a generic term used quite indiscriminately, can you think of a different word that would better describe God's and Jesus' gift to us? Explain why you chose the word you did.

Reciprocal Sacrifice

EXPLORATION

Eph. 5:1, 2

CONCLUDE

The Cross answers every question. It says "God is love; He didn't let anything stand in the way of rescuing His children." It says "God understands; He became one of us and experienced rejection, injustice, and heartache." It says "We have value; we are worth the life of God." It says "We have an Elder Brother; this Jesus, who walked our road, will walk with us as He walked with Enoch." It says "We have an example; the story of Jesus goes beyond an historical document and invades our hearts. Jesus' sacrifice becomes reciprocal in our own lives."

CONSIDER

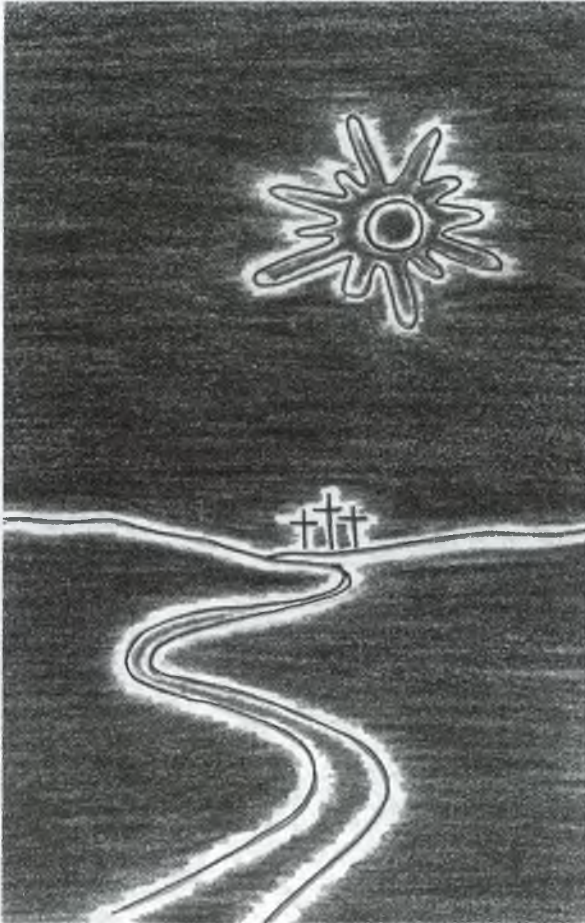
- Listening to Lewis Walton's set of tapes, *Rediscovering Calvary*, from American Cassette Ministries. You may be especially interested in the tape entitled "The Trial of Jesus: A Lawyer's Perspective."
- Watching the Jesus movie or the Matthew video, particularly the final scenes of Jesus' trial and crucifixion.
- Practicing sacrifice by choosing a ministry or needy person you have not been supporting, and giving up something you normally spend money on to begin supporting the ministry or the person.
- Listening to Michael Card's CD, *Known by the Scars*, and meditating on this phase of Jesus' journey.
- Videotaping man-on-the-street interviews, asking people what things they treasure that would be very hard to sacrifice. Show the video to your Sabbath School class.
- Drawing a map of Jesus' movements from Gethsemane to the tomb, noting what He went through and who He encountered at each stop.
- Creating a role-playing activity for your Sabbath School class or small group in which each person chooses a character in the trial and Crucifixion story (Barabbas, Peter, the thief, Pilate, Caiaphas, an angel, etc.) and tells the story from their perspective.

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages, chaps. 75–78.

Don Richardson, *Peace Child*; Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*; Philip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, chap. 10.

Darkness at Noon



**“ My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? ”
(Matt. 27:46, NKJV).**

INTRODUCTION

Matthew 27:52

Under normal circumstances, noon is usually the brightest hour of the day. But on this particular Friday, noon was the darkest hour. The sun would not let its light fall on the innocent Lamb of God carrying our sins to the cross. Neither could the heavenly host afford a moment's observation of the terrible scene at Golgotha.

On reflecting upon the Calvary experience, John the revelator could not find the language to express God's love. He could only call upon us. "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1, NKJV).

The fact that Someone special could love us this much—lay down His life for our own good—should evoke a special feeling of appreciation in us.

In his hymn "Go to Dark Gethsemane" James Montgomery gives us just a hint of what Christ suffered for our sake:

Go to dark Gethsemane,
Ye that feel the tempter's power;
Your Redeemer's conflict see;
Watch with Him one bitter hour;
Turn not from His griefs away;
Learn of Jesus Christ to pray.

See Him at the judgment hall,
Beaten, bound, reviled, arraigned;
See Him meekly bearing all;
Love to man His soul sustained;
Shun not suffering, shame, or loss;
Learn of Christ to bear the cross.

Calvary's mournful mountain climb;
There adoring at His feet,
Mark that miracle of time,
God's own sacrifice complete;
"It is finished!" hear Him cry;
Learn of Jesus Christ to die.

Darkness and the Climax of Salvation History

EVIDENCE

Matt. 27:45, 46

The cry of Jesus on the cross is to be seen not as a cry of despair, but as the fervent prayer of a sufferer who maintains His trust in God's protection and who is confident of vindication. The cry corresponds to the opening words of Psalm 22. It reveals the anguish felt by a friend and foe alike in dying the most excruciating death. The burden of the world's sin, Jesus' complete self-identification with sinners, involved a real abandonment of His Father.

The word *forsaken* means to abandon, to loose. The promise is that God will never forsake the righteous by allowing them to fall into the hands of the wicked (Ps. 37:25, 33; 9:10; Isa. 41:17).

In Psalm 22 the psalmist is convinced that God has forsaken him because of his dire circumstances, but then he concludes the psalm with a triumphant note, proclaiming God's faithfulness (Ps. 22:1; Matt. 27:46). It may be suggested that God had indeed not forsaken His Son in His personal relationship, but as parallel in Psalm 22:1, had to forsake Him to the suffering. The cry from the cross means to abandon, to loose. God promised David that even if his children forsake the divine law, He would not violate His covenant with the Davidian dynasty (Ps. 89:10-17).

The cry on the cross does not indicate the abandonment of relationship.

So the cry on the cross does not indicate the abandonment of relationship. Jesus has finished the work of saving humankind, which He came to do. His life on earth was a perfect life, and now He has given His life as "a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28, NKJV).

REACT

1. We have found that the cry of Jesus on the cross was the cry of triumph not despair. Now what does it teach you as a Christian life is concerned? What impact does it leave in your life? What connection does it have with your salvation?

2. In what way do you feel that Jesus was forsaken on the cross? Does His confidence in the face of abandonment help you when you feel forsaken? Be prepared to share your response as a testimony or a challenge in class next Sabbath!

Monday
February 14

All for Me—All for the Glory of God

LOGOS

Matt. 27:42, 46; Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44

Each person has his or her own response to Jesus' final moments on the cross. It's that response that sets us apart from each other regardless of our station in life.

A priest, a soldier, a thief. All mocked Jesus as He hung on the cross.

"'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, "I am the Son of God" ' " (Matt. 27:42, 43, NIV).

A priest, who should have known better. A soldier only doing his job. A thief with no hope. Each hurled these remarks, but only two understood.

**There were only two
choices for Jesus that day:
save Himself or save
everyone else.**

The priest preached. He taught the Jewish people. He had been consecrated and ordained—just as Aaron and his sons had been during the Exodus. He was the mediator between man and God. He offered the sacrifices to God, reconciling their sins. The priest

studied the Scriptures. He prophesied of the soon-coming Savior.

The priest cried out, "'He saved others, . . . but he can't save himself! . . . He trusts in God" " (verse 42, NIV). How ironic that a priest who believed in God, acted as a mediator, taught people, and prophesied had no trust in God. He mocked the very God he prophesied about.

The soldier was only doing his job. He had been ordered to crucify this man Jesus. Maybe the soldier had seen Jesus around town, preaching, healing, loving people. Maybe he hadn't witnessed these events. But that Friday morning, he was only doing his job as ordered. He nailed the sign "The King of the Jews" just above Jesus' head. He heard the hecklers. He heard the priest, the Sanhedrin. He joined in.

Jesus' garment was nice, too nice to tear apart. The soldiers cast lots to decide who would get the garment. As they gambled, Jesus pleaded on their behalf, "'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing' " (Luke 23:34, NIV).

This soldier heard Jesus' plea. He heard Jesus cry out to a higher authority—an Authority higher than the soldier's commander, the priests, the rulers, the king. The soldier was transfixed, rooted to the foot of the cross throughout the darkness

and the earthquake, hearing Christ utter His last words, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (verse 46, NIV).

Witnessing this, the soldier could only conclude that “surely he was the Son of God!” (Matt. 27:54, NIV).

A thief caught in the act was hanging beside Jesus. Another thief on the other side. Two criminals, one Savior.

Both criminals chimed in with the crowd, mocking Jesus. Both asked Him to save them as well as Himself. But one looked over at Jesus. He heard everything. How could he not? He heard the crowd and the soldiers’ taunts. He heard Jesus’ reply, or rather His nonreply, to His tormentors. He saw Jesus save nothing, not even His dignity. He heard every word uttered by Jesus in those final hours on the cross. He heard every word Jesus cried out to His Father.

This thief knew he was a sinner and deserved the punishment meted out by the courts. He acknowledged his crimes, yet he knew that Jesus had committed no crime. With every ounce of energy he had left, he turned his face toward Jesus. “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” (Luke 23:42, NIV).

Jesus was placed between two criminals. Crucifixion was meant for the hardened criminal, those rejected by their own society. He was placed in the middle because He was considered chief among criminals. Isaiah prophesied: “[He] was numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12, NIV).

One man hanging next to Jesus knew perfect peace in that moment.

Why didn’t Jesus save Himself from the cross? There are many pat answers that Christians like to give, and those answers give relief to many people. Yes, He could have come down from the cross and saved Himself. If He had, there would have been rejoicing throughout Jerusalem, throughout the country, throughout the world, throughout the army of angels. But Jesus didn’t save Himself on the cross because the very act of not saving Himself is what gives every sinner hope of forgiveness and reconciliation with God. There were only two choices for Jesus that day: save Himself or save everyone else. Jesus’ choice to stay on the cross demonstrated to the entire world that to save others, He couldn’t save Himself. The mockery Jesus endured that day from the crowd, the priests, the soldiers, and the two thieves hanging next to Him proved true. His death on the cross is what empowered Him to save me, you, and the rest of the world.

REACT

1. What does the thief being granted eternal life at the final moment of his life say about the saving grace of Jesus Christ? How does it relate to last-day events?
2. Since the promises of the Bible are true and they assure us of deliverance from the “hands of the wicked,” how do you explain, or how do you maintain trust, when it appears like you in fact have fallen into “their” hands?

Tuesday
February 15

Redemption Had Been Accomplished

TESTIMONY

John 19:30

“Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, ‘It is finished.’ John 19:30. The battle had been won. His right hand and His holy arm had gotten Him the victory.”

When God completed Creation, He looked upon it and said it was good. And when He completed the work of redemption, He cried with a loud “It is finished.” If we can grasp the significance of the finished work of Christ, we can be motivated to a life of dedication and obedience.

“Even after entering upon his earthly mission, the Saviour, wearied with the stubbornness and ingratitude of men, might have drawn back from the sacrifice of Calvary. In Gethsemane the cup of woe trembled in his hand. He might even then

“The battle had been won.”

have wiped the blood-sweat from his brow, and have left the guilty race to perish in their iniquity. Had he done this, there could have been no redemption for fallen men. But when the Saviour yielded up his life, and with his expiring breath cried out, ‘It is finished,’ then the fulfilment of the plan of redemption was assured.”²

“Thus the death of Christ—the very event which the disciples had looked upon as the final destruction of their hope—was that which made it forever sure. While it had brought them a cruel disappointment, it was the climax of proof that their belief had been correct. The event that had filled them with mourning and despair, was that which opened the door of hope to every child of Adam, and in which centered the future life and eternal happiness of all God’s faithful ones in all the ages.”³

REACT

1. If “It is good” and “It is finished” describe God’s completed works, what statement describes your position as it relates to His completed works?

2. What other descriptive phrases could you use to illustrate God’s response to us in our struggle with making Christianity work in our lives (i.e., “Well done thou good and faithful servant”)? What phrase could He use to describe you?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 758.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 348.

3. *Ibid.*

Within the Darkness

HOW-TO

Ps. 31:5

When I was a child, my family and I spent many Sabbaths in nature. Many were the times I heard “Nature is the best picture of God’s character.” But although I enjoy nature, I’ve found that even in the midst of God-designed beauty, it’s easy to miss the real beauty of God’s character. Nature displays one aspect of God’s character, but even that display has been damaged by sin. The complete, undamaged portrayal of God’s character is found in a look at the ugly; the ultimate results of sin.

The life of Christ has been frequently studied by Christians. We rejoice with the shepherds at His birth. We analyze His parables. We know the Beatitudes, or at least we did at one time. We try to love our neighbors as ourselves and turn the other cheek. We try to do what Jesus would if He lived our lives. But how can we be like Jesus in the darkness of the Crucifixion?

1. Recognize your options.

For us there can be only one ruling passion. All others have to be subordinate. For Jesus His moments in the darkness were

the final display of a life continually submitted to His Father’s will. We must decide what passion will rule our lives. Money? People? Work? Or the will of our Father? If we waver now, why would we remain steadfast in the darkness? What we do in the darkness will be no different from the life we live in the light.

2. Fuel your fire. Jesus fed His passion for His Father by spending time in His presence, talking with Him and listening to Him. Just as friends who never talk cease to know each other, we also lose our passion for God if we don’t feed it with His presence. Food isn’t optional for humans. Prayer and worship aren’t optional for Christians.

3. Work your muscles. We understand that Olympic quality skills aren’t developed in easy chairs. But somehow we expect Christian character to be perfected on padded church pews. Trials, difficulties, and problems are the weights in a Christian’s gym, the turf on the playing field. Play hard.

4. Rely on your God. Darkness comes to all of us at different times. Darkness is the time to rely on what God has shown you in the light. If you can trust God’s words in the light when all seems clear, you can trust them in the dark as well. Not knowing what God’s plan is doesn’t change the fact that He has one and that He has promised to finish what He has started in your life (Phil. 1:6).

Somehow we expect
Christian character to be
perfected on padded
church pews.

Thursday
February 17

The World in a Coma

OPINION

Matt. 27:45, 46; Luke 23:44

It has been said that the night is darkest just before the day breaks. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was in His darkest hour and felt forsaken by all He knew. Even though His disciples were standing around the cross and God and the angels were looking down from heaven, no one else was hanging on the cross with Jesus except two criminals. However, the day soon broke and Jesus died and was then resurrected. This daybreak wasn't just for Jesus, but also for heaven and all humanity.

The daybreak for Jesus meant that He had died and was resurrected. This meant that Jesus had achieved His goal here on earth and His 30 or so years here

**Jesus has been pleading
with us to wake up.**

weren't wasted. The daybreak for heaven meant that God's plan had succeeded, Satan had been overthrown, and humanity had been saved. Daybreak for humanity meant that we would

now be saved from our sinful state, and the hope for a better life in heaven was shared. Yet, humanity appears to have been in a coma.

Reportedly, people in comas can hear those around them talking. Perhaps you've seen a movie, or even experienced it yourself, in which a person is in a coma and the people surrounding the patient keep talking to them in the hope that the familiar voice will help them wake up. While we've been in our coma, Jesus and heaven's entire population have been pleading with us to wake up. As it gets closer to the daybreak of our coma, the world keeps getting darker. Soon we will heed the familiar voice of Jesus pleading with us to accept Him and what He has done for us. Yet when we wake, we don't need to worry; Jesus has already paid our hospital bill and released us from the debt of sin.

When we wake from our coma and the day breaks for us, we will be on our way home to heaven, where it will never darken again. Just as when a patient leaves the hospital to go home and home seems just that bit more beautiful, so will we appreciate even more the wonderful deed that Jesus has done for us.

REACT

1. Reflect on a crisis in your life that reached a climax just as, or just before, a light switched on showing you a way out of danger.
2. Picking up on the analogy of the coma, who is actually in the coma? Is it growing Christians, struggling Christians, apathetic Christians, or non-Christians?

Karen Clark, Mackay, Australia

Fast-Food Pharisees

EXPLORATION

Matt. 27:27-31, 39-46

CONCLUDE

In our fast-food culture, it is the shortest distance to now that is celebrated most. I would preserve my own dignity and comfort at all cost. Yet, as followers of Christ, we are given a powerful vision. We are challenged by the Cross to see far into the future—to a new earth bursting with worship for a leader who died in humiliating, excruciating pain. To give up self is to commit to increased responsibility. Stripped of concern for immediate gratification, we can take up the cross, follow Him, and walk easily through the eye of the needle.

CONSIDER

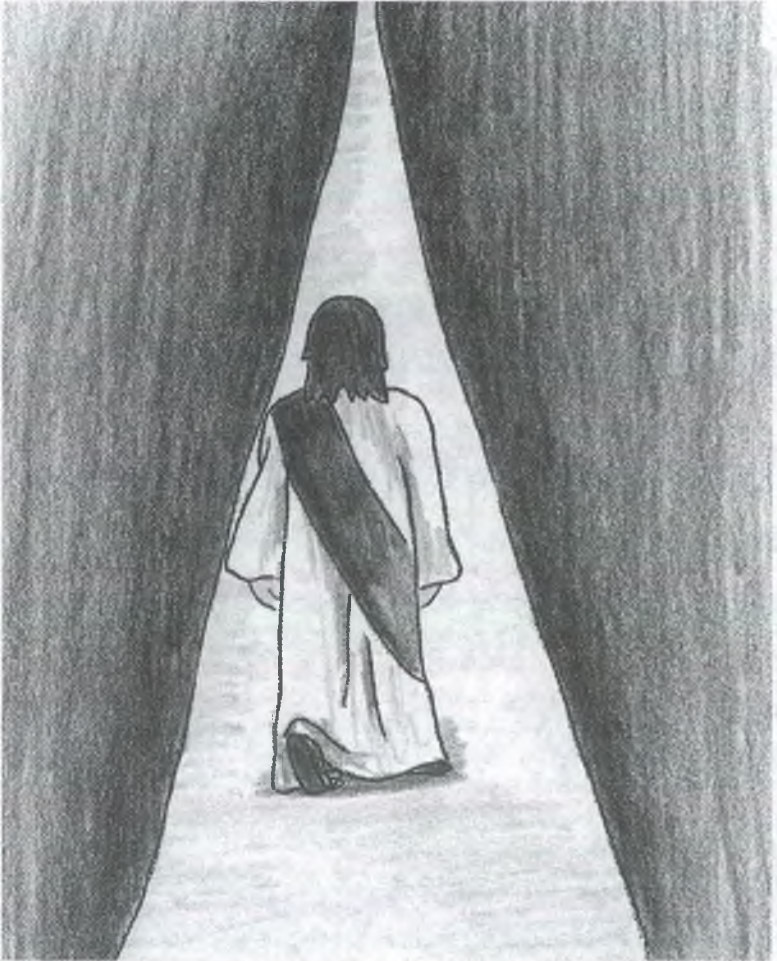
- Researching what is historically involved in crucifixion (see *The Gift*, below). Look up several artists' renderings of Christ's crucifixion. Are the pictures true to your research?
- Making an approximate timeline of Christ's crucifixion, including the statements Christ made while on the cross and the reactions of the thief, Pharisees, and soldiers. Are the two sets of exclamations related? If so, how? What was it about Christ at the moment of belief that led the thief and soldier to have faith in Christ's divinity?
- Listing what you imagine/know to be the daily responsibilities of the disciples before meeting Christ. Make another list of what you imagine/know to be the daily activities/responsibilities of the disciples after meeting Christ and, more specifically, after Christ returned to heaven. Did their responsibilities decrease or increase after knowing Jesus? If so, how? How does this apply to our own lives as Christians?
- Finding a place where you can be in complete darkness and meditate on Christ's sacrifice in silent prayer.
- Watching several commercials on television and noticing what they promise to, and require of, the consumer. Write a commercial for Christianity.
- Thinking about the choices you have made over the last week. For how many of these choices did you have to/decide to consider long-term consequences for your actions?

CONNECT

The Desire of Ages.

Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*; Kim Allan Johnson, *The Gift*.

He is Risen



“ ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!’ ” (Luke 24:5, 6, NKJV).

Are You for Real?

INTRODUCTION

Matt. 3:11, 12; 3:13-15

Do you know a man named Jesus? A carpenter who lived two thousand years ago?

He was the Man who spent His life teaching the Holy Scriptures at the roadside, beside the mountain, healing the sick, allowing the blind to see, the lame to walk, helping the needy, rescuing lost souls. He was the Man who was betrayed by His friend, but still forgave. He was the Man who was rejected by His own people; He was arrested with wrong accusations; He was badly beaten, physically and mentally. He has taken our guilt and pain to give justice to all.

“Christ was the prince of sufferers; but it was not bodily anguish that filled him with horror and despair; it was a sense of the malignity of sin. . . . The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon his heart; and the wrath of God, and the terrible manifestation of his displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of his Son with consternation.”*

How tragic—how painful! He loves us so much that He gave His life for us to have eternal life. He was nailed to the cross.

Do you know Him?

In our modern world many have claimed that they have fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. Many have believed them, for they really don't know the Scripture.

They base their belief on how well the person speaks and how well he can defend himself. How well do you know Jesus personally? Do you claim Him to be your Savior because your parents did the same thing? If

Many have claimed that they have fulfilled the Messianic prophecies.

you claim Him to be your Savior, you will know His favorite things—His likes, His dislikes. You will know Him to be more than a mere part of the earth's history.

He came here to be our Savior, Redeemer, Guide, to reconnect the direct communication with God the Father through Him, to take our part in the Cross and, most of all, to be our Friend—your Friend.

Do you know Jesus? Do you know Him well enough to trust Him with your life, or do you sometimes doubt Him?

Here's what I can assure you: If you really know Him, you wouldn't dare ask, “Are You for real?”

* *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 3, p. 162.

Sunday
February 20

Life Again—but From Whose Perspective?

LOGOS

Matt. 28:9; John 11:1-46; 20:10-18; Rom. 6:4-6; 1 Cor. 15:3-8

Every day thousands of people die. Death is sad for the family and friends of the deceased. The grieving can take months and years. However, most humans know that we are going to die. We were born to die. Our future is the grave or cremation. Yet God set “eternity in [our] hearts” (Eccles. 3:11, NKJV). Is there life after death? This is a basic spiritual question.

Lazarus is one of billions who have died on earth. His death was not unique, nor was his sisters’ grief.

John 11:1-46

The story of Jesus and Lazarus comes at a climax in the ministry of Jesus and the book of John. From the outset of his Gospel, John has been giving evidence that Jesus is who He claimed to be: God. John uses the testimonies of witnesses and the miracles as the selected major evidence to present his case for the divine origin of Jesus. The miracles go from the more basic of turning water into wine

Jesus knows that His personal testimony has been rejected.

(John 2) to giving sight to a blind man by proxy (John 9), each successive miracle showing that Jesus had control over more than any other. The immediate context of the Lazarus story has Jesus at the feast of dedication. The Jewish

people want Jesus to tell them who He really is. In the ensuing dialogue He does: “I and My Father are one” (10:30, NKJV).

However, Jesus knows that His personal testimony has been rejected, so He reminds them of the other evidence twice—the miracles (verses 25, 38). Jesus’ ministry is one of both show and tell, and to challenge stubborn hearts He is about to bring out the big one—the climactic evidence. Jesus Himself says the death of Lazarus is “for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (11:4, NKJV). Glory in John’s Gospel is the purpose of Jesus (17:1-5).

From a spiritual perspective Jesus has continually offered eternal life to those who believe in Him (3:16, 17, 36; 4:14; 5:24, 25; 6:40; 10:10). If He is to offer eternal life, however, He must deal with humanity’s major obstacle to ongoing life: death. If Jesus is God, surely He can raise the dead. If not, He and His teaching are of no value to humans, and the promise of eternal life is given in vain.

Before Jesus goes to Bethany—the place where Lazarus lived and died—He reminds His disciples of God’s view of death. Death is but a sleep (11:11-14). From

a human perspective death described as sleep is a peaceful image, but no human can wake a person from death. From God's perspective, however, humans can be aroused from the sleep of death.

On arrival at Bethany Jesus is greeted by Lazarus's two sisters. Martha and Mary are so caught up with their grief and their limited view of Jesus' power that they use the same words to blame Jesus for Lazarus's death. When Jesus gives Martha the promise of the resurrection, she grasps only the future resurrection.

Jesus then demonstrates that He, as God, can raise the dead now. His sorrow before the resurrection of Lazarus may have been more about the inability of anyone to grasp the complete spiritual God picture than the emotion of identifying with those in grief. Lazarus's resurrection showed that Jesus can deal with death.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

The New Testament echoes with the major themes of grace: Christ died and rose again. In proclaiming this belief, Christians of all ages have been intellectually honest: Dead men cannot save us. The resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal fact of faith in Jesus. Paul knew this and lists some of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances. The Gospels give others: Peter (John 21), the 12 disciples in Jerusalem and in Galilee (20:19-29; Matt. 28:16-20), Mary (John 20:10-18), and the two disciples on the Emmaus road (Luke 24:13-35). The whole point of the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus was to give evidence that Jesus is alive.

John 20:10-18

Perhaps in thanks for Jesus raising her brother from the dead or for the change Jesus had brought to her own life, Mary extravagantly pours a bottle of pure, expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. John sees this as preparation for Jesus' burial—a prophetic act (John 12:1-8). Mary does not comprehend her own actions and is the first to go to the tomb of Jesus early Sunday morning to embalm Jesus' body. She is grief-stricken again. Two angels ask her, “ ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’ ” (20:13, NKJV). Moments later Jesus asks her the same question. Now at the death of Jesus, as it had occurred at Lazarus's death, Mary's self-indulgent grief and soul-searching questions block her from seeing the spiritual perspective. She was talking to Jesus and she did not know it. Perhaps the repetitions of blame in grief in John 11 are compounded with the repetitions of question over grief by the angels and Jesus in John 20.

Mary finally recognizes Jesus when He calls her by name. The sound of our own name is the sweetest sound to any human ear, in particular when God is calling our name. Jesus then gives Mary a task. Mary is to be the first witness and give the first testimony of the greatest event in history (verse 18). Jesus is alive!

Humans today are like Mary and Martha. We see things only from our perspective. We want scientific proof of the Resurrection. God challenges us to accept the evidence and believe in Jesus. Then we have life now and life forever.

Hope Beyond the Grave

TESTIMONY

John 10:17, 18; 1 Cor. 15:20; 1 Thess. 4:14

The peak of the cosmic conflict between the Prince of Peace and the powers of darkness was marked by the Crucifixion, i.e, the death of Jesus. This left Satan working hard to see that the plan of redemption was not a success.

"When Jesus was laid in the grave, Satan triumphed. He dared to hope that the Savior would not take up His life again [John 10:17, 18]. He claimed the Lord's body, and set his guard about the tomb, seeking to hold Christ a prisoner."¹

"When Jesus came into the world, Satan's power was turned against Him. From the time when He appeared as

**We question the presence
and power of our Lord.**

a babe in Bethlehem, the usurper worked to bring about His destruction. In every possible way he sought to prevent Jesus from developing a perfect child-

hood, a faultless manhood, a holy ministry, and an unblemished sacrifice. But he was defeated."²

How often do we lose our trust and hope in the Lord? Whenever we don't get what we expected or something overwhelming comes our way, our faith shakes and the pulse rate rises. We question the presence and power of our Lord. With the death of Christ the disciples' hope perished.

My mother has told of how she grieved when a doctor told her that her four-year-old son was dying. He had been very ill and in a comatose state for two days. Neighbors gathered to plan for the burial service. Meantime her innocent daughter went where the boy lay and called her brother's name. Suddenly the boy joined his sister to play. All were amazed. This boy happens to be me. My mother's faith was in the doctors. On whom is your faith based?

To the believers death is but a small matter. Christ speaks of it as if it were of little moment. "If anyone keeps My word he shall never see death. . . . He shall never taste death" (John 8:51, 52, NKJV).

To the Christians death is but a sleep, a moment of silence and darkness. "Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Col. 3:3, 4, NKJV).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 782.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 759.

Resurrected Faith

EVIDENCE

John 20:25, 29

There are doubting Thomases among us who need to see before they will believe. Our belief in the Resurrection need not be based on blind faith. Looking at the Resurrection from a historical perspective, one would find reasons to believe in its historicity. If Jesus never rose from the grave, today we Christians would be “grave worshippers”!

According to New Testament scholar James D. G. Dunn, it was a customary practice in the time of Jesus to meet at the tomb of the dead prophets for worship.* We get a hint of this practice from Scripture itself: “ ‘You build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous’ ” (Matt. 23:29, NKJV). And it continues today in the veneration accorded to the tomb of Abraham in Hebron and David in Jerusalem. A 1984 TV program mentioned another example of this practice at the tomb of a lesser-known, near contemporary of Jesus: Rabbi Honi, “the circle drawer.”

Some Christians today regard the site of Jesus’ tomb with similar veneration, but the practice goes back only to the fourth century. For the period covered by the New Testament, however, there is no evidence whatsoever for Christians regarding the place where Jesus had been buried as having any special significance. This is so because no grave was thought to contain Jesus’ earthly remains. The tomb was not venerated because it was empty!

It was customary in the time of Jesus to meet at the tomb of dead prophets for worship.

The belief in a risen Jesus resurrected the faith of the followers of Jesus. The reality of the Resurrection transformed a band of demoralized disciples who “were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19, NIV) to men who could not be intimidated by the leading Jewish authorities. Something must have happened to them. The resurrection of Jesus as a historical event is part of that explanation.

REACT

Does God allow any room for doubt in our walk of faith with Him? John 20:24-31 seems to indicate that He does understand the human need to “see” and believe. Discuss.

*James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster Press), p. 67.

We Are God's Arms—Extended

HOW-TO

1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6

Jeff (not his real name) had a strong faith in the God he believed in such that he always walked with the cross in his pocket. He trusted that for him to be safe, the cross in his pocket would sense danger and thus he would be saved from any calamity. One day, as he walked along a dusty road, a gang of thieves accosted him, but they could find nothing of value except the cross in Jeff's pocket. "You have a cross in your pocket," they said with a sneer, "yet you are so poor. What kind of God is this you serve who gives you nothing of value?"

Such is our Christian walk. We know that we have the hope of eternal life through Him. He is of more value in our lives than anything else you can think of. And it's not yours and mine for keeps. The news must be shared. But how? you may ask. The answer is in questions:

"What kind of God is this you serve who gives you nothing of value?"

● As followers of the resurrected Jesus, how often do we personalize Jesus in our lives so

that He influences everything we do, every day?

● As followers of the resurrected Jesus, how often do we share the message of His salvation with others?

● As followers of the resurrected Jesus, do we humble ourselves and become burden bearers to our sisters and brothers in our neighborhood?

The Christian walk is a journey that calls for walks. Are we willing to carry the cross in the pocket of our daily lives and look forward to the eternal value that it bears? As you and I walk our journey of faith, can people tell that the cross of Jesus bears meaning to us and that the resurrected Jesus makes a difference in how we live our lives, walking with Him all the way? Ellen White states that "in every doctrine of grace, every promise of joy, every deed of love, every divine attraction presented in the Saviour's life on earth, we see 'God with us.'"¹

"He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His."² Stop and gaze at the Cross. Focus your attention on those in society who are spiritually hungry, those who are less fortunate. Tell them about Jesus, His love and how He came to love, heal, and forgive. Be God's arm—extended.

The Cross redefines God as One who was willing to relinquish power for the sake of love. Would you, too, for the sake of your neighbor's destiny?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

Alive Is He?

OPINION

John 11:25, 26; Rom. 6:6-12; 1 Cor. 15:13-22; 1 Thess. 4:14-18; Rev. 3:20, 21

A few days after Lazarus passed away, Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26, NKJV). Jesus revealed His godliness to her. He spoke and Lazarus came forth. Truly He is the Resurrection and the Life.

"If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen" (1 Cor. 15:13, NKJV). This makes the Christian faith nothing better than heathenism; it makes liars of those who proclaim His resurrection. Thus it nullifies the fact that He cleanses us from our sins and "those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (verse 18, NKJV). Why live a Christian life for the dead? "Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (verses 20-22, NKJV).

Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death; as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even we should walk in newness of life. The old self must be crucified that the old sinful self might be destroyed, that from this day forward we should not serve sin, but live a life in Christ and

He wants to be with us.

live with Him. Christ conquered death; it has no more power over Him, and if we live in Him and He in us, it loses its power too (Rom. 6:6-12).

The resurrected Christ stands and knocks at your door, and only when you hear His voice and open the door will He come into your life. He wants to be with us and would like us to be overcomers of sinful self by His power that we may join Him at His Father's throne (Rev. 3:20, 21).

At Jesus' second coming the living won't have advantage over them that are asleep in Christ. The Lord Himself will descend from heaven to wake the dead in Him first. The living will be changed and together we will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. No more separation from our Lord.

REACT

1. How important is Christ's resurrection to Christian belief? credibility? Why?
2. From Romans 6:4-6 the practice of baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. In what way did Christ die? In what way do humans die? In what way does Christ live? In what way do humans live? Is there any difference in quality or timing of the resurrections?

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 15:3-6; 1 Pet. 1:3-5

CONCLUDE

Other prophets and charismatic leaders were offering words of hope and even miracles. Jesus wasn't the only one who roused the ire of both church and political leaders with His provocative parables and actions. He wasn't even the only one killed for His beliefs. But He was the only One who rose from the dead.

What Jesus did during His lifetime was valuable. But it's what happened after His death that eternally affects us. His resurrection was proof-positive that He really was who He said He was. When Christ rose from the tomb, He became living proof of our faith.

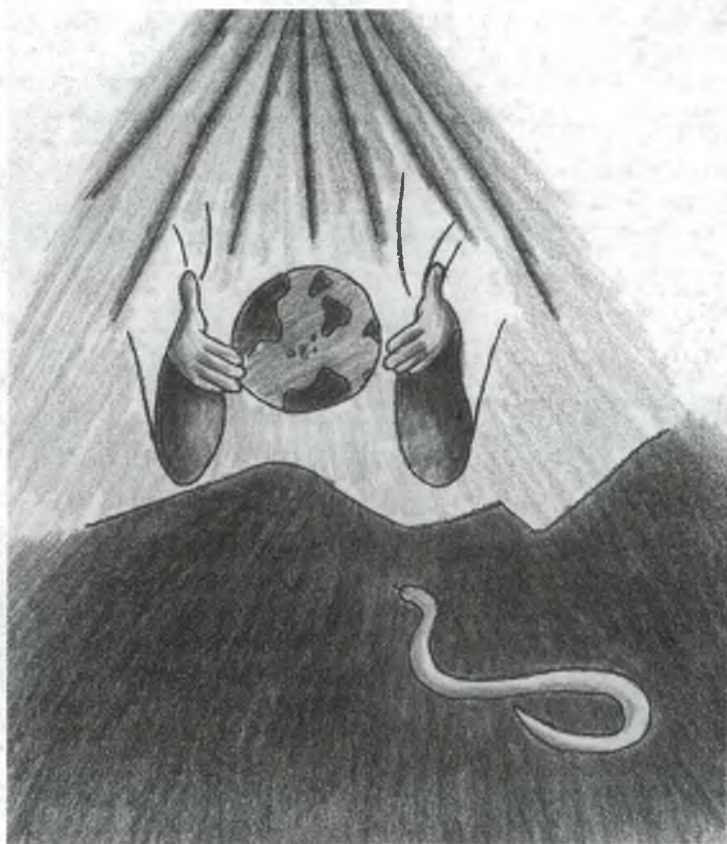
CONSIDER

- Studying the life of a contemporary martyred leader, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Compare his or her lifestyle, goals, and accomplishments with those of Christ.
- Planting a seed or bulb. It takes faith to believe that seed can rise from the dirt into a living plant. Compare the faith Christ had in His Father with our faith in Christ.
- Taking a prayer walk that focuses on Jesus' trial, death, and burial. Stop at set places to read and meditate on an event from the Passion of Christ. End with a worship service celebrating His resurrection.
- Giving a gift. Enclose an unsigned card with a Bible text that tells of God's gift to us through Jesus (e.g., John 3:16, 17; Rom. 6:23; Eph. 2:8; 1 John 4:9, 10).
- Proving someone exists. What methodology would you use to convince someone of the existence of a person they've never seen?
- Campaigning to have your church group celebrate Christ's resurrection as markedly as they do Christmas. When Christ rose from the tomb, Satan was eternally defeated. That's cause for celebration!
- Designing a poster that reflects the excitement of the Resurrection and what it especially means to you. Hang it someplace visible to others.
- Listening to "The Young Messiah" (or any version of *Handel's Messiah*) all the way through. These works embody the promises of Christ's birth, His death and resurrection, and His second coming.

CONNECT

Kevin Bowen, *Will's Bones*; John Duckworth, *Return of the Living Dead*.
The Dead Sea Scrolls Revealed, software program.

The Heart of the Cross



“The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18, NKJV).

INTRODUCTION

2 Cor. 5:14, 15

For millennia the universe existed and went about its business in perfect harmony. The leadership of God through His law of love had made sure that it was so. But now a scandal rocked this seemingly perfect way of life. God’s character was brought into question, and Lucifer—the top angel, and widely understood to be the one creature that had privy into the plans and ways of the Creator—had alleged that “God was not just in laying laws and rules upon the inhabitants of Heaven; that in requiring submission and obedience from his creatures, he was seeking merely the exaltation of himself.”¹ He argued that angels were in themselves perfect beings and would do much better for themselves if they followed their own will—free from the laws by which God governed the universe.

God had to answer these allegations. It would have been easy to destroy Lucifer and lay the argument to rest—temporarily. Though peace would have been restored,

“[Lucifer’s] own work must condemn him.”

the universe would now serve God out of fear, and in their hearts would be convinced that Lucifer was right. But God only accepts a service of love. “Therefore it must be demonstrated before the inhabitants of Heaven as

well as of all the worlds, that God’s government was just, His law perfect.”²

“[Lucifer’s] own work must condemn him.”³

Through Adam and Eve’s acceptance of Lucifer’s insinuations, this world of ours became a test lab for his “reforms” to God’s law. We had become his followers, and as such directly at odds with our Creator.

As the universe looked on, they saw Lucifer come away unscathed from God’s dominion. It was now time for God to come down into Lucifer’s dominion. It would cost Him His life. At the Cross, God laid this whole bitter argument to rest. It was now plain for all to see that it was sin, and not God, that was causing suffering and death. The universe now knew that God’s law of love was the right way, and furthermore, they were now able to grasp the depth of God’s love for His creations.

And for us here on earth it provided an “emergency exit,” a connection back to our Creator—salvation. It gave us a choice. And if we choose to follow God and accept His law of love, He now has full authority to stand before anyone in the universe, look them squarely in the eye, and say: “They are mine, I have earned the right to redeem them.” And this is the grace of God. Because we have all sinned, we could never have earned this right by ourselves.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 498.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

It Was *His* Choice

EVIDENCE

Psalms 22; 88; Isaiah 53

Often when we think about Jesus during the hours prior to His crucifixion, we tend to focus only on His physical sufferings. I could probably count many martyrs who endured even more physical pain as they perished, but that doesn't make them capable of rescuing a lost race. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we should completely ignore His physical pain either. But to understand why Jesus had to die, we must also focus on His mental, emotional, and spiritual agony. Isaiah 53, the superb description of the Messiah's sufferings, mentions pain and suffering, but are these physical? Or do they go further in describing the mental affliction of a Savior who is forever separated from His Father? Psalms 22; 88 are like a transcript of Christ's thoughts as He hangs on the cross.

The sacrificial system pointed to Jesus as our Substitute, and not merely our Substitute for the first death. Many Christians have experienced the first death and more will do so before Christ returns. Jesus instead took our place in the second death, the one that means a realization of being forever separated from the one Being in the universe who loves you more than you could ever imagine.

"When faced with the ultimate decision to preserve self at the loss of others or to save others at the loss of self, what will the divine One choose? The good news of the gospel here emerges in all its healing beauty: No matter where this path of suffering leads, He cannot leave us to perish. His decision is made: He will save mankind at any cost to Himself. He cannot do otherwise, for the essence of His character is selfless love. . . . Knowing that He could abandon fallen man and save Himself at any moment, the Son of God continued to trudge forward into the darkness with self-forgetful determination. The devastating prospect of never-ending separation from His Father did not alter His decision to ransom the rebellious children whom He loved more than His own soul."*

What was Jesus experiencing on the cross?

REACT

If you could, would you give up your salvation in order that your best friend or the person you loved the most would be saved? Would you give up your salvation so that Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, or Hitler would be saved? Explain your answer.

*Ty Gibson, *See With New Eyes: The True Beauty of God's Character* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000), pp. 79–83.

Monday
February 28

God's Answer to the Cry

LOGOS

Gen. 18:22-33; Rom. 3:9-20; 5:12, 15, 18; 2 Cor. 5:14

On the surface the Cross does seem foolish. How can death bring about life? How can suffering ease pain? How can sacrifice be a gift? To those who are dying, the Cross is ridiculous. To those who are being saved, the Cross is pure genius.

The Cross shows that God, throughout the ages, has been intimately involved with rebellious humanity. It shows that He has an answer to sin. But the Cross was not God's first revelation of that answer. God had visited sinful earth before to point the way to the Cross. One such visit occurred the day He talked with Abraham.

The Wickedness of Many (Gen. 18:22-33)

From the first disobedience in Eden, God heard the cry of suffering and pain caused by sin. He heard the anguish of His creation, and could not ignore it. One

On the surface the Cross
does seem foolish.

such cry came up to God about the sinful state of Sodom and Gomorrah. It called God from His throne to see firsthand how bad it was (Gen. 18:20, 21). Of course, God did not need to

leave heaven to know how bad things had become—the Infinite Power of the universe knows and sees all things. However, to show His fairness and care, He worked in a way that His creation could understand—He came and walked and talked and saw. It cannot be said that God does not see us, does not feel, and does not know about our lives. From Creation through all eternity, He is closely involved with each of us.

In fairness God revealed to Abraham His plan for Sodom and Gomorrah. And in complete acknowledgment of God's character, Abraham cried out, "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked" (Gen. 18:25, NKJV). Abraham rightly recognized that God, as the Judge of all the earth, was merciful, fair, and loving. He knew that it went against God's character of love and justice to kill the righteous with the wicked.

As Abraham questioned God, he came to see that God had a plan and would not allow the wickedness of many to destroy the righteous few. Rather, God had an answer. He would allow for the righteousness of the few to save the wicked many.

"I will not destroy it for the sake of ten" (verse 32, NKJV). Here God shows that although the wicked deserved death, He would accept the righteousness of ten for the whole city.

The Wickedness of All (Rom. 3:9-20)

As we know, ten righteous could not be found. There was one considered righteous in Sodom, but his was an imperfect righteousness, and could not save the city either. Lot's righteousness could not save even himself, because "When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city" (19:16, NIV). Lot did not go willingly; he was led away from the coming destruction. He was led away not because of his righteousness, but because "the Lord was merciful to them" (verse 16, NIV).

And the reality is that had even ten righteous been found, they could not save Sodom and Gomorrah in the long term—and for eternity. There was the need for a better answer.

"What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all!" (Rom. 3:9, NIV). The outcry about Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18:20) is the same cry heard by God today: "There is no one righteous, not even one. . . . All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Rom. 3:10, 12, NIV). The cry is for something greater than ten righteous sinners. The cry is for the righteousness of the Perfect One to substitute for the wickedness of so many—the wickedness of us all.

From the hearts of people everywhere throughout the ages, God has heard the cry for help and deliverance from a world in a downward spiral. His response to that cry is the Cross.

The Righteousness of One (Rom. 5:12, 15, 18; 2 Cor. 5:14)

The righteousness of ten could not provide eternal salvation for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. The righteousness of 50 couldn't have either. If every person of those cities had been God-fearing people, their righteousness would still not have been enough to save them from eternal destruction. And what of us now? How many righteous would it take to save us? Praise God it takes the righteousness of only One. The perfect, righteousness of the Son of God, who died for us.

Through only one we have been condemned to death. By Adam's single act of rebellion, we face the penalty of death. So, if through one we are destined for death, it is through One we are chosen for life.

The future of Sodom and Gomorrah relied not on the righteousness of 10, 20, or 50, but on the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. And so it is with all of us. Through the Cross, God accepts the righteousness of One for the wickedness of us all. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had a choice, and so do you.

REACT

Is it fair that "sin entered the world through one man"? (Rom. 5:12, NIV). Should we all have been given the same chance as Adam? If yes, how would God answer the problem of disobedience?

Tuesday
March 1

It Is Never or Forever With the Cross

TESTIMONY

1 Cor. 1:18

"The cross of Calvary appeals in power, affording a reason why we should love Christ now, and why we should consider Him first, and best, and last, in everything. We should take our fitting place in humble penitence at the foot of the cross. We may learn the lessons of meekness and lowliness of mind as we go up to Mount Calvary, and, looking upon the cross, see our Saviour in agony, the Son of God dying, the Just for the unjust. Behold Him who could summon legions of angels to His assistance with one word, a subject of jest and merriment, of reviling and hatred. He gives Himself a sacrifice for sin. When reviled, He threatened not; when falsely accused, He opened not His mouth. He prays on the cross for His murder-

**"We must come nearer to
the cross of Christ."**

ers. He is dying for them. He is paying an infinite price for every one of them. He would not lose one whom He has purchased at so great cost. He gives Himself to be smitten and scourged without a murmur. And this uncomplaining victim is the Son of God. His throne is from everlasting, and His kingdom shall have no end. . . . Look, O look upon the cross of Calvary; behold the royal victim suffering on your account."¹

"We must come nearer to the cross of Christ. Penitence at the foot of the cross is the first lesson of peace we have to learn. The love of Jesus—who can comprehend it? Infinitely more tender and self-denying than a mother's love! If we would know the value of a human soul, we must look in living faith upon the cross, and thus begin the study which shall be the science and the song of the redeemed through all eternity. The value of our time and our talents can be estimated only by the greatness of the ransom paid for our redemption."²

"Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour's love; and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fulness of joy; for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which man can attain."³

1. *That I May Know Him*, p. 65.

2. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 100.

3. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 222.

Our Crossroad

HOW-TO

Rom. 8:3, 4, 9; 9:32; 12:1, 2

Both God and Jesus have been intimately involved with humanity since the dawn of time. The sacrifice of God's one Son, Jesus, is at the center of the Christian faith, but are we able to truly grasp what happened at the Cross and how it affects our day-to-day lives?

1. The real event. What literally happened at the Cross is extremely difficult for humans to grasp. A few things stand out as we ponder the event. Jesus was crucified between two criminals. To the Jews, this indicated that He was a criminal also. This final event corresponds to numerous other humble acts in Jesus' life: His birth in a manger into a poor family, His simplicity in regard to Sabbath keeping, His washing of the disciples' feet as an act of ultimate service and humility, just to name a few. He taught that true kingship was about service.

His earthly kingship was important to His disciples, yet Jesus was focused on eternity. True to human nature, the disciples realized the incredible nature and message of Jesus and the Cross only after He had left them. The horrible reality of seeing their Savior die as a criminal and the trauma they must have felt when they thought His body had been stolen must have been tremendous. They felt so intensely passionate about His message that many of them died as a result of sharing it. What a contrast to us today!

2. Personally—day to day. It goes against the grain of our conditional, materialistic, independent natures as humans to need a Savior to rescue us from our poor condition. We are brought up to act as though we're just fine, thank you, the way we are. The world in its humanistic approach teaches us to reach the full potential within us and to rely on our own resources for happiness and satisfaction. We fill our lives with many things in search of meaning—love, lust, money, clothes, and music.

Occasionally our imagination may dare to fill in the things we don't know about our Savior and about the mind-boggling event of the Cross. We are bound to the love from a Creator we've never seen face to face and are magnetically drawn to Him because of the many evidences of His love.

You stand at a crossroad, wondering if the cross of Jesus will really change your life. What will your response be to the fact that Jesus died for you? Jesus asks us this question, and it's our responsibility to answer it. Ultimately, the way in which you answer this question will make all the difference to your life, both now and eternally.

Jesus taught that true kingship was about service.

Thursday
March 3

The Ultimate Sacrifice

OPINION

John 3:16; Rom. 3:23, 24; 1 Cor. 6:20

The story is told of a boy named John who, when he was 12 years old, built a model boat. He loved the boat very much and he took it to the river each day to sail in the water. One day as he was sailing his boat in the river, it was swept away by a strong current. After 20 years had passed, John was passing by an auction and saw the same boat that he owned long before and loved very much. *How much will I have to pay for the boat?* he wondered.

The bidding for the boat began, and the price of the boat kept on rising. One man made a bid of \$10,000 for the boat. John countered with \$10,100 for the boat. This figure was almost an entire year's salary for John. Because he loved the boat so much, he would sacrifice a year's salary to redeem his boat and to make sure that the boat was well taken care of.

Can you imagine that Someone made an even greater sacrifice for us? Indeed we were once perfect, but the old serpent snatched us from the protective care of our Maker.

The devil means us no good, and if it were left to him, we would all be dead or worse—we would be living in fear and torment with a dark and gloomy future. The

*How much will I have to pay
for the boat? he wondered.*

price that was to be paid for us was greater than any money could pay. It was the sacrifice that supercedes and nullifies all other sacrifices. Our loving Maker was

now to take on the title of our Savior and Redeemer by paying the ultimate price for us, which was to be His spilled blood shed on Calvary. All Jesus now requires of us is for us to believe. Let us remember that our lives are not our own, but we were bought with a price that is far greater than any of us could ever pay. Let each one go on his knees each day and give thanks unto the Lord and seek His divine guidance to go from day to day.

Jesus paid it all; all to Him we owe. Let us always remember as youths where our priorities should lie. Always keep in mind the sacrifice that was made. The Savior left His throne above to come to sinful earth to die so that you might have life.

REACT

In our culture value is often measured monetarily. In light of what God paid, what is our value?

Stanley Tulloch, Bartons, Jamaica

The King of Fools

EXPLORATION

Matt. 27:33-50; Rom. 3:9-20; 1 Cor. 1:18

CONCLUDE

The cross of Jesus is an iconic symbol found on church spires and costume jewelry. But it must be more than that in the personal life of a Christian. Ultimately, the Cross is the unveiling of the kind of God we serve. Earthly kings operate on the assumption that might makes right. But in God's kingdom love makes right. It makes us righteous and restores us to Him. This must seem like foolishness to earthly kings and we must seem like fools.

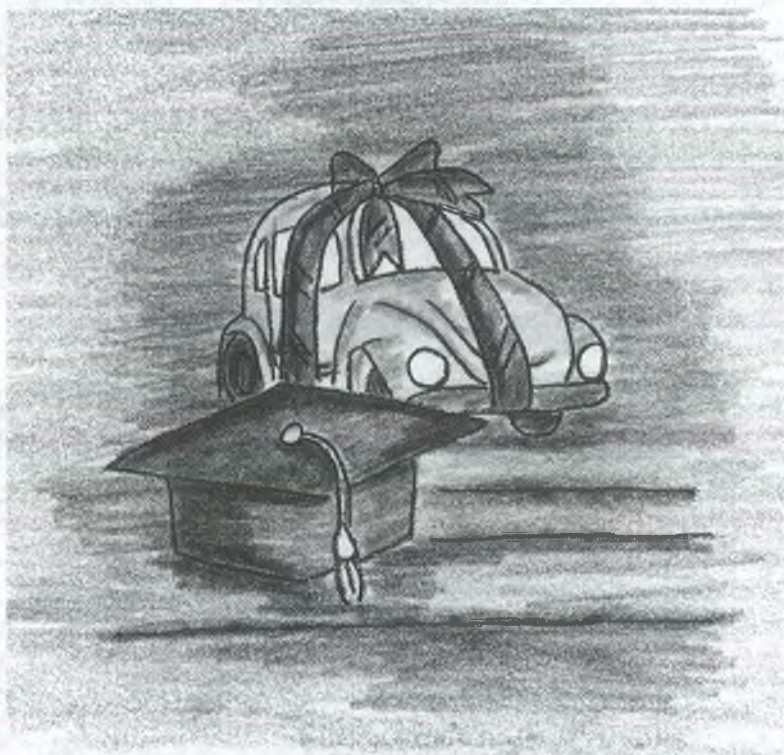
CONSIDER

- Finding a few hours of uninterrupted quiet time. Read the Crucifixion account in Matthew 27:33-50. In your own words, write what the events would have looked like to a disciple.
- Cataloging metaphors of self-sacrifice from nature. Categorize your findings according to animal and plant type.
- Drawing three scenes—the fall of Adam and Eve, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the Resurrection—on a long sheet of paper.
- Writing a story of a Christian explaining to a nonbeliever what the Cross means to them.
- Requesting your pastor to allow you to conduct an informal poll of your entire church one Sabbath. Ask the question: "On a scale of one to ten, how do you rate your own understanding of the Crucifixion. One is very low; ten is very high." Collect the votes and present your results on the next Sabbath.
- Videotaping or tape recording people on the street as they respond to the question: "Do people need to be forgiven by God when they do something wrong?"
- Composing a melody to sing the words of John 3:16 from the Bible version of your choice.

CONNECT

E. Lonnie Melashenko and John Thomas McLarty, *Stand at the Cross*.
Jaime Jorge, *At the Cross* (audio CD).
<<http://www.adventist.org/beliefs/index.html>> See #7 through #10.

The Cross and Justification



“A man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law” (Rom. 3:28, NKJV).

Will You Accept the Greatest Gift?

INTRODUCTION

Rom. 3:21-24

The day had finally arrived. Jason was graduating from college! Half blinded from all the flashes coming from his father's camera, he had somehow made it to the front of the auditorium without falling and accepted his diploma. After the ceremony came all the hugging and laughing with friends and family. But soon he found himself being ushered outside by his parents and the rest of his family. Once in the parking lot, they led him to the most unbelievably beautiful red sports car Jason had ever seen. A couple of his friends, in on the secret, had already gathered there.

"Surprise! This is our graduation gift to you," yelled his parents as they handed him the keys. But to everyone's astonishment, Jason started wailing and shaking his head. "No, I can't take this. I don't deserve this gift," he cried! "I've tried to be a good son but I haven't been good enough. I haven't mowed the lawn enough times or washed enough dishes to deserve this."

"Son, what are you talking about? We love you and we want to give this to you as a gift. Just take it!" said Mom.

But Jason would not change his mind. He gave the keys back to his parents and told them, "Maybe I'll deserve this in a year or so, but right now I don't." With that he returned the

keys to his parents and sulkily walked away from a bewildered crowd of friends and family who couldn't understand what had just happened.

How silly to think that anyone could turn down such a wonderful gift. But can it be that we're turning down an even greater gift from our heavenly Father? How many times have I wondered, If God came today, would I be saved? I try to be good enough but I'm not perfect. I don't deserve to be saved. Have you ever thought that too? Well, guess what! We can stop worrying. Nothing we can do can make us deserve God's gift of salvation. But God died just to save us. It is His gift to us! "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8, NKJV). Accept His gift and believe that you are saved. Just like that!

So you have faith. What next? "Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31, NKJV). By accepting the Lord as our Savior, we will want to know Him more, and because of our relationship with Him we will become better people. Remember, to know God is to love Him.

How silly to think that anyone could turn down such a wonderful gift.

Sunday
March 6

Free and Just for You

LOGOS

Rom. 3:20, 28; 4:13; 5:14-18; 6:23; 8:33, 34; 9:31, 32; 2 Cor. 9:15; Gal. 2:16; 3:8-11; Eph. 2:7-9.

The Cross and justification, the gift, the law, Christ, and you. All these things fit together somehow, yet it seems that it is difficult for us to grasp this reality. I remember finals week as a student in college. It was the longest week of my life: papers due, last-minute reports, and the dreaded tests.

I remember I walked into one classroom where I knew the test would be extremely difficult and would have a big impact on my final grade. As the class sat down, the professor looked at us and said, "Take out a sheet of paper and sign your name. Then you may leave."

What a great gift! We had not done anything to earn it; he just gave us a free pass.

This week's topic will lead us into the understanding of a much bigger free gift—that of justification in Christ through grace.

The Author's Experience

Not mine, but Paul's experience. The texts that we will be studying were written by Paul, so it is important that we consider Paul, the man. Here is Paul, the man who had grown up in a church system that had always emphasized what people did and that their actions would determine their salvation. Along comes Jesus, who teaches that the only way for salvation is through Him. Paul spends his time persecuting the followers of Jesus until one day he discovers that salvation is only of God and not based on us.

**Abraham got up
and just moved.**

He never stops to exclude the law and its importance. "What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not!" (Rom 7:7, NKJV). Paul is clear that the law has a part in the Christian's life; however, he also realizes that salvation comes from God.

The Gift

"All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23, 24, NKJV). Paul expresses the fact that this is not from man but from God through Jesus and that it is a free gift from God.

There is nothing that you have to do, buy, trade, or get in order to be redeemed. It is the free pass to the test that you did not deserve, but the professor gives you anyway. Even though I had prepared, my friends who didn't prepare for the test got the same reward and exemption from the test. It wasn't much different for Paul,

who lived life according to the law and doing everything that was asked of him, yet he got the same free gift as the criminal on the cross.

Justification

Romans 5:14-18 tells us that sin came in through one man and that redemption comes through another, but God's justification is greater than the sin that came in. Sin is a great problem, and there is no doubt that it has led us down a very ugly and painful path. Our hope, however, is in the fact that the gift is much more reaching and complete than the problem. Christ's grace and love for us is all-sufficient for our salvation.

Faith and God's Creation

Abraham was minding his own business when God asked him to leave his home and move to a strange place, to become the father of many nations. Abraham got up and just moved. He didn't totally understand and he didn't do everything right, but he got up and moved.

"It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith" (Rom. 4:13, NIV).

You see, faith is believing in what you don't see, and Abraham could not see the fruits of the promise God had made him, but he believed and God credited it as righteous. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:8-10, NIV).

Faith is the key ingredient in this theme of justification. God created us to believe in Him and to do good and great things. God made us in His own image, and as such, we have the resources needed to live the life of good works—not in ourselves—but because of Jesus' free gift.

Making Sense of It All

Through the Cross or the event of the Cross, God provided for our biggest need—that of reconciliation with Him. No longer were we to be isolated or struggling to try to live up to a standard in hope that what we did brought us salvation. This was never God's plan, yet we managed to distort it. At times we think that if we work hard, study hard, and play hard we will be rewarded, and one too many times we find ourselves disappointed because no matter how hard we try, we fail. Christ is trying to tell you, "Hey, you no longer have to struggle, for I have struggled for you. I have freely given Myself so that in Me you may find salvation."

Won't you please accept it? As you study and consider this week's lesson, remember that the gift is already yours. All you have to do is believe.

TESTIMONY

John 14:6

When I was a child my parents gave me all I needed, sometimes even giving me some money. On a certain occasion, I wanted to give them a gift, so I searched for the biggest gift all my money could buy, afterward feeling proud for having given them a gift with my own money. But wasn't it really their money? If it hadn't been for them, I never would have had money with which to give them a gift.

It's the same way with our good deeds with God. "We possess nothing, can offer nothing in value, in work, in faith, which we have not first received of God." As a child, we heard people say, "Behave yourself so that you can go to heaven with Jesus!" This led us to believe that good deeds were what allowed us to be with Jesus; nevertheless, we all know that justification and salvation are found through faith. But what does that mean?

We don't have anything that we have not first received from God.

**We don't have anything
that we have not first
received from God.**

Faith is a gift from God, and we are justified freely through His redemption. In other words we must go at all times to the cross of Christ. "Faith is rendering to God the intellectual powers, abandonment of the mind

and will to God"²; and your body. How? By "making Christ the only door to enter into the kingdom of heaven."³ Only when we go to the cross of Christ and recognize the sad situation that we are in, only then are we forgiven. Simply put, God produces forgiveness in our hearts, and being motivated by the faith that we also receive from Him, it allows Christ's justice to fill us and for us to become joyful, knowing that we have been forgiven and restored to His grace. "God works and man works."⁴ We must be collaborators of God, taking the yoke with Christ; this means that as God's collaborators we must allow Him to be the power that controls everything. "He bestows the gifts; man receives them and acts with the power of the grace of Christ as a living agent. . . . We cannot build ourselves. There is a power outside of yourself that must do the building of the church, putting brick upon brick, always cooperating with the faculties and powers given of God to man."⁵

1. *Faith and Works*, p. 22.
2. *Ibid.* p. 25.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
5. *Ibid.*

Where Am I Today?

EVIDENCE

Ps. 37:31

The Bible is a book of many subject matters, many of which are areas that provoke discussions. What comes to mind when we think of Mount Sinai, Moses, the people of Israel, and sacrifices? We may think of many answers, but in the book of Exodus we find the evidence that relates to all these words: the law.

With what purpose did God give the law to Moses on Mount Sinai? Was it God's objective to give His people a law that they could not comply with, or was God thinking of having a holy nation under the execution of an external law?

God personally educated His people with His holy law, a nation, who in its context, had been mistreated under the influence of a heathen culture.

We can find in Exodus 7–14 the wonders that God performed in favor of His nation. First, He identified with them through a mediator: Moses. Second, with His mighty arms, God proved His love to Israel by liberating them from a horrendous slavery. Third, He educated them in a direct manner throughout the holy law.

The people of Israel did not understand the true significance of the law of God, although they said, " 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do' " (Exod. 19:8, NKJV). Words are words, but they demonstrated through their actions that their promise to God did not last very long (Exod. 32:1).

Have you ever felt compromised to return a favor to someone who has done a favor for you? Have you ever had to do something that you did not want to do just because you were afraid of what they might say of you? Israel was "returning" God the favor for what He had done for them if they obeyed the law. That's it!

Where am I today? Like the people of Israel? Do I just exhibit the law on Saturday mornings with my elegant clothing, or express amiable words, when in reality, I do not genuinely feel them? Is this the true representation of the law? "By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20, NKJV). The law of God reveals, like a mirror, our sinful nature and defects, teaching us the need of a Savior, who, living in us, can correct our faults. In John 14:15 Jesus says, " 'If you love Me, keep My commandments' " (NKJV).

Through the acceptance of the righteousness of Christ in our favor; through a continuous relationship with Him, He will bestow upon us what the people of Israel were missing: the law of God in our hearts. Jesus can give us what the law would have never given us: power to obey, the forgiveness for sin, and the grace for each of our necessities.

**God personally educated
His people with His
holy law.**

How to Respond to Justification

HOW-TO

Jer. 33:3; Mark 5:19; Luke 17:11-19; Eph. 5:20

If someone (not a relative or close friend) offers you the thing you most needed or wanted—it may be a new car or a full-paid college opportunity, or a week cruise vacation—how would you respond? One of the first questions that comes to my mind when free stuff is offered is: What does he/she want in return? In our time almost everything has a price. We need to pay toll to use some roads, we have to pay for medical services, even the water that is so essential for daily living has a price. Sometimes living in such a materialized world makes it difficult to conceive that God offers us forgiveness and eternal life for free. Still more surprising, God gives—expecting nothing but gratitude in return. Do we really take this seriously? What do we do with such a wonderful gift?

1. Accept or believe that it is true. Because this is a godly issue, we need to ask Him for help to understand it and accept it as is written: “Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3, NKJV).

Still more surprising, God gives—expecting nothing but gratitude in return.

2. Thank the giver. As anyone who offers a gift, Jesus appreciates thankfulness. “Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20, NKJV). See also Luke 17:11-19.

3. Tell others. Sometimes someone who offers free gifts does not have plenty for everyone. For that and other reasons, some of them prefer to stay anonymous. Jesus is different. He has justification for everyone and He wants us to tell others. “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (Mark 5:19, NKJV).

REACT

1. If justification is free for everyone, why don't the majority of people accept it?
2. Since justification was so high-priced—the life of Jesus—why is it offered to us for free?
3. What personal changes have you experienced since you know you have been justified by Jesus Christ?
4. “If it's too good to be true, it usually is” is the way the saying goes. How do you find the faith to believe that this is not true in regard to salvation?
5. How does gratitude to God affect your behavior as a Christian?

It's All Through Jesus

OPINION

John 3:17, 18

The gift of salvation is the most precious gift anyone can receive. The best part about it is that it's free. Jesus paid the price for it when He died on the cross for each of us. Now we are justified in front of God in Jesus' name. That is the only way God sees us pure—through the blood of Jesus. The penalty for sin is death, but Jesus took our place so we can have eternal life.

There was once a man condemned to the electric chair because he had killed several people. He deserved to die. The man's mother made a last request before they executed her son. The mother's request was to let him be with her before his death and to take him out in a black gown so that his face would not be shown when he died.

The department agreed to it, and when the man's day to die came, they did exactly as asked. After they killed the man they took off the robe. To their surprise it was not the man. The mother had put on the robe instead—to die in his place to pay for what he had done. Jesus did that and much more for us. He took our place. He was beaten, spit on, and crucified for us. I don't think there

**Some of the people He
gave His life for will
deny Him.**

is a greater love than this. "God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17, NKJV).

He was in heaven at the right hand of His Father, and He gave that up to save sinners who don't deserve it. And some of the people He gave His life for will deny Him and not consider Him their Savior. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (verse 18, NKJV). Jesus' act of dying on the cross for us justifies us in front of God. He sees us pure through Jesus' blood. When we get on our knees and pray to Him, the only way He receives our prayer is through Jesus. That's why when we pray we finish by saying "in Jesus' name." He is the only Way, the Intermediate, between God and us.

REACT

Today's scripture says that if we don't believe, we are condemned. Do these words frighten you? Do you find yourself praying the prayer of the father in Mark 9:24? Explain.

EXPLORATION

Eph. 2:8

CONCLUDE

Not to one person, not to a group of people, nor to the elite, but to all, to every one of us does God offer His gift of salvation. What do we have to do to deserve this gift? Nothing! Faith and acceptance, God's grace and His love are all we need to overcome our sin problem. Christ's death on the cross redeemed us and righted our relationship with the Godhead. All we have to do is believe and accept it. It's already ours.

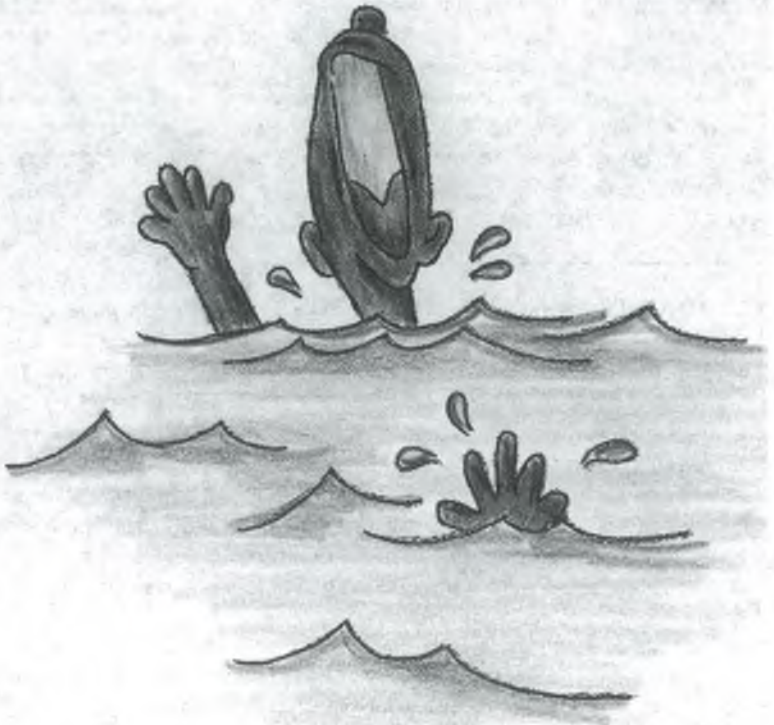
CONSIDER

- Sharing a meal with someone who you feel would benefit from hearing about God's gift of salvation.
- Using colored pencils to compose a picture of Jesus presenting the gift of salvation to you. Use this as a reminder that this gift is already yours and that all you have to do is accept it.
- Writing a skit that shows what God's grace means to you personally. Share what you would say to Christ about this gift and what it means to you.
- Composing a song about God's grace and gift of salvation, then sharing it with your Sabbath School class.
- Viewing the film *Pay It Forward*. Think about how this film depicts grace and the importance of accepting God's gift of salvation.
- Asking older members of your church how accepting the gift of salvation has made a difference in their lives and what His grace means to them.
- Memorizing Ephesians 2:8, as a way of exercising your faith in God, meditating on it, and repeating it daily for 21 days.

CONNECT

Philip Yancey, *What's So Amazing About Grace?* pp. 59–72; Kim Allan Johnson, *The Gift*.

The Cross and Sanctification



"This is the will of God, your sanctification"
(1 Thess. 4:3, NKJV).

Life's Swimming Lessons

INTRODUCTION

1 Thess. 4:3

The water whisked over young Matt's head. As the ocean's fingers pulled at him, thrills of delight erupted in the boy. Although he continued his antics, Matt also knew the dangers. His dad had told him repeatedly that the ocean was something to be respected, something that is beautiful but also full of risks. As Matt played in the surf, his father's words echoed in his head: "Stay close to the shore and don't swim alone." The guidelines seemed easy to follow.

Matt's buddy, Alex, also loved the ocean. As the tumbling waves brought the two boys to the water's edge, a friendship formed. Matt and Alex spent countless hours splashing each other or playing their aquatic version of "truth or dare."

As the two enjoyed one innocent game after another, the thrill soon began to ebb away. One afternoon, Alex thought to push the boundaries and dared Matt to try swimming farther than either of them had tried before. Not wanting to look foolish, Matt took the dare.

As his tired arms and legs struggled to keep his head above water, he knew he

**Sometimes we test the waters
and venture out too far.**

had gone too far. This time, the rush of water did not bring thrills of delight as it did when he was safe by the shoreline. Delight was replaced by fear as

he desperately clawed for air. Losing strength and control, Matt felt completely lost. Without realizing it, he frantically shouted, "Dad!"

Just when he felt his lungs were about to burst, Matt felt a hand grabbing at him. As his head popped into the warm sunshine, Matt gulped in air. There was his father, swimming with the strength Matt never had.

"Dad," Matt sputtered as his father pulled him onto the sand, "Dad, I swam too far. I should never . . . Dad, you said . . ."

"Son, shhhh," he said. "I know. I know." With a giant bear hug, his father calmed the young boy. "Matt, the water is powerful—too powerful for you, or even me, to control. You made a mistake, but my arms will always be there to pick you up."

Our heavenly Father gives us guidelines to follow. But sometimes we test the waters and venture out too far. We begin to flounder and find ourselves gasping for air with no hope. Isn't it wonderful to know we can find Him with one simple word: Dad.

Have You Died?

EVIDENCE

John 3:1-8; Rom. 6:8-14

Nicodemus once asked the question, "How can a man be born again?" in response to a statement that Jesus made about being part of the kingdom of God (John 3:1-4). He reasoned that to be born again, one would essentially have to die and come back to life. As weird as it sounds, Nicodemus was almost right! Jesus was actually talking about dying to the sinful nature and living a new Spirit-filled life. The question that he posed could be rephrased this way: How can one know that the sinful nature has died? or alternatively, What is the evidence that the sinful nature has truly been put to death?

Our first clue is found in Romans 6:8: "If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him" (NIV). Christ's death has obtained for us the victory over sin and its penalty: death. If we have died to sin, we immediately begin to live a similar, victorious life that Jesus did while on earth.

Another piece of evidence is found in verse 12. When your sinful nature has died, sin will no longer have control in your life. "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires" (NIV). Living a life with Christ will utterly destroy all those sinful habits along with any desire to sin. We no longer become instruments of wickedness but instruments of righteousness (verses 13, 14).

Our next clue is found within our thoughts; those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires. Those who live according to the Spirit, however, have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. (See Romans 8:5-8.)

**As weird as it sounds,
Nicodemus was almost right!**

In His response to Nicodemus, Jesus said, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, NIV). This brings us to the final piece of evidence that one has truly died to sin, which is the visible effect of the indwelling presence of Jesus through the Holy Spirit clearly displayed in their life. The acts of the sinful nature are obvious. They include sexual immorality, hatred, selfishness, jealousy, and pride. The fruits of the Spirit, however, are displayed in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23).

How can one know if that sinful nature is dead and buried? The answer is simply found in the life that you are living.

Monday
March 14

Today and Tomorrow

LOGOS

Rom. 6:1-16; 1 Cor. 6:11; Gal. 5:16-25; Col. 3:1-4

What I am writing to you today, September 11, 2003, will be read in March 2005. On the second anniversary of the greatest terrorist attacks in the history of the United States of America, there are more than 140,000 U.S. soldiers stationed in Iraq, the U.S. seeks \$2 billion in aid for Afghanistan, in addition to that an additional appropriation of \$87 billion has been requested for Iraqi reconstruction, my brother-in-law is in Baghdad and has been told his stay there has been extended, a recall election in California is a very strong possibility, and the space shuttle may fly again this spring.

Writing about these issues today may be completely irrelevant in 18 months. After all, there will be a presidential election and the war on terrorism will certainly have progressed. Even though we look at the insecurity of our futures, I am so thankful to remind myself that in this week's lesson the only important thing in my life today and wherever the world will be 18 months from now will be the understanding and acceptance of what Jesus accomplished for me on the cross!

**These issues today may
be completely irrelevant
in 18 months.**

The Cross and Sanctification

In Paul's New Testament writings, he makes it very clear that the Cross accomplishes in the life of a sinner the satisfaction that sanctification is a goal that is only completed through a clear understanding of Christ's death for you nailed to the cross.

Accepting the Cross changes the life of a sinner to acknowledge their own sinful self. Since we are slaves to sin (Rom. 6:6) and it is a cruel master as its wages are death (Rom. 3:23), I am more than grateful to God that instead of enduring separation from Him forever, instead of paying my wages, He offers something better—a free gift called eternal life.

There is not one thing that I can do to earn this gift, and if I could it would not be considered a gift; it would simply be a wage. The only escape from eternal death is a gift called eternal life. Eternal life is given to only the one who realizes that grace is not cheap or free. It is not considered cheap from the One who gave (John 3:16).

The Gift of Life

Three kinds of life are mentioned in the Bible:

1. Physical life
2. Spiritual life
3. Eternal life

Paul is clear in Scripture that our physical life is a body in sin, but that if we are united with Jesus at the Cross, then we can be raised to a new life just as Jesus was raised; that our sinful self is crucified in Christ at the Cross, and that sin loses all power in our lives. We are no longer “slaves to sin” (Rom. 6:6, NIV); therefore our spiritual life shines forth. With the acceptance of Christ’s death and resurrection in our life, Paul tells us that we are free from sin and the power of sin. The process of sanctification in our lives keeps our spiritual existence stronger and prepares us for an eternal life in heaven.

Paul called the church of Corinth the institution that was no longer in the world; he called them the “servants of God.” He considered the church in Corinth to be “cleansed” from their sin, washed, and made acceptable to the Father and to His cause. When the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in the life of a sinner, the believer is transformed, an ongoing action of becoming sacred, and this person becomes more and more like Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:11

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 another word is introduced as to the steps of a Christlike walk. The word is *justification*. This is simply the faith of a believer seen in the pure white robes of Christ’s righteousness upon accepting Him as your personal Savior. Instead of a sinner, God sees the purity of His Son, which could take place only because of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross!

One may inquire as to what role the Holy Spirit plays in this scenario. If the Son has sacrificed Himself for our sins, the Father accepts the Son. Because “the Holy Spirit works this transformation from sin to righteousness, believers are under moral obligation to live lives of continual surrender to the Lord’s will at all times.”¹

Galatians 5:16-25

Since the “fruit of the Spirit is not the natural product of human nature, but of a power wholly outside of man,”² it is the process of sanctification that enables one to have evidence of the fruit of the Spirit. Just as there is one cross to look upon, there is one fruit. This fruit includes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Traits found only in the one who has a life sanctified through the grace of Christ reveal the fruits of the Spirit.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 700.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 981.

Tuesday
March 15

Can't the One Bath Do?

TESTIMONY

Lev. 20:7

Webster's Dictionary defines the word *sanctify* thus: "to make holy; to make free from sin; to make productive of spiritual blessings." One is led to wonder how sanctification can be applied to our lives. It is the precursor to holiness. For us to be holy, we must go through a process of sanctification, wherein we are freed from sin and produce spiritual blessings.

Sanctification is a process very much like bathing. One little boy asked his mom, "Why can't one bath do for always?"

"Well," his mom replied, "if you never get dirty again, it will do."

If there was no sin found in us, there would be no need for sanctification; however, since we sin every day, we must sanctify ourselves every day. "But Christ,

If there was no sin found in us, there would be no need for sanctification.

coming to the earth as man, lived a holy life, and developed a perfect character. These He offers as a free gift to all who will receive them. His life stands for the life of men. Thus they have remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God. More than this, Christ imbues men with the attributes of God. He builds up the human character after the similitude of the divine character, a goodly fabric of spiritual strength and beauty."¹

Sanctification means for each one of us that we always strive to be more like Jesus. Every day we endeavor to have manifested those qualities that made Jesus so different from others, that enabled Him to be a witness to so many.

"All our good works are dependent on a power outside of ourselves. Therefore there needs to be a continual reaching out of the heart after God, a continual, earnest, heartbreaking confession of sin and humbling of the soul before Him."²

When we do this, we are able to see more clearly in what ways we fall short of holiness and make the necessary changes, so that soon our lives would be producing spiritual blessings.

"Through Jesus, God's mercy was manifested to men; but mercy does not set aside justice. The law reveals the attributes of God's character, and not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man's redemption."³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 455.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, *ibid*.

Buy Now?

HOW-TO

Luke 23:39-43; 1 Thess. 4:3

Sometimes I wish my conversion experience was like that of the thief on the cross or the deathbed conversion. I know what mine would look like. I would be lying on my deathbed surrounded by weeping family members, the local pastor giving me the fast-forward version of *Steps to Christ*. My life would flash before my eyes, and I'd see all the mercies Christ extended to me, and with a raspy voice I'd whisper, "I believe" and die, all the believers saying, "Amen." Skip forward to the grand funeral (Did I mention that I was rich and famous in this fantasy?) and pan upward to the Second Coming focusing on me ascending to heaven.

Fortunately, God is the Organizer of life events and the above dramatic tale is not my life. And, if you're reading this, there's a good chance it's not your life either; but how many of us wish that it were our path to sanctification?

The trip to sanctification is like downloading a game demo: It's fast, fun, and free at first conversion, but the free trial soon ends and then you have to make a decision to "Buy Now." This process

may not be everyone's, but I dare say that for most believers, initial conversion and acceptance of Christ was easy; it is staying on the straight and narrow that is the hard part. The "buy now" is living every day of your life as you dreamed it should/would be at the moment of conversion. How do you better prepare yourself to make the purchase when you have to "buy now"?

The road to sanctification
is not easy.

may not be everyone's, but I dare say that for most believers, initial conversion and acceptance of Christ was easy; it is staying on the straight and narrow that is the hard part. The "buy now" is living every day of your life as you dreamed it should/would be at the moment of conversion. How do you better prepare yourself to make the purchase when you have to "buy now"?

1. Get to know God. How many times have you heard this? I'm sorry but it really is the first step. This time there's a new twist: know God as God knows you! He's God, the Master of the universe, and all the pretension in the world isn't going to fake Him out. This whole redemption plan is nothing about what you bring, and it's all about God loving us "while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:8, KJV). So, starting from that point, get to know God, be honest and real, talk with Him in a respectful but true manner, and He'll become your Best Friend and you'll be His. Tip: I keep a journal, it's not an everyday thing, but it's a supplement to prayer when I'm struggling to know Him. It hasn't made me perfect, but it makes it easier for me to recover from my mistakes.

2. Read your Bible. The obvious works! Try this: Pick a character in the Bible and learn more about him or her. Get the extended version from the source. This will help you learn the nuances of the path to sanctification and be inspired daily. This should help in understanding that the process is not easy, but you are not alone. There is nothing wrong with copying previously lived, good decisions and avoiding the bad. That's what they're there for.

The Message of the Cross

OPINION

2 Cor. 5:21

I remember hearing a story about a dog that sacrificed its life for that of its master. The two were on a rock by the sea, and the man was getting ready to jump into the water when the dog spotted a shark. Quickly, it jumped into the water ahead of the man and soon the water was filled with blood. It was at that point that the man saw the danger that awaited him; but more so, he saw the great love of his dog for him.

After man sinned, death awaited all like the shark swimming in that water. Romans 6:23 tells us that the penalty for sin is death. We as human beings are like

**The Cross carries a special
message for all.**

that man: at the point of being devoured by the shark called death. Yet, before we had the chance to take one more step, Christ "jumped" ahead of us to take our place. He took the

penalty that we deserved to give us a life that He deserves.

The Cross carries a special message for all, especially those who have accepted Christ.

"Without the cross, man could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour's love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned." This is wonderful news, joyous news, that brings comfort to the soul.

The true message of the Cross is God the Creator's great love for human beings. "Christ's death proves God's great love for man. It is our pledge of salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to Him."²

It is the Cross that gives Christians a reason for living. Jesus' death on the cross is the price paid to afford us the gift of salvation. It is in the message of the Cross that men and women, boys and girls find hope. "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19, NIV).

Thank You, Lord, for keeping Your promise of salvation. Thank You for this blessed hope that we, as sinners, find in the message of the Cross.

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

The Gift of Life

EXPLORATION

Rom. 6:8-14

CONCLUDE

Sin is a dreadful slave master; its wages are life draining. But we have the option of working with another. There is no payout with God. He offers us the ultimate gift. To be able to appreciate this gift, we need to be like Him—free from sin. This is made possible through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. We need just to accept that we have a propensity to sin and recognize that only through Him can we have this gift—the gift of eternal life.

CONSIDER

- Researching other religions on the methods, rituals, or rites used to attain a level of holiness.
- Designing a trademark/logo for your partnership with Christ in the process of sanctification.
- Looking up verses on holiness and sanctification. Memorize at least two of them.
- Creating a bar graph of the fruits of the Spirit based on the amount that you possess. Set goals on how the lesser fruits can be made to increase.
- Viewing the film *As Good As It Gets*. Think about the spiritual implications of Melvin's statement: "You make me want to be a better man."
- Performing a simple activity for a children's Sabbath School group to help them understand the concept of sanctification.
- Giving a gift, wrapped as attractively as possible, to someone who does not have the means to return the favor.

CONNECT

The Great Controversy, pp. 469–474; *Messages to Young People*, pp. 114, 115.

The Cross and the Great Controversy



“ ‘Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself’ ”
(John 12:31, 32, NKJV).

Trademarked Cross

INTRODUCTION

Col. 2:13-15

I've heard these questions many times: "What significance does the Cross have?" someone will ask. Or, "Why is it part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's logo? Is the church now following the ways of the world?" And, "Are we associating ourselves with the Catholic Church? Are we putting our focus on the Cross and not Christ? Does this mean we are turning away from our Adventist beliefs?"

The Adventist Church's logo—made up of the Bible, the cross, and the flames representing the three angels—is the first official logo copyrighted and trademarked by the Adventist Church; the first logo the church has owned. It was implemented by the World Headquarters Communication Department in 1997, and it still receives comments. Many love it; some don't. The main issue seems to be the cross.

Without the Cross, where would we be? It's not the cross itself, but what it represents. How can we not focus on this? It's the heart and soul of our entire belief system. When we see the cross, we are reminded of what Christ went through. Were it not for what happened on that rugged, wonderful cross, unfallen worlds would not have fully known what Christ—and Satan—are capable of, and we'd be lost. Forever. Christ registered the cross as a trademark for salvation.

**Without the Cross,
where would we be?**

The Cross is a great story, one with a great ending. There's the introduction, which develops the characters and lays the foundation for the plot. Then there's the "body," or meat of the story. It's here where you are really drawn in, perhaps relating to the characters and either rooting for them or against them. And finally comes the climax, the most important and exciting part. It builds and builds until something has to happen to resolve the story. You've no doubt read a story or seen a movie with a bad ending. How did you feel when it was over? Disappointed, frustrated. You vow never to read that story or see that movie again. The story itself can be great, but it's the ending that makes the difference.

"When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (Col. 2:13-15, NIV).

Fortunately for us lost, pathetic people, Christ's story has a good ending.

LOGOS

Job 1; 2; 42; Isa. 53:4; Matt. 4:1; John 12:31-33; 1 Pet. 5:8, 9; Rev. 5:11-14; 12:7-19.

When God created the universe, it pulsed with perfect love. But Lucifer's rebellion and the self-sufficiency of Adam and Eve, our first parents, separated humankind from God and earned it the wages of its misdeeds: death.

What Satan didn't count on was the depth of God's love for His fallen people. God would restore His people; He would win back their loyalty.

What's at Stake?

Sin is separation from God and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23, KJV). Justice demands that sinners die for their rebelliousness. But in a unique combination of love and justice, the

The cross became the symbol of the depths to which God would stoop to restore humanity.

Creator took the punishment reserved for His rebellious creatures and gave them the gift they had forfeited by their rebellion: eternal life.

This is how the apostle Paul put it: "God made [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so

that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV). The transaction is as simple as it is profound: When we accept Him by faith, Jesus takes our sinful past and gives us the benefit of His perfect righteousness.

But that isn't all. The unlikely symbol of this exchange is the cross. Before Jesus died on it, the Roman cross was known only as an instrument of torture and execution. The fact that it would become the symbol of redemption is extremely significant. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree'" (Gal. 3:13, NIV). It wasn't the physical pain and torture that killed Christ, it was the separation from His Father—caused by taking our sins upon Himself—that killed Him. Jesus died the death we deserve so that we can live in a state of grace.

The cross, this instrument of cruelty, humiliation, and death, became the symbol of the depths to which God would stoop to restore humanity to a relationship of reconciliation. That's why Paul said, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14, NIV). When we put our faith in Christ, we are no longer under a death sentence; we are adopted as God's own sons and daughters.

Practical Implications

In addition to revealing the depths of God's love for His fallen creatures, the Cross also reveals the strength of Satan's hatred for Christ and His followers. After Jesus' death and resurrection, Satan turned his wrath on Christ's followers. In symbolic language John the revelator wrote: "Then the dragon [Satan] was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (Rev. 12:17, NIV).

The story of Job helps illustrate the cosmic struggle between good and evil—and how we are often caught in the cross fire between a God of love, whose eternal plan has been to save His loyal creatures, and a hate-filled adversary, who is committed to thwarting that plan.

At issue is whether God's children will be faithful to Him in spite of popular misconceptions about His character. During Job's ordeal, his so-called friends saw God as a deity who rained calamity on those who displeased Him. They thought the fact that Job was described as being "blameless and upright" (Job 1:1, NIV) was only proof that Job harbored some hidden sin, and that was why he suffered the loss of his livelihood, his family, and his physical and emotional well-being.

Job's story reveals that people suffer because they live in a sinful world. Jesus took our death sentence, but Satan still has the power to cause painful physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. And just as God the Father remained silent while His Son hung on the cross and exclaimed, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, NIV), God sometimes seems distant and uninvolved when we go through trials of many kinds.

The Cross reminds us that there is an enemy who opposes everything and everyone that God holds dear. And the more we are committed to the two great principles outlined in Revelation 12:17—obedience to God's commandments and holding to the testimony of Jesus—the more we can expect to attract Satan's enmity.

In God's Hands

In Job 1 God boasted to Satan: "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil" (verse 8, NIV). That boast revealed God's high regard for Job. It also made Job the target of Satan's wrath. And even Job, in the midst of his horrific ordeal, misunderstood God's silence and inactivity.

Yet, in a statement of steadfast faith he proclaimed: "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God" (Job 19:25, 26, NIV). It was the same attitude reflected in Jesus' last words from the cross: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46, NIV).

There's much in this world that defies rational explanation. Yet, if we could see things from God's eternal perspective, we would see that the only place we're truly safe is in God's hands—whether we can tell He is there or not.

Tragedy on Calvary

TESTIMONY

John 19:16-30

Ellen White's *The Desire of Ages* paints a beautiful and tragic picture of our Savior hanging on the cross. She also pulls out the little nuances that make the story complete and allows us to see Jesus as a man and a God rather than just a picture hanging on a wall.

"That prayer of Christ for His enemies embraced the world. It took in every sinner that had lived or should live, from the beginning of the world to the end of time. Upon all rests the guilt of crucifying the Son of God. To all, forgiveness is freely offered."¹

"The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. So great was this agony that His physical pain was hardly felt."²

There was no Richter scale to measure the strength of the earth's wrenching.

The reaction of nature to its Maker being tortured compounds the scene of grief and terror on Calvary. There was

no Richter scale to measure the strength of the earth's wrenching or barometers to track the change in atmosphere around the cross, but the description gives us an image of how the earth was revolted by the scene.

"Never before had the earth witnessed such a scene. The multitude stood paralyzed, and with bated breath gazed upon the Saviour. Again darkness settled upon the earth, and a hoarse rumbling, like heavy thunder, was heard. There was a violent earthquake. The people were shaken together in heaps. The wildest confusion and consternation ensued. In the surrounding mountains, rocks were rent asunder, and went crashing down into the plains. Sepulchers were broken open, and the dead were cast out of their tombs. Creation seemed to be shivering to atoms."³

"Not until the death of Christ was the character of Satan clearly revealed to the angels or to the unfallen worlds . . . for though they did not then understand all, they knew that the destruction of sin and Satan was forever made certain, that the redemption of man was assured, and that the universe was made eternally secure. Christ Himself fully comprehended the results of the sacrifice made upon Calvary. To all these He looked forward when upon the cross He cried out, 'It is finished.'⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 745.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 753.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 756.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 764.

The Cosmic Face-Off

EVIDENCE

John 12:31, 32

John's Gospel brings us into a cosmic arena. As this Gospel opens, the lights go up and from our ringside seats we are introduced to the Man on center stage—the Champion.

John's words are simple, powerful phrases that reveal the purpose and career of Christ, our Champion: "the light [shining] in the darkness" (John 1:5, NKJV), "full of grace and truth" (verse 14, KJV), "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (verse 14, NIV). This is more than the makings of a good news story; it's the revelation of a dramatic universal event.

The Semitic root for *word, dabar*, also meant "thing," "affair," "event," or "action." A word spoken was a happening. Once uttered, it could not be torn from the event that it evoked.* When God spoke, the worlds were created. John urges us to confront the reality of who Christ is.

His ministry has no meaning outside of this truth. The "Word" not only recalls creation of this planet but takes us to the Source from which came the universe, space, and time. The

**From our ringside seats we
are introduced to the Man
on center stage.**

Man before us in this historical arena, in this singularly dark, hostile place in His created universe, is the expression of that Source, communicating His love and saving acts. This Gospel gives us insights into the skirmishes between the Champion and the challenger—the one who usurped ownership of this world through his lies, plunging it into darkness and sending it spiraling away from its Source.

In John 12:31, 32 we come to the supreme moment of crisis when Jesus declares, "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world shall be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (NASB). This is the pivotal point in history, when the Champion faces off with the challenger in hand-to-hand combat before the whole universe. On the cross Christ endures the judgment that belongs to this rebel world. Our Champion takes the condemnation for our sin, exchanging His life for ours. As the nails anchor Him to the cross, He anchors us to Himself. As He is lifted up between heaven and earth, we are tethered to His kingdom. Satan, the challenger, is cast out, and Christ, our Champion, reclaims and redeems us.

**The Communicator's Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 29.

How to Avoid Temptation

HOW-TO

Ps. 32:10; Matt. 26:41; John 14:15; Heb. 2:18

When God died for us on the cross, He was not only saving us from death and giving us eternal life; He was giving us the choice to accept this gift of eternal life. Through the Cross God gave us free will. Everything we possess comes to us stamped with the Cross, bought with the blood that is precious above all estimate, because it is the life of God.

Therefore as Christians, we have the right to choose good or evil. Choosing the right path means putting our total trust in God and committing our lives to Him. Evil can be appealing and hard to resist at times. Temptation is among us every day, and the easiest way to weaken temptation is to strengthen our relationship with God. By walking through each day with Christ, assurance and strength can help us control wickedness.

**We have the right to
choose good or evil.**

Our relationship with God takes time and commitment, but can be accomplished. Temptation is always around, so it is important to stay alert and focused and learn how to resist the devil.

1. Talk to God. Prayer can strengthen our relationship with Christ and deliver us from temptation (Matt. 26:41). Communicating with God is important. When times are hard, it is important to turn to God. We shall be tested and tried, but let such times be spent in earnest prayer to God that He may give understanding.

2. Remember. When Jesus walked on this earth, He suffered through pain and temptation (Heb. 2:18). Knowing that God can feel our pain and sorrow can give us comfort and assure us that we are not alone in this world.

3. Trust God. Having faith in God can help turn evil away and bring forth the acceptance of righteousness. The Lord has promised to surround us with His love as long as we put our trust in Him (Ps. 32:10). Belief in that strength comes to you through our precious Savior.

4. Love God. By just loving God, we can overcome sin. Love God and you will be persuaded to obey what He has commanded (John 14:15).

REACT

1. Why is it difficult to avoid temptation?
2. How can we live our life according to Christ?
3. What are ways that you have grown in your spiritual journey with Christ?

Celebrating the Cross

OPINION

1 Cor. 15:12-19

The victory at the Cross is central to the story of humanity. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is no hope for life everlasting. That's something to celebrate.

A solemn and rather dour atmosphere marked the "celebration" of Communion in my home church. Four times a year our congregation reflected on the great sacrifice of God's Son. As a child I watched the adults gravely chew the small, unleavened wafer and try to reverently sip Welch's grape juice.

Hopefully I asked my parents if I could have a piece of wafer to ease my hunger. It was not to quench the appetite, I was told, but rather to meditate on the symbolic message behind the small morsels of food. We were eating the body of Christ and drinking His blood. It was a morose and solemn occasion.

Where was the celebration? Where was the rejoicing in the fact that the Son of God had not just died a horrible death for us, but that He arose? The answer is found in the Resurrection, a celebration of His triumph at the Cross.

C. S. Lewis writes in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* of Aslan, a symbolic Messiah, coming to Narnia to save its inhabitants from the clutches of the White Witch. He is killed in the place of a traitorous child who doesn't find out until later about Aslan's great sacrifice. The death

Where was the celebration?

of Aslan is not a burden that the child had to bear. Furthermore, the story does not end with Aslan's sacrifice. It is just beginning.

The story of our lives begins with the resurrection of Christ. Although the death of Christ paid the price for our sins, it is His victory over death that gives meaning not only to the Cross but also to our faith. The apostle Paul says that if not for the Resurrection, Christ is dead. And if Christ is dead there is no resurrection. And if Jesus is dead "our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14, NIV).

This weekend millions of Christians around the world will be rejoicing in the resurrection of Christ, celebrating the hope that all people have for a life beyond this world.

We must remember that the power of the Cross lies not in the death but in the resurrection of Christ. It is true that the Cross is at the center of the great controversy. But it is the victory of good over evil, of life over death, of God over Satan that demonstrates to the unfallen worlds the power of God's love.

Friday
March 25

Carrying the Cross

EXPLORATION

1 Cor. 1:18

CONCLUDE

Throughout the Word of God there is a theme: good versus evil, God versus Satan. Ellen White speaks of it in no uncertain terms. "The great controversy" is how we phrase it. The conflict is the basis for our need for a loving God, our falling from Him and our eventual return to Him. It is the uniting thread in our lives as Christians. The cross of Christ plays a pivotal role in the great controversy. The power of the Cross is crucial to our understanding of Christ's victory over sin, His sacrifice, and our reunion with Him in heaven. The defining moment in Christ's life was the decision to take up His cross and die for us. The defining moment in our lives is to take up that same cross and let it belong to us as well.

CONSIDER

- Looking through every magazine you can find in your house and finding crosses. Cut them out and either paste them in a book or make some other form of art with them. Place them in a prominent place in your living area in order to show the centrality of the Cross in the great controversy.
- Building a cross. Do some research into the dimensions of the ancient structure and build one yourself. To realize that it was our sins that placed Jesus on His cross will be a humbling experience.
- Taking a few days to read and consider the book of Job. It is an amazing story of one man's faithfulness, and God's faith in that one man. It is truly the story of the great controversy. Journal each day as if you were Job. What would be your reactions to God?
- Writing a song about the role the Cross plays in the great controversy. Remember, verses of songs need to bring us to a resolution in the chorus; just as history is a preamble to the solution of the Cross.
- Taking a walk with a camera and photographing every natural or human-made cross you see on your walk.
- Deciphering what the Cross means to you. Begin by writing down single words that come to your mind when thinking about the Cross. Write sentences using those words. Then write a paragraph with the concept of each word you have used. Take as little or as much time as you need.

CONNECT

Matthew 27.

John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*; "The Old Rugged Cross" in *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*.

Timothy Gillespie, Riverside, California

Next Quarter's Lessons

Book of Mark

If you have not received a copy of CQ for second quarter 2005, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Introducing Jesus, the Son of God

Logos: Mark 1:1-20

The Week at a Glance: What does Mark's opening of his account of Christ's life suggest from the outset? What kind of start did Mark have in ministry? What did he mean by the term gospel?

Lesson 2: Amazing Miracle Worker

Logos: Mark 1:21-2:17

The Week at a Glance: What proof did Jesus start giving of His power? In what ways did the healing of Peter's mother-in-law reveal the principles of a Christian life? How did Jesus show the link between the spiritual and the physical life? In what ways did Christ break down some of the long-standing religious traditions of His day?

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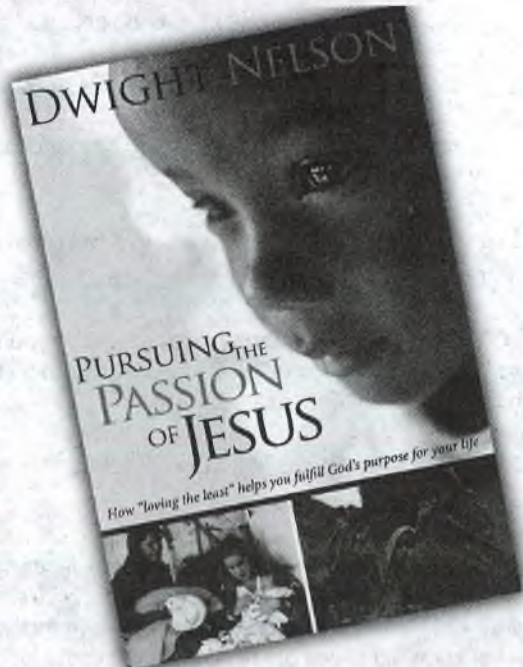
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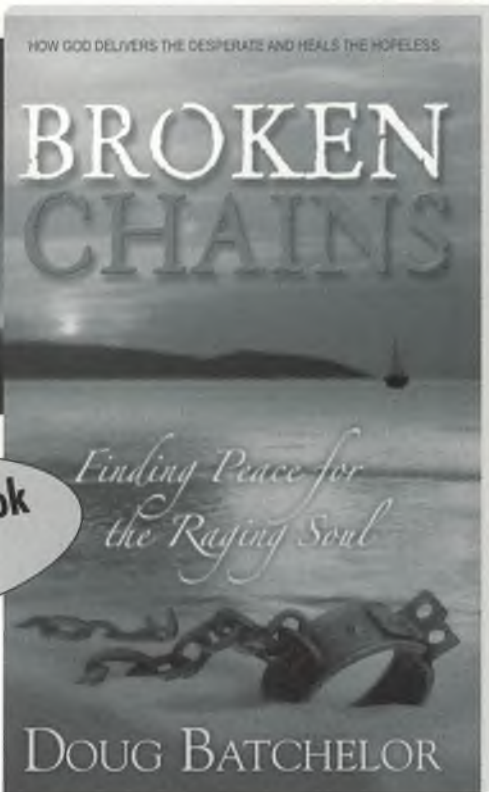
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Cathy Sue Cordero

Cathy Sue is a normal, happy university student living in Puerto Rico. But she was born four months early, weighing just 1½ pounds and with just one arm. The doctors said she would not survive. But she did survive and the miracles that God worked in her brought her family to God.

Cathy never thought of herself as handicapped. Her older brother taught her to do things other kids do, like bike-riding and swimming. When she joined Pathfinders, she often won first prize in competitions. Cathy seldom wears her prosthetic arm. She tells those who feel sorry for her, "When Jesus comes, He will have an arm for me. Until then it's not a problem."

Cathy has a mission to teach others that being different is OK. She challenges them not to let other people decide for them who they are and what they can do. She adds, "Loving God has helped me love myself."

Read more about Cathy Sue in this quarter's *Mission*.



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