

# ***A Reasonable Salvation***

***God's Edenic Vision***

***But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,  
and always be ready to give a defense to  
everyone who asks you a reason for the  
hope that is in you, with meekness and  
fear - 1 Peter 3:15 NKJV***

***"Come now, and let us reason together,"***

***Says the LORD,***

***"Though your sins are like scarlet,***

***They shall be as white as snow;***

***Though they are red like crimson,***

***They shall be as wool. Isaiah 1:18***

***I, I am He, Who erases the memory of your unfaithfulness  
for my own sake. Isaiah 43:25***

***"There is that in Himself that impels Him ...Love" -Lange***

## A REASONABLE SALVATION

John H. King

### God's Edenic Vision

*We have taken a step back from looking at a few trees to scope out the forest around them, from confining prophecy to a single event and allowing it to speak more openly for the heart of God. There is a larger picture here than The Exodus or Judah's return from Babylon. There is anticipated a final restoration of all things [Revelation 21].*

*There is throughout prophetic history the thought of a restoration of God's Eden vision which the disciples, no doubt, picked up on at Jesus's ascension [Acts 1:6]. We must step back far enough to see Eden in our peripheral vision on both ends of that history. [Joel 2:25; Revelation 2:7].*

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## Interpreting The Cross

It is extraordinary the way people will play the gospel back to you, if it is presented to them in an uninterpreted way. - Vincent Donovan

Most theories of the Atonement are built on analogy. And analogies are stories culturally interpreted. We should be familiar with a number of images used to explicate why the Savior gave His life for mankind.

1. Christ as a sacrifice for sin paints the picture of the Temple precinct where the sacrifices were a type of Christ's crucifixion [Hebrews 10:1].
2. Christ ransoming us depicts the market place as, for example, the story of Hosea buying back his wife, Gomer, from the slave auction block [Hosea 3:2].
3. Christ our justification recalls the court room because justice is a legal term and Christ in His death paid the penalty for our sin [Romans 5:9].

But these explanations presume within the cultural milieu that the image was well-understood. Yet even this was no guarantee that the truth the image taught would be accepted. Isaiah somehow knew his message of "The Suffering Servant" which spoke to the Savior's passion and death [Isaiah 53:1] remained a riddle in his day. The priests and prophets ridiculed him, in a drunken stupor, snorting derisively, "Who does he think he is to teach us, treating us like babies just learning, babbling, "tsaw, tsaw, tsaw, qaw, qaw, qaw!" [Isaiah 28:9-10] They prided themselves on their learning not realizing that in scorn they spoke prophetically.

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“Indeed,” affirmed the prophet [Isaiah 28:13] “what should be rest for your soul is mere babble to your ears.” As Jesus understood his generation, “...it is given in parables, that ‘Seeing they may not see, And hearing they may not understand.’ [Luke 8:10; Isaiah 6:9].

But if Israel could not see the spiritual reason for the many sacrifices they offered, how might the Greek philosopher fare, who cares nothing about sacrifices, sitting in the seat of knowledge reasoning how intelligent he is. Certain Epicurean<sup>1</sup> and Stoic<sup>2</sup> philosophers at Athens referred to Paul as a “babbler” when he spoke of Christ’s death and resurrection [Acts 17:18].

### Finding the Words

A missionary is defined as someone who brings the gospel message into a culture that has not heard the message at all of an infinite grace and our God’s self-sacrifice to save us from sin. We might add: a culture that does not know the stories, the metaphors, we tell—and, maybe, cannot relate to them. Finding the right words sometimes is a challenge. John Perry in sharing the story of Maryam Rostampour’s and Marziyeh Amirozadeh’s imprisonment for Christ in Iran wrote, as an example, of the difficulty in translating their testimony from their native language, Farsi, into English.

He tells us, “A native English speaker has no idea how treacherous the language can be until he tries to explain why some words are considered off-color while others meaning exactly the same thing are not.”<sup>3</sup>

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1. a person devoted to sensual enjoyment, especially that derived from fine food and drink.

2. They taught that virtue, the highest good, is based on knowledge; the wise live in harmony with the divine Reason (also identified with Fate and Providence) that governs nature, and are indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune and to pleasure and pain.

3. .Maryam Rostampour, Page 292.

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There is a great likelihood that other cultures cannot relate to the analogies so common in our story circles. However the Gospel is taught it may require other stories, other analogies, other metaphors, to present the message of Salvation.

Richard Trench, an anglican arch-bishop in the late 19 Century, told the story, "Moffat in his *Missionary Labors and Scenes in South Africa* gives us a very remarkable example of the disappearing of one of the most significant words from the language of a tribe sinking ever deeper in [heathenism]; and with the disappearing of the word, of course the disappearing as well of the great spiritual ...truth whereof that word was at once the vehicle and the guardian. The Bechuanas, a Caffre tribe, employed formerly the word 'Morimo,' to designate 'Him that is above,' or 'Him that is in Heaven,'" and attached to the word the notion of a supreme Divine Being. Thus is it the ever repeated complaint of the Missionary that the very terms are well nigh or wholly wanting in the dialect of the [native] whereby to impart to him heavenly truths, or indeed even the nobler emotions of the human heart."<sup>4</sup>

There is also something called monolatry.<sup>5</sup> The word speaks to a religious recognition of many gods even though the devotee follows only one. Alcoholics Anonymous refers to a "power greater than yourself" but never identifies that "power" as a singular or only source of help for all. Each one must find their own "power." This is not pejoratively mentioned here. The main point to make is how we interpret the word "god."

It could have been used by Vincent Donovan to describe the Masai understanding of "god." The Masai didn't believe in one and only one true God but a god each

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4. Richard Trench, *On the Study of the Words Lectures* ( New York: W.. Widdleton, publisher. Unknown), 23

5. the worship of one god without denial of the existence of other gods.

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tribe worshiped severally. Each tribe believed that their “god” was the true god to whom they prayed. It almost parallels the civilized concept of denominations in which each church claims to be “full Gospel” distinct from all others. Obviously, such a limitation of divine grace and mercy or the revelation of Divine truth does not serve to explain the Cross. The Masai of Tanzania struggled to appreciate the idea that the God they might serve as Christians within their group or tribe was the “same God” who came to save other Masai.

### **Missionaries**

Missionaries are familiar with the disconnect: what they have learned and how to present it in a reasonable way to be understood. Vincent Donovan, who spent 17 years in Tanzania, wrote, “Suddenly I feel the urgent need to cast aside all theories, all efforts at strategy—and simply go to these people ... just go, and talk to them about ...the Christian message.” ... I feel rather naked.”<sup>6</sup>

Don Richardson in “Peace Child” learned about the adoption of a child between warring tribes to bring peace, known as a “peace child.” His autobiography is the story of sharing the message of the cross—but not through sacrifice—with the Sawi people of the Netherlands New Guinea [now Indonesia]. To reconcile with a neighboring tribe a treaty of peace was expressed in the offer of an infant son that was by ceremony and agreement adopted into the warring clan. They called him their “peace child,” which brought all conflict between the tribes to an end. Don Richardson spoke to them about Jesus, God’s peace child, and we know God used the story to bring salvation to the Sawi people.

A dear friend owns a farm on which she raises the cutest baby goats that like to hop about joyously. She was saddened to learn the importance in the Old Testament of

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6. Donovan, back cover.

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sacrificing these docile creatures in the name of God's forgiveness. The good news is in Hebrews 10:26 "there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins." But Isaiah profiled the suffering servant of God as a small ewe lamb that submitted without a whimper to the most notorious abuse [Isaiah 53:7]. It became necessary with my friend, though we recognize the analogy as a description of cruelty Christ endured for our salvation, to put the emphasis on the judicial or punitive aspects of Christ's death in our stead. The story had to be told some other way than using the metaphor that involved the death of that cherished little jumper.

### **Transcending World-views.**

There are two principles every believer should consider while sharing their faith: (1) Analogies and metaphors are culturally interpreted. So stories must be selected that have meaning in an analogous sense for sharing the Gospel. Equally true, (2) morality represents social order or how a society defines right from wrong, good and evil. And not every society lives by the same definition. How to navigate through the rapids of societal mores to the peaceful waters of God's righteousness most assuredly requires His divine hand at the tiller. This has posed a challenge for the missionary when "non-western" ideas of morality are practiced from nudity to polygamy to cannibalism. We have referred to these as "pagan" or even "savage" but they should be no more objectionable than abortion and gender reassignment practiced in our world.

An anthropologist in a college class that I attended told the delightful story of visiting a tribal chief somewhere along the Amazon River. He brought a gift for the chief's wife: a tee shirt. She came out of an inner chamber in their tent not knowing he was there and turned red face when she saw him. She scurried back inside. He was embarrassed because she was bare-breasted. She was obviously shamed. With his apologies, he offered the gift of the shirt to the

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chieftain for his wife, which the chief took to her. A few minutes later, she came out to greet the anthropologist. She had cut two holes in the shirt to free up her bosom to the tropic air. But she was now wearing her nose ring—the reason for her embarrassment. How would a missionary tell this story? It looks like western cultures have encouraged civilized tribal woman to wear shirts now. Is that not important?

Cultural practices and an understood morality are social constructs that together form a societal worldview, which, in turn, gives meaning to such spiritual ideas as right from wrong, defining the family unit, what is happiness, and even, what we mean by “God.”

### Postmodernism

We live, in the industrial world, in a “postmodern” age which challenges the church’s interpretation or understanding of such ideas. Andrew Park, a Methodist theologian, interpreted the concept of punishing sin as a means to marginalize the suffering of those who have been victimized by what he called “improper theologies.” Treating everyone as a sinner, promotes the impression that a victim’s suffering is their fault.<sup>7</sup> “Modern theories of atonement renounce violence,”<sup>8</sup> Park alerted.

Rita Nakashima Brock, an American feminist scholar and Protestant theologian, fulminated, “It’s telling people you don’t have a right to protest when terrible things happen to you. It short-circuits the legitimate expression of tragedy and grief that is fundamental to our psychological health. We ought to be outraged that the Roman empire crucified Jesus, not grateful, not happy that he died for us, but outraged at this travesty of justice.”<sup>9</sup> Adonis Vidu in *“Law and*

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7. Vidu. Page 178

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

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*Atonement*” explains, “The attending notion of guilt is also meaningless for a society that no longer anchors standards of moral conduct in a personal, transcendent, God but in variously constructed and justified immanent human standards.”<sup>10</sup>

### Transcending Culture

The Gospel transcends culture, that is, the Gospel is God’s power to save anyone, anywhere! It is not the property of any one culture or religious group. It is God’s reach at Calvary extended [GRACE] to rescue anyone who calls out to Him. We should be able to deliver the message in any cultural setting where hungry hearts can, in turn, share it in their own words—words from a transformed heart and life—which the Spirit of God can direct. If He can give us what to say in a crisis [Mark 13:11] how much more should The Spirit of God be able to direct our thoughts while we are heralding the good news to a hungry soul!

No one should have to know English or Western culture to understand God’s truth. We speak of walking in a disciple’s sandals if we want to follow Jesus. This metaphor is suppose to suggest the importance of experiencing what the Savior experienced in order to understand and appreciate the fellowship of His sufferings. But it was never you and I walking in His sandals that brought salvation but *He* walking in *ours*! He knew our temptations; we do not need to spend 40 days in a wilderness to learn what He went through. The larger point has always been that He experienced a cross so that you and I would never hang there!

Is there a message of the Cross that avoids stories strange to the soul who hungers to know God? Most assuredly, Yes!!

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10. Ibid. 184

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### The Covenant

The purpose for writing this work is, as Peter urged, “[to] be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks ... a reason of the hope that “ we have in Christ. We endeavor, therefore, starting at Creation to explain Calvary as reasonable and reasonably meaningful for faith. Not every theory of the Atonement greets our public with an interest that can lead to conviction, and while God could use our words spoken in meekness and a deep respect for Him from a sanctified heart [1 Peter 3:15] it should sound reasonable to want not to speak in strange metaphors or using words that have a double entendre or are unfamiliar to the listener. It cannot be wrong to search for a Bible based theme or pathway to the Cross that explains God’s justice and love in a reasonable way.

Reasonableness, however, is determined by an individual’s perspective. What is reasonable to one might not be reasonable to another. When Calvary is all about you and me, our personalized view of Jesus’ death and the provisions of His grace may vary. Some, for example, see physical healing more theologically significant than others. But to share in a common reasonableness or view, Calvary is most reasonable and just, if we seek to know *God’s* reasons for sending His Son to die? This work hopes to project a Divine reasonableness for the Savior’s crucifixion and resurrection. Said another way: It should be all about *Him* and not just us.

John Stott in his work, *“The Cross of Christ,”* noted that the three major explanations of the death of Christ were distinguished chiefly in that “in each God’s work in Christ is directed toward a different person.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus died to defeat Satan [Colossians 2:15] as well as out of a love for us [John 3:16] but—if I may say it—primarily, honoring the Father’s interest in being reconciled to us [Romans 5:10]. It was the

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11. Stott. Page 226.

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request of God's justice and His offended holiness that sent His Son to the Cross. Augustine, according to Adonis Vidu, argued that "Jesus demonstrates perfect obedience.... In this he satisfies God. ...It is precisely His attitude to His death that ... propitiates God."<sup>12</sup>

To get closer to Calvary, we must get closer to God, and that is only possible in prayer and the prayerful study of His Word. And we will never in this lifetime be totally satisfied with God's reasons [Romans 11:33]—nor should we. Calvary must remain a matter for faith. God had that lonely hill of suffering in mind when He created us. Who we are and who He is were from eternity past linked together in His mind and heart.

So we strip away all the figures of speech and the symbolism, the shadows and types, not because they are not inspired—they are, but because we seek an explanation of God's impassioned drive to win us back after our first parents did what they did. We look closer to the language of Scripture, we listen more intently with a stethoscope of prayer (metaphors are useful) to hear from God, the beat of His heart as well as the nuance in His words. The story to tell is the story of a Covenant God and His creation—how it all began and how it will end. E. P. Sanders argues that the covenant is the hidden presupposition of Jewish literature even when the word hardly occurs.<sup>13</sup>

We are investigating two phrases of significance even though written only once each: What is it about the covenant, or more correctly, the God of the *covenant*, that needs to be avenged [Leviticus 26:25] and what did our Lord mean when He forgave us "for His own sake"? [Isaiah 43:25]. Both these statements in some way reveal God's personal interest in Jesus' crucifixion.

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12. Vidu. Page 40. *De Trinitate*. 14.12.15

13. Wright. Page 26,

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N. T. Wright is worth quoting here: “I have often reflected on the strangeness of the task to which Paul devoted his life: telling pagans [Greeks and Romans] that there was a single creator God rather than a multiplicity of gods was bad enough, but adding that this God had made himself known in a crucified Jew, who had than been raised from the dead, was bound to cause hoots of derision, and, if Acts is to be believed, sometimes did. Yet Paul found that when he told us this story, when he proclaimed that Jesus was indeed the world’s true Lord, people (to their great surprise, no doubt) found this announcement making itself at home in their minds and hearts, generating the belief that it was true, and transforming their lives with a strange new presence and power.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Paul and N. T. Wright**

N. T. Wright recognized that the message of a reasonable salvation was somehow hidden throughout the Biblical text because it was not the metaphor but the real and literal story of the Bible, itself. He confessed, for example, regarding Paul’s epistles, “Exegesis needs the concordance, but it cannot be ruled by it. It is no argument against calling Paul a covenantal theologian to point out the scarcity of the word covenant in his writings. We have to learn to recognize still more important things, such as implicit narratives and allusions to large biblical themes. Just because we cannot so easily look them up in a reference book does not make them irrelevant.”<sup>15</sup>

N. T. Wright spent no small effort linking God’s creation, His creative purpose, to God’s covenant.<sup>16</sup> Wright observed in the Scriptures, especially of Paul, “The Creator God is the Covenant God and vice versa.”<sup>17</sup> Wright showed

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14. Ibid. Page 100.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid. Page 21ff.

17. Ibid. Page 24.

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in his work the influence Paul's Jewish roots had upon his theology. Writing lengthy quotes from Wright's work is inappropriate, so others should study his thoughts at length from his book, but he is on to something which is seldom preached, perhaps, because of the difficulty many have attached to an academic pursuit. "First," Wright begins, "the covenant is there to solve the problems within creation."<sup>18</sup> Then, secondly, Wright contends, "creation is invoked to solve the problems within the covenant."<sup>19</sup> When Adam, God's creation, sinned God needed the New Covenant in Christ to bring about reconciliation with all mankind. And because the Old Covenant, Torah Law, could not save, God needed to create the new man "created in righteousness and true holiness." [Ephesians 4:24]. So, our Creator is a Covenant God, a basic truth worth pursuing when our quest is a reasonable explanation of the Cross.

It is easy to see why a Creator who keeps covenant "must eventually engage in a final showdown with the forces of evil"<sup>20</sup> This is sometimes clothed in the narrative of the Exodus and other times "like a great court scene, a trial in which the powers of evil are judged, condemned, and overthrown."<sup>21</sup>

### **The Righteousness of God**

We cannot speak of God's covenant without referring to His righteousness. But what is God's Righteousness?<sup>22</sup> The problem of how to translate the phrase "The righteousness

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18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. In my book, *The Cross*<sup>22</sup> I deep dive into the many meanings of righteousness and how various Christian faiths see it differently. We share a common declaration that Jesus' death was the cause of our "justification" but the meaning of this takes us in many directions.

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or justice of God,"<sup>23</sup> which Wright calls "the *covenant faithfulness* of God," Wright admits,<sup>24</sup> is difficult already in Isaiah [Isaiah 56:1] and elsewhere—as it is in Paul. Somehow we need a word which will pull together this entire complex of thought which evokes the Hebrew phrase and it's Greek equivalent but in English.

There is no such word. The fact that the Creator and covenant God can be relied upon to act in accordance with His creative power and His covenant fidelity to put the world right has become the burden of soteriological studies that, it is hoped, will be advanced in this brief work. Hopefully, proceeding to show that Jesus' death and resurrection had everything to do with covenant will only support what we have already discovered about our faith and His grace.

Wright concluded, "When God fulfills the covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gifts of the Spirit, thereby revealing his faithful covenant justice and his ultimate purpose of new creation, this has the effect *both* of fulfilling the original covenant purpose (thus dealing with sin and procuring forgiveness) *and* of enabling Abraham's family to be the worldwide Jew-plus-Gentile people it was always intended to be."<sup>25</sup> He goes on to answer, then, "...the much larger question of how the Creator God can be true to creation, how the Covenant God can be true to the covenant, and how those things are not two but one. And that is what the phrase "*righteousness of God*" is all about."<sup>26</sup>

Wright proceeds to argue<sup>27</sup> that Israel often goes back to Genesis 1 and the story of the Exodus to appeal to the Creator's power to deliver and God's responsibility by

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23. δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ == יְהוָה יִצְדָק Romans 1:17 & Deuteronomy 33:21

24. Wright. Page 24.

25. Ibid. Page 37.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid. Pages 24-25.

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covenantal agreement to do so. The operative term of such an appeal is God's righteousness to establish justice in the world and more especially to vindicate His people when they cry on to Him for help. He references Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36 as key to explaining Calvary and Deuteronomy 30 [27-30] as "arguably the basis of the whole idea."

### **The Marrow of Christian Theology Revisited**

We must look at Romans 3:21-26. This has been called the marrow of Christian theology.<sup>28</sup> Godet quotes Calvin saying, "There is not probably in the whole Bible a passage which sets forth more profoundly the righteousness of God in Christ."<sup>29</sup> Jesus' sacrificial death is "the ultimate cause of our justification"<sup>30</sup> and righteousness.<sup>31</sup>

Paul wrote in Romans 3:24-26: *We are "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over [not forgiven] the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."*

The wording of these verses [Romans 3:21-26] sums up, what Wright calls, Paul's "Covenant Theology" which Paul then takes the rest of his epistle to explain. "God's covenant faithfulness," Wright wrote, "is revealed, through the faithfulness of the Messiah, for the benefit of all who believe, Jew and Gentile alike. That is the point of 3:21-26."<sup>32</sup>

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28. Godet. Page 150.

29. Ibid.

30. Stott. Page 184.

31. As Wright points out "God's righteousness" or God's justice and His justification are all part of the New Covenant making this word difficult to translate. There is no one English equivalent.

32. Wright. Page 119.

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These verses using such words as *redemption*,<sup>33</sup> *propitiation*,<sup>34</sup> *demonstrate*<sup>35</sup>, and, of course, *righteousness or justice* [the same word]<sup>36</sup> are descriptive of relationship or the new agreement [the New Covenant] between Christ and the believer. Paul's letter to the Romans is theologically built on the "covenant faithfulness" of God, putting the emphasis not on the *provision* of Salvation—as important as this is—but the *relationship* between God and us in which Salvation is maintained, as Paul affirms to the Philippians, "Therefore, my beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for, it is God that works in you." [Philippians 2:12].<sup>37</sup>

### Covenant Theology

Dr. Ligon Duncan, Chancellor and CEO of Reformed Theological Seminary, has taught that covenant theology<sup>38</sup> is the Bible's way of explaining and deepening our understanding of at Calvary.<sup>39</sup>

1. how to read the Bible (both Old Testament and New) as the unified, coherent and consistent account of the one plan of the one Triune God to commune with his people by means of covenant, so that they might glorify and enjoy him forever;

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33. ἀπολυτρώσεως - to redeem by the payment of a ransom

34. ἱλαστήριον - the means of expiating sins

35. ἐνδειξιν - give evidence

36. δικαιοσύνης, δίκαιον and δικαιούντα - words that speak of righteousness and justice.

37. Isaiah 66:2 "For all those *things* My hand has made, And all those *things* exist," Says the LORD. "But on this *one* will I look: On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit, And who trembles at My word."

38. on Covenant Theology, accessed 2/23/23 <https://rts.edu/resources/covenant-theology-2/>.

39. There is no personal interest here to argue against dispensationalism or any other time honored Christian theme that finds ample support among peoples of faith.

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2. communion with God, how by God's loving condescension and covenant initiative we have been drawn into a covenant relationship of love with him;
3. the person and work of Christ, who is the covenant mediator and only redeemer of his covenant people, whom he saves by bearing the covenant curse they deserve on their behalf;
4. how we know that truly we belong to God and can be certainly assured of salvation, because of the unbreakable covenant oath and promise of God to us; and
5. the covenant signs, sacraments, or ordinances (in the New Testament: baptism and the Lord's Supper), what they are, what they are for, and how they work in confirming God's covenant promises and grace.

A study of Covenant Theology is not the scope of this work, but it should become obvious that this best offers a reasonable explanation as to Jesus' crucifixion, which is what this book is about. It should be obvious also that beneath the exegesis of texts and the syntax of words is what I want to call the Divine conscience, the Spirit not the letter of all that is written to reveal God's heartfelt interest in us, the need for Salvation through His own death in the person of His Son, and a most reasonable explanation of our hope in Him.

### **The Divine Conscience**

Here is Isaiah 43:11-12. Read it and then read it again, only read between the lines. What exactly is God saying to us? Listen closely. The New Living Translation attempts to capture the passion in His words:

*"I, yes I, am the Lord, and there is no other Savior. First I predicted your rescue, then I saved you and proclaimed it to the world. No foreign god has ever done this. You are witnesses that I am the only God," says the Lord.*"

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God intended to deal with evil by keeping His promises, keeping covenant! Isaiah's "*proclaimed*" and Paul's "*demonstrate*" are not the mere happenstance of language. "*No other Savior*" sounds perfectly in accord with Paul's "*redeemed...freely by ... grace.*" And God clarifies with emphasis, "*No [other] has ever done this...I am .... The Only...*"

It is a Covenantal God Who redeemed us, a truth worth studying. Through a life time of prayer we only begin to see past the veil. "For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known" [1 Corinthians 13:12]. The way God intended to deal with evil was through keeping the promises made in the covenant. Wright explained, "It is to ... the fulfillment of creation and covenant, not in their abolition, that we find ourselves compelled to turn our full attention" [Matthew 5:17].

## Speaking in Metaphors

“Temba, his arms wide” - Star Trek: The Next Generation: Season 5, Episode 2 “Darmok” [A metaphor for reconciliation and acceptance]

As Jesus made clear, the use of parables, analogies, and metaphors serves a purpose in explaining truth that otherwise goes unsaid. The parable provided the way to communicate the “mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven” [Matthew 13:11-12] so that those seeking to win a public argument against the Savior couldn’t because “hearing ... they would not understand” [Matthew 13:14]. But it was equally true that through the use of the parable Jesus’ ideas could take form. They could be visualized even if such a vision was, indeed, elementary. In at least ten parables we are privileged to walk around God’s kingdom in story form and view aspects of what will soon be for the saints of God. It is, indeed, a humble representation, and the window we are peering into is somewhat obscured [1 Corinthians 13:12] but we do see that the Kingdom of Heaven is soon to be as much a reality in the new world as it is within our hearts! [Luke 10:9; 21:31].

Parables and other forms of the metaphor are very much a part of our cultural imagination. One analogy often overlooked is why God chose to create the marriage bond monogamous between a man and woman. Adam would not lose more than one rib for God to create only one Eve to form a “oneness” that culturally has been all but lost, Jesus regretfully lamented, “because of the hardness of men’s hearts” [Mark 10:5]. Adam and Eve were in actuality our first

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parents (so we believe as Christians) but the analogy is in what way their union is a picture of ours with Christ.

### **The Marriage Analogy**

Divorce along with same-sex unions, and polygamy were not God's design because God intended the marriage union as a metaphor representing "Christ and the Church" [Ephesians 5:32]. The mystery of marriage "oneness" is a spiritual bond perhaps only recognizable after decades of working through confrontations, arguments, and misunderstandings. Perhaps, a couple only begins to recognize their love has climbed somehow to a higher level unseen in all the busyness of life. In later years, to their utter surprise, even without the flowers and weekly dinner dates, something has happened to "cement" [the Bible word 'cleave'] them together.

Husbands are enjoined to love their wives "just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" [Ephesians 5:25]. Somewhere alone in the memory of our first parents, we can assume, is a moment when such a love as this made sense to them. Most husbands since could only complain about the lack of submission and respect wives show—missing Paul's point entirely. Nonetheless, this metaphor serves to highlight the mystery which only begins to reveal its secrets to those few couples whose love is of a quality worthy such a revelation.

Christ's love for us put Him in the fore when evil needed to be defeated which led to His crucifixion. Some husbands enjoy the leadership role when society is passing out accolades but they cringe away and hide in the shadows when the task requires sacrifice. Even here, though, there is, or should be, a consciousness that almost instinctively moves him to risk all for family. Little boys dream of adventures with punches thrown in defending fair maiden. But this seed

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of manliness must be culturally watered to germinate.<sup>40</sup> The gardener is another man, a “father”, who must cultivate in a boy both the desire to defend love and the tenderness to recognize that love when the time comes.

### **Interpreting Metaphors**

There is a problem with using a metaphor that often goes unaddressed: How should we interpret it? The Psalmist spoke of the Lord as his Shepherd. This probably has great meaning for someone who owns sheep, but what does the average urbanite take from the analogy? Believers unfamiliar with tending sheep are left to attempt an explanation that hopefully supports a biblical interpretation. When Jesus added that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him, do they really—in the modern Christian world? Or are Christians taught somehow that following Christ is only connected to supporting the church in some tangible sense: financial support, and attendance? How many Christians can honestly say they can identify the voice of the Savior or of the Spirit?

It is possible to misapply the elements of a parable, to take from the narrative lessons or theological feedback that was never intended to be taught. Among the Savior’s lessons of the Kingdom of Heaven in parable form, He used an illustration of a wedding feast in which one guest appeared without a “wedding garment” on. How is this to be interpreted? Is it in reference to the “robe of righteousness” the saints in Heaven will be given? In other words, no one will actually get inside the “Pearly Gates” only to be thrown out later.

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40. I define a cultural metaphor as follows: It is any distinctive or unique activity, phenomenon, or institution with which all or most members of a given culture emotionally and/or cognitively identify. cf. This Online Readings in Psychology and Culture Article is brought to you for free and open access (provided uses are educational in nature) by IACCP and ScholarWorks@GVSU. Copyright © 2011 International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology. All Rights Reserved. ISBN 978-0-9845627-0-1

## Our Redemption

The word “redemption”<sup>41</sup> is used 10 times in our New Testament to indicate a deliverance [from sin] “procured by the payment of a ransom.”<sup>42</sup> Everywhere in the New Testament, the Greek dictionary reads that it is “metaphorical, viz. Deliverance effected through the death of Christ from the retributive wrath of a holy God and the merited penalty of sin.”<sup>43</sup> But unfortunately [if I may use this word] this metaphor has raised questions in the minds of some theologians. Adonis Vidu ascribes Greek cultic influence to the development of an early Christian theology of a ransom paid to Satan for the souls of mankind.<sup>44</sup> In my work, *The Cross*<sup>45</sup> I slowly came to realize that metaphors, like parables, contain in story form truth that needs to be extracted. Jesus’ death set us free from sin which ransom-like paralleled deliverance from slavery. None of this requires a payment to anyone, per se, but scholarship struggled academically to come to such a conclusion.

This theory survived with little serious criticism until its disassembly by Anselm in the eleventh century. Until then variations on this common theme were proposed. Augustine (354 – 430) reasoned that Satan’s power was delegated by God. (As in Job’s case?)<sup>46</sup> Augustine advanced this reasoning, “If ...the commission of sins and through the just anger of God subjected man to the devil, doubtless the remission of sins through the merciful reconciliation of God rescues man from the devil.” (Augustine: On The Trinity 13.12.16)<sup>47</sup> Then there was also the view of the devil as a

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41. ἀπολύτρωσις

42. Thayer. Page 65.

43. Ibid.

44. Vidu. Page 14.

45. See my book “The Cross:Why Jesus Had To Die”

46. Job 1:12 “*Very well,*” the LORD told Satan, “*everything he owns is in your power. However, do not lay a hand on Job himself.*” So Satan left the LORD’s presence.

47. Craig. 105

## Speaking in Metaphors

usurper. On the whole, however, the devil was regarded as having some rightful dominion over us. Athanasius (c. 298 - 373 ) subscribed to this position, and so did Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyons, d. 202). Origen ( c. 184 – c. 253) took the metaphor of ransom literally. He reasoned that “a transaction with Satan took place, in which Satan, unaware of Christ’s divinity, asked for the blood of Christ and therefore was deceived into committing the ultimate suicidal act.”<sup>48</sup> Origen thought that Christ’s human soul was a ransom payment made to Satan in order to gain our release. “But to whom did he give his soul a ransom for many?” he asked. “Certainly not to God.” He thought, “What is it perhaps, then, to the evil one? For he had the power over us until the soul of Jesus was given to him as our ransom.” (Origen: Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew XVI.8)<sup>49</sup>

For Gregory of Nyssa God would not be just to disregard Satan’s right over man.<sup>50</sup> Adam freely gave himself to the tempter and sold himself into sin. “Satan’s right over man must be respected.” (Catechetical Oration 22)

But Gregory Nazianus would sharply denounce the notion that Christ’s death was a ransom paid either to Satan or to God.<sup>51</sup> Gregory believed that Jesus was not a ransom but a victim of Satan’s unjust attack. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice to God “so as to snatch us from him who had us in his power...” (Against Apollinaris 69-72)<sup>52</sup>

### **The Problem with the Metaphor**

Figures of Speech offer us choices of interpretation and if we know human nature at all we admit that it is most natural to choose the meaning that best supports our own

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48. Vidu. 18

49. Craig. 99

50. In Matthew 4:9 Satan argues, “*I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me.* (pay me homage).” and Jesus never debated Satan’s point. cp. Craig page 109. footnote 16.

51. Craig. 102 footnote 8

52. Ibid.

## Speaking in Metaphors

lifestyle and is less likely to challenge us spiritually. For this reason, as an example, the Word of God was careful not to suggest any particular form for worship. In point of fact, one of the few times the word “worship” is used in the New Testament is when Jesus told the woman at the well that form and ritual are not the important elements: Spirit and Truth are [John 4:24]. The term is not ritualized at all in the New Testament. Worship since Calvary is intended to be more than ritual and form. It involves the heart in humble submission to God. Paul taught the Corinthians that unbelievers attending a Christian meeting should sense a conviction that draws them to the mourner’s bench where true worship, indeed, takes place [1 Corinthians 14:25]. Paul, otherwise, spoke of “service” [Romans 12:1].

We do not know what songs they sang in the early churches or if and when offerings were taken or if the church leaders were given robes to wear or exactly how a meeting was choreographed. Nor should we! These are culturally interpreted [1 Corinthians 11:16].

### **The Tabernacle Pattern**

But the picture in the Old Testament is quite the opposite. Form was everything [Hebrews 8:5]. Worship in this way followed faithfully a certain ritual not only as regards the service itself but at certain times and days as well. The sacrifices, as we know, were centric to such worship as a type of Christ’s death. But since there remains no more sacrifices for sin [Hebrews 10:26] because Jesus has died and risen, there is a freedom offered believers in worship.

We must, however, not misinterpret this. The freedom isn’t to invent a replacement for the ancient practices but rather to participate “in spirit” in such gatherings. To enjoy “literal” or true worship in communion with our Lord. We should be able to strip away all the phylacteries of a worship service including a top-notch sound system, choir robes, candles, incense (no meanness is

## Speaking in Metaphors

intended here) and still experience our Lord's presence. We should still be able to pray together, sing acapella, even off key, and hear from God's Word without any supporting ritual.

The point is not to remove the ritual but to know that our worship of God is real and the ritual is simply a natural tendency toward organizing our time together. The symbols in the ritual all have meaning but must never replace literally getting in touch with our Lord in true worship.

The word "worship" had an expression of kneeling before the Lord in humble submission and service. Not a bad ritual here for today's church but it might require an altar rail and an opportunity for people to linger, not harassed by schedules and other commitments. Maybe the church can bring back the altar rail and unlock the church door making this opportunity available through the week for whomever would come. Don't forget to invite them in on Sundays. People may need to be encouraged to try something quite different from their day to day activity and different from what church was for them before.

This is not to suggest that every service must be a gathering at the front or must open with a lengthy prayer meeting. That would be a ritualized service which is not the idea behind true and spiritual worship. But even offering an opportunity for people to open themselves up to express a spontaneity in worship may take a bit of coaxing.

### **The Danger with Metaphors**

The real danger with metaphors is that the interpretation may miss what God wants us to see in the metaphor. If Jesus paid my ransom, yes, I am saved through faith, but, salvation is not just a ticket to ride, a "get into heaven free" card. It is this but much more. Salvation is a renewed relationship with the God we have fallen in love with. Salvation is a prayer life and a hunger for God's Word

## Speaking in Metaphors

and a draw to be in fellowship with others of like faith [2 Peter 1:1]. The idea of a ransom may not say all this.

I may need also a more literal understanding of what God expects of me, of what salvation is all about. If I am more prone to the church ritual as a routine that gives structure to my week, to my life, I might erroneously disconnect the practice from what it represents, still believing that this is all there is to salvation. My salvation is not a church pew; my salvation is an ongoing and deepening relationship with the Savior. The church service is intended to be an outward expression of that inward, heartfelt, relationship. The church service never stands alone. It is possible to lose sight of the reality of salvation but continue to embrace the religious practices; where, then, is our actual dedication to *God!*

### **A Literal Truth**

How might Christians be encouraged to maintain a healthy relationship with God without discrediting the importance of an organized time of fellowship? I am recommending an *additional* understanding of the Cross as a *covenant*—a new covenant—between God and us by faith. This calls for a faith that is also faithfulness as an expression of godliness. The just or the righteous *live* their faith according to Habakkuk [2:4]. The idea of a “covenant” with God is a literal and not a symbolic representation of the provisions of Calvary. Because covenant means relationship and relationships are built on faith—or trust, communication with God, prayer, takes on a far more meaningful importance. Church services should be designed to encourage and provide God’s people with opportunity to exercise their right to “come boldly to the throne of grace” [Hebrews 4:16]. Prayer meetings serve an important purpose in this regard. Altar calls in which believers can linger, sermons on “talking to God” or “practicing God’s presence” can support this literal truth that acceptance of Jesus’ death and resurrection is in reality accepting and

## Speaking in Metaphors

participating in a “new” covenant with Him. Prayer is an essential part of all that.

In reality, Jesus’ death was the moment when God fulfilled the “Old” covenant and drew up the “New” covenant<sup>53</sup> for us to keep. This is worth studying.

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53. My position here is: The theological idea that the word for “covenant” is a last will and testament misrepresents the meaning of the texts which employ and explain the term.

## The Old, Old Story

Tell me the story of Jesus, write on my heart every word; tell me the story most precious, sweetest that ever was heard. - Fanny Crosby

“Tell Me the Old, Old Story” was a hymn, originally 50 stanzas long, written by Arabella Hankey while she convalesced from a lengthy illness in 1866. It is this story Christians want to hear and tell repeatedly. Fanny Crosby, the “Queen of Gospel Song Writers” added, “Write on my heart every word... The ...sweetest that ever was heard.”<sup>54</sup> Hankey joyously interrupted, ““What seems each time I tell it more wonderfully sweet.”<sup>55</sup>

His story is more than His death. It encompasses His life and ministry, then, as the incarnate Son of God, and now, as our mediator and the administrator of the Church as its Head. Jesus’ story is the story of the launching of the New Covenant written upon each believer’s heart replacing the Old etched only in cold stone. As Hankey composed it, “Tell me the Story slowly, That I may take it in; That wonderful redemption, God’s remedy for sin.”<sup>56</sup>

### The Story Behind the Story

But the story behind the story—of covenant faithfulness and judgement—without metaphor and analogy is hard to rhyme or set to music. Philosophical explications seldom lend themselves to poetic verse. But just because we

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54. “Tell Me the Story of Jesus” GPH. Page 319.

55. “*I Love To Tell the Story*” GPH. Page 320.

56. “Tell Me the Old, Old Story” GPH. Page 318.

## The Old, Old Story

fail to find words like “Covenant” or “Vengeance” in the Hymns doesn’t mean they are not there “in spirit.” Christopher Idle<sup>57</sup> penned an old hymn, “Our God has made his covenant new”<sup>58</sup> in which he celebrated the drawing up of the new covenant at the resurrection of our Savior.

Our God has made his covenant new  
the Lord himself has spoken  
not like the covenant made before  
which human sin had broken.

...

But now God sets his law within  
on human hearts he writes it;  
the people God has made his own,  
one holy church, recites it.

Philip Doddridge in the 18<sup>th</sup> century wrote “My God! the covenant of Thy love.”

My God! the covenant of Thy love  
Abides for ever sure;  
And in its matchless grace I feed  
My happiness secure.  
Since Thou, the everlasting God,  
My Father art become,  
Jesus, my Guardian and my Friend,  
And heaven my final home

Isaac Watts in “Let God arise in all his might”<sup>59</sup> penned these words in which he, perhaps inadvertently, correctly equated God’s vengeance with His justice.

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57. Christopher Idle from Jeremiah 31

© Christopher Idle/Jubilate Hymns Ltd 8 7. 8 7. 8 8 7 *Light Upon the River* (Hope Publishing Company, 1998)

58. [https://www.jubilate.co.uk/songs/our\\_god\\_has\\_made\\_his\\_covenant\\_new](https://www.jubilate.co.uk/songs/our_god_has_made_his_covenant_new)

59. [https://hymnary.org/text/let\\_god\\_arise\\_in\\_all\\_his\\_might](https://hymnary.org/text/let_god_arise_in_all_his_might)

## The Old, Old Story

Let God arise in all his might,  
And put the troops of hell to flight,,  
As smoke that sought to cloud the skies  
Before the rising tempest flies.  
[He comes array'd in burning flames,,  
Justice and vengeance are his names;  
Behold his fainting foes expire,  
Like melting wax before the fire.]

### The Story of Redemption

The account of our redemption is usually told in song from *our* side of the New Covenant and not God's. Francis Rowley said it adequately in "I Will Sing the Wondrous Story"<sup>60</sup> It is all about what He did for *me* and not my commitment to *Him*:

I will sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me

...

I was lost, but Jesus found me  
Found the sheep that went astray  
Raised me up and gently led me  
Back into the narrow way

I started a search through the Gospel Publishing House hymnal of the Assemblies of God for the story behind the story, the Story of our redemption from sin, Satan and death, told without parable and metaphor celebrating God's goodness and His power to save—in other words, celebrating *Him*, alone! There are some.

Jack Hayford in the Hymn "Exalt His Name Together"<sup>61</sup> wrote, "...Jesus glorified, Who took our sins to Calv'ry, and in our place He died." His work is a veritable

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60. "I Will Sing the Wondrous Story" GPH. Page 321.

61. "Exalt His Name Together" GPH. Page 76.

## The Old, Old Story

essay on the provisions of Calvary set to worship music (perhaps, in the spirit of a David).

Fanny Crosby wrote “For our sins He suffered and bled and died.”<sup>62</sup> Matthew Bridges gave these words to musicians, “All hail, Redeemer, hail! For Thou hast died for me;”<sup>63</sup> In William Clark’s “Blessed Be the Name”<sup>64</sup> we read, “Redeemer, Savior, Friend of man once ruined by the Fall, Thou hast devised salvation’s plan, For Thou hast died for all.” [Good theology!]

### The Song

But the metaphor often is visibly laid over that eternal plan in order to simplify the message and make it easier to voice in praise. (And this is a good thing.) Consider, for example, the hymn, “What a Wonderful Savior!”<sup>65</sup> written and set to music by Elisha Hoffman, “Christ has for sin atonement made; We are redeemed! *The price is paid!*” and in “Blessed Assurance”<sup>66</sup> Fanny Crosby called herself, and you and I, too, an “Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of His Spirit, *washed in His blood.*”

But “washed in His blood” is a metaphor for our salvation that perhaps some believers who have ASD might sing without understanding. Is it important to make the message clear? This is not to discourage singing these songs but hymns and choruses of praise—to stay focused on my main point—are almost exclusively about Christ’s death for *us* and not about God’s desire toward us, or simply about *Him*. In English: the choruses and hymns are about *me*, *my* sins, *my* deliverance, *my* salvation, *my* protection, *my* deliverance, etc. He ransomed *me*. He died for *me*. Even in “Rock of Ages” a hymn that never grows old, we sing “Cleft for *me*.” It is still about *me*.

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62. “Praise Him, Praise Him” GPH. Page 55.

63. “Crown Him with Many Crowns” (GPH). Page 67.

64. “Blessed Be the Name” GPH. Page 68.

65. “What a Wonderful Savior” GPH. Page 71.

66. “Blessed Assurance” GPH. Page 70.

## The Old, Old Story

But Calvary was also about *God*. Jesus' death satisfied, pleased, *God*. Isaiah prophesied, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; ... And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied." [Isaiah 53:10, 11].<sup>67</sup> Richard Trench interprets 1 John 4:10<sup>68</sup> to say that Christ's offering of Himself "enabled (*God*) to show Himself propitious (favorable) to us once more."<sup>69</sup> Professor Vidu argues, that there is "*no other family of theories [that] takes God to be the object of the work of Christ on the cross.*"<sup>70</sup> (Emphasis added). The Lord, Himself, shared as much with Isaiah where we read "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions *for My own sake*; And I will not remember your sins" [Isaiah 43:25]. "There is that in Himself that impels Him ...Love" Lange interpreted.<sup>71</sup>

Singing about the Covenant would shift the emphasis back on God, not His wrath on the sinner but His judgment on sin, not an appeased rage but a victorious outcry over our being reconciled to Him! Our main point remains that our God is a Covenantal God. We are encouraged to remember this with each rainbow that He hangs in our sky when the storm is over. And there is one song we still sing which acknowledges this about Him, that celebrates the Covenant between our Lord and us: *On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand*. The third stanza reads:

His oath, His covenant, His blood,  
Support me in the whelming flood;  
When all around my soul gives way,  
He then is all my hope and stay.

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67. Matthew 17:5 on the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus discussed His coming crucifixion with Moses and Elijah, God blurted out, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

68. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be the propitiation for our sins*.

69. Trench. *Page 294*.

70. Vidu. *Page 32-33*.

71. Lange, vol 6. *Page 472*.

## The Old, Old Story

We can understand the interest in a personal focus and the need to explain the Cross and the Divine Heart in metaphor. We must never stop singing His praises. We should not start critiquing the hymns that have through worship brought us closer to the Savior. But we can add this, that God joins us in the celebration of our salvation and the joy of being reconciled once more to His great heart.

“The LORD, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness, he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing” [Zephaniah 3:17 RSV].

### **Celebrating Our Lord’s Presence.**

Our Salvation is all about Him but we sing a lot about ourselves. We see His gift of grace as life eternal, but it is the gift of Himself, the gift of a love relation with Him. We objectify God in verse; we ought to be appreciating Who He is to us—not only what He has given to us. Of the names of Jehovah we appreciate, consider that Jehovah-Rapha is tied to His covenant with Israel [Exodus 15:26] and by extension you and me. Jehovah-Shammah, all but forgotten by us at the end of Ezekiel’s prophecy is the prophet’s final thought, the crescendo at the end of his prophecy of the return of God’s glory to Israel—and, again, by extension you and me. Just His presence, Ezekiel reminds us, is sufficient to make our eternity, heaven. The Psalmist proclaimed, Psalm 115:1 CSB, “Not to us, LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your faithful love, because of your truth.”

There is great news: denominational preferences in music are giving way to the simple sounds of the stringed instrument and the words are returning to a purer celebration of the Lord’s Presence, celebrating “Lord, not ... us.” The tunes are easier to sing and harmonize to. The words are about our Lord. We should see ourselves as children coming to a friend’s party—not expecting a present, but bringing one! Not expecting to be blessed or entertained.

## The Old, Old Story

We attend worship not to be blessed but to bless Him! [Psalm 68:26]. This is not to suggest that we shouldn't pray for the sick or seek His touch on our lives. He is most celebrated among us when He ministers to us and we share our testimony with others. We should, we must. But the music is less and less about the words, the creed, and more and more about the heart longing to embrace everything that He is to us. The same choruses are finding hearts open across denominational lines. No wonder the organ has been moved out, because we are not emphasizing the hymns of old that were about us and we are now coming to *His* party not ours—and more and more Generation Z youth are loving what's happening—drums and all.

### Top Christian songs of 2022

The older hymns to a large degree are in sermonette set to rhyme and music. Many had started as testimonials to God's mercy after a traumatic event or during a lifelong illness which another song writer set to music. These were encouraging stories of grace as well as reassuring biblical truths which we sang heartedly and worshipfully, Sunday after Sunday. I do not say this as a hymnologist (I am not one) but only as a believer who spent years enjoying these old songs and one who now misses them. But I also believe this is by divine design to introduce a purer and more expansive worship sound among believers bringing His Church together.

The more recent compositions emphasize worship, raising the voice to declare our love to Him, to celebrate His goodness. Here are some examples;

Jenn Johnson sings of the "Goodness Of God" on the Bethel Music label. The words go:<sup>72</sup>

I love You, Lord

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72. <https://youtu.be/n0FBb6hnwTo>

## The Old, Old Story

Oh Your mercy never fails me  
All my days  
I've been held in Your hands  
From the moment that I wake up  
Until I lay my head  
Oh I will sing of the goodness of God

...

With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now, I give You  
everything  
Your goodness is running, it's running after me

...

With my life laid down, I'm surrendered now, I give You  
everything  
Your goodness is running, it keeps running after me  
All my life You have been faithful  
All my life You have been so so good  
With every breath that I am able  
Oh I will sing of the goodness of God

Charity Gayle sings "I Speak Jesus."<sup>73</sup>

I just want to speak the name of Jesus  
Over every heart and every mind  
'Cause I know there is peace within Your presence  
I speak Jesus

In clear language: we are returning to song which raise the heart in prayer, songs which are sung—not *about* our Lord, but—to our Lord, directly.

### The Ministry of Exhortation

There is, Paul taught, a ministry of exhortation [Romans 12:12] distinguished from 6 other callings he outlined to the believers in Rome. Some ministry is designed to address physical needs, such as ministering to the poor or

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73. <https://youtu.be/PcmqSfr1ENY>

## The Old, Old Story

supporting the ministry financially [Romans 12:13]. The teaching ministry [Romans 12:16] and the work of the prophet [Romans 12:11] are well known but what does an exhorter do that makes their calling unique? This ministry leads in “rejoicing in hope” a phrase that suggests a ministry of encouragement (the word used is the same as spoken of the Holy Spirit as our comforter, John 16:8) which fits the role of worship leader.

Leading believers in worship is far more than teaching them choruses or being a choir director. A worship leader needs to follow the Spirit’s leading as regards: what to sing, when to sing it and for how long. We generally put the Spirit on our schedule because Sunday mornings are crammed with organized activity that church leaders feel important, but at times, we need to be on the Spirit’s schedule regardless what we might have to postpone until next service or next week.

Give this some prayerful thought.

## **The Reason for Calvary**

Keep looking for an interpretation of the cross that portrays God as more restorative, reconciling, and just. - Sharon Baker

God grieved along with those whose cries nightly reached His ears, and He assuredly cared, but He had to plan for their ultimate deliverance which would involve a Roman cross and His own death. "But when the fullness of the time had come," Paul wrote, "God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." [Galatians 4:4-5]. Paul repeated the phrase "under the law" because it provides a focus for God's reasoning. Paul referred to this "Law" as "requirements that were against us, which was contrary to us." And he taught that "He [God] has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." [Colossians 2:14] But I am ahead of His story. Let's go back to the beginning.

### **A Just Salvation**

Most believers, understandably and properly, simply accept the death of the Savior for their salvation without questioning God's reasons for sending Him to Calvary. But there are a few, perhaps of a philosophical bent, that seek deeper explanations. Jesus' death on Calvary was a reasonable solution to the problem of sin. But in what sense should we call it "reasonable"? Some, hearing the story of an innocent man dying for sinful man, claim such a solution to

## The Reason for Calvary

be cruel and unnecessary. Forgiveness should not require such means, they conclude, but they are wrong. François Turretini (17 October 1623 – 28 September 1687) a Genevan-Italian Reformed scholastic theologian looked at divine justice from the underside of the tapestry offering reasons why we can say that Jesus' substitutionary or sacrificial death in our stead was *not unjust*.<sup>74</sup>

Professor Adonis Vidu called the Cross “the mechanism by which God saves us.”<sup>75</sup> He argued that there is a “scholastic drive ... to probe the depth of this mystery for its reasonableness.”<sup>76</sup>

According to Athanasius of Alexandria (296 – May 373) man is “..the impress of His (God's) own Image.”<sup>77</sup> Man was made for fellowship with God, so on some level Adam might know Him. God equipped him with a “reasonable” ability to have such fellowship. “Why did God make them (humankind) at all,” reasons Athanasius, “(if) He did not wish to be known by them?”<sup>78</sup>

So we go back to the beginning. Athanasius wrote, “For in speaking of the appearance of the Savior amongst us, we must needs speak also of the origin of men, that you may know that the reason of His coming down was because of us, and that our transgression called forth the loving-kindness of the Word, that the Lord should both make haste to help us and appear among men. For of His becoming Incarnate we were the object, and for our salvation He dealt so lovingly as to appear and be born even in a human body.”<sup>79</sup> Athanasius called this “...reasonable with respect to God, i.e. what is involved in His attributes and in His relation to us.”<sup>80</sup>

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74. Turretin. Page 13

75. Viidu Page 61.

76. Ibid.

77. <https://ccel.org/ccel/athanasius/incarnation/incarnation.ii.html>

78. Athanasius. 24

79. Athanasius. 10

80. Athanasius. 7 cf. Rom. iii. 26, cf. Anselm, ib. l. 12.

## The Reason for Calvary

### The Knowledge of Evil

Eden was Adam's opportunity to get to know the God (Who wanted to be known) Who created him, but, for reasons difficult to find, he thought it of some importance or value to learn things that had nothing to do with Who God is. I have to believe this was all explained to Adam and Eve—to learn Good is to know God. God, in fact, told them, "Don't even touch the tree!; it's deadly!" [Genesis 3:3]. How could they—how could we—rationalize that what God said He didn't really mean!" God sought a serious and personal introduction with Adam. This was Adam's opportunity to know God as Athanasius surmised. It was most reasonable, therefore, for God to warn our first parents of the evil slithering through the underbrush (Satan) that like the Siren's song lures the unwary to their death. Adam's disobedience introduced evil, not just to himself, but to all his descendants [Romans 5:17-18].

Evil is a rejection of all that is God. And this innate awareness of "moral wrong" is a part of our heritage from our first parents; it is Adam's legacy passed on in a sense through the human conscience [Romans 2:14-15].<sup>81</sup> We now know it as "sin."

### Adam's Legacy - The Experience of Evil

The term "evil" is instinctively recognized by every person who experiences the pain it causes. It is said of pornography, for example, "You'll know it when you see it." And there are phrases used in judiciary parlance that suggest as much, such as: "mens rea" or "the intention and knowledge of wrong doing" and "res ipsa loquitour" or "the

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81. for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*)

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thing speaks for itself” or even the use of our word “reasonable” which must go undefined in legal documents and left to the judge to determine its value. Such sayings in language reveal a common knowledge about evil that denies all mankind the right of ignorance. Everyone’s description of heaven is as a place where evil does not exist and the Bible confirms this. All this is self-taught, I believe, because it was given us by revelation on the day of creation. Even the preacher talks of “sin” without ever giving an adequate definition of the term and somehow “sinners” know what they mean.

Even children cannot accept a concrete example of wrong that is taught to them unless first there is a general or absolute sense of “wrong” as a concept. We used the word, “bad.” If it were true that evil is taught, righteousness would be legislated. There would be knowledge without wisdom as to how and when to apply that knowledge. We endeavor to teach young children to share their toys but they know intuitively this means they get to play with at least one of them. A hug is a concrete expression of love to a small child only because they have sensed love even before birth.

We are more than an evolved species. A consciousness of moral right from wrong is one indication of this. Although many domesticated animals seem to experience “guilt” or attrition when caught misbehaving, only humans know contrition - penitence which comes with a knowledge of the wrong. This characterizes a being who intuitively knows what “evil” is.

Another proof that evil is a definable part of human behavior is the administration of corrective discipline distinguished from punishment. Children (and adults) accept the first but fear the latter as abuse. Humans are capable of learning through chastisement or discipline when it is legitimately “earned.” Paul argued it this way: “...the invisible things of him [God] since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are

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made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they [those who commit evil] may be without excuse:" [Romans 1:20]. To paraphrase: A moral sense of the Divine is perceivable in creation; so mankind knows there is a right from wrong. The code of Hammurabi, one of the earliest collection of laws, is often cited to show that Moses on Mount Sinai was not the first to receive from God a list of commandments common to every man's conscience.

We may continue to debate the social value of morals and ethics—some mistakenly arguing that there is no absolute moral code. According to Sam Harris of the new atheists, science questions whether we should even be talking about morality as a real possibility. "[Some] seem to think that the very existence of moral controversy nullifies the possibility of moral truth." Harris wrote. "In their opinion, all we can do is study what human beings do in the name of 'morality.' Thus, if religious conservatives find the prospect of gay marriage abhorrent, and secular liberals find it perfectly acceptable, we are confronted by a mere difference of moral preference— not a difference that relates to any deeper truths about human life."<sup>82</sup>

He's wrong! The larger point is that Society is built on an agreed sense of an understood morality. If happiness were always and only an individual quest, society would lack the moral cohesion or the collectivism, the order, necessary to survive. (We have been here already in our discussion.)

But this in itself shows there is such a thing as a concept of morality in the heart and mind of man. The conscience speaks for itself as a tool of self-introspection that honest persons credit with sounding the alert when one is too involved in the moment to consider their actions

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82. Sam Harris. *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York:Free Press, 2010), 85. Kindle Edition.

## The Reason for Calvary

otherwise. It is the soul's garrison when temptation is stalking about. This is also why language has invented the phrase, "I'm sorry" as a situational reset when regret begs for a redo of whatever was said or done—in error.

We must go back to Adam to find the origin of conscience and morality. We must go back to the first married couple who suddenly were embarrassed to be undressed in front of each other, which betrays a certain awareness of some evil act they shared.

We all were "in Adam" [1 Corinthians 15:22] when he discovered what "evil" tasted like [the apple?]. Anyone experiencing or engaging in sin who has an awareness that it was sin or wrong, has that awareness because God gave it to them. Godet referred this to "... a primordial revelation addressed to *all* men " [Romans 3:29]. If Adam and Eve discovered a knowledge of good and evil through disobedience, and if the consequence of their sin "came upon all" [Romans 5:12] we can conclude that the human conscience was educated that moment in the difference.

Different cultures may value different codes of conduct as right from wrong, but the point is we all have them. We all have an innate consciousness of right from wrong, good and evil. And no person would honestly see God as anything but "good." Yes, Adam bit into the forbidden fruit!

### So Many Questions

The only question to ask is whether they would have been able to perceive a moral choice without experiencing evil first. I true choice must be an intelligent one. The questions remaining are: Could our first parents have chosen *not* to experience evil and still call it "a choice"? Does a true choice require a clear and experiential knowledge of all choices, experiencing not just temptation but what happens when one yields to it? And if they had *not* sinned, would

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their progeny have the same choice or was God intending to deny the snake another opportunity to tempt anyone? Would it be possible to be tempted without the serpent present? These questions are beyond the scope of our knowledge because they are “what if’s” which only God could know. But the only question should be: Did Adam’s choice introduce evil to mankind? Has his choice thrown all of us into the tar pit<sup>83</sup> and we can only climb out on the rope of salvation God has provided us? The answer to this is a resounding “Absolutely, Yes!” Paul taught, “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.”[ Romans 11:32].

### **Relationships are Built on Trust [Faith]**

When God created the first couple, He did this for communion, fellowship, a relationship with them, but it had to be built on trust and for that to be real they needed to know there was a choice. “What it lies in our power to do,” Aristotle reasoned, “it lies in our power not to do.” They didn’t need to know evil, only that it existed. Soon, it would be personified, slithering up behind them, winding its body around their world and its craft around their thoughts ...and you know the rest.

Faith is trust [John 14:1].<sup>84</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that when trust is damaged, the relationship is damaged. It is reasonable to infer that this is so because we are made in God’s image. God, for example, made the marriage bond representative of our relation with Him [Ephesians 5:32]<sup>85</sup> so that our relationship with God becomes analogous to marriage itself. Faithfulness in marriage must be consistent and continuous. There can be no such thing as a partial or periodic faithfulness. Thus it is reasonable to say God

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83. a complicated or difficult situation or problem

84. You believe in God; believe [trust] also ... me.

85. I speak concerning Christ and the Church

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designed Adam's and Eve's relationship to be monogamous. His highlighting the first Commandment [Exodus 20:3] "You shall have no other gods before me!" must be observed without exception. Trust is otherwise broken.

When we limit faith to "creed" or doctrine—an academic pursuit in learning a denominational perspective on truth—we fail to appreciate the larger scope of faith: "The just shall *live* by faith" [Romans 1:17]. It is impossible to escape the truth here: salvation is a restored relationship with God, which on our part necessitates *trust*. Faith is not a lesson in how accurate our memory is but about how faithful our living for our Lord is.

### A Covenantal God

God is a covenantal God; God makes agreements, covenants, which is reasonable because a relationship is built upon trust and this requires the communication of a common understanding to which two persons agree. This is by definition *covenantal* and our fellowship with God is built on this principle.

This is also why prayer, as the vehicle of our communication, is of critical importance. One word for prayer is defined as "calling on [talking to] God"<sup>86</sup> [Luke 6:12].<sup>87</sup> Paul spoke about "persevering in prayer" [Colossians 4:2]. Prayer is conversing with God [Romans 15:30].<sup>88</sup> "My sheep hear my voice and they follow." [John 10:27] Jesus explained; "The sheep follow him: for they know his voice." [John 10:4]. We can describe a healthy relationship as the mutual awareness of two persons, who can say to each other, "I know I love you, and I know that you love me."

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86. Kittel, vol II. Page 807.

87. He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

88. Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,

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The Bible is the story of God's interest in communing with us, His creation, and the hindrance evil causes. The Fruit of the Spirit, the Beatitudes, Paul's use of the phrase, "one another": love one another, submit to one another, forgive one another, etc. are *relational* ideas. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* calls righteousness "a term of relationships"<sup>89</sup> It is not surprising to hear E. Randolph Richards in his work, *Misreading Scripture With Individualist Eyes*, call sin, that which "... alienates from God's community."<sup>90</sup> And that God "... doesn't want only to save me as an individual, God saves us into ... a community."<sup>91</sup>

### God is a Covenantal God

But the link between God's covenant and His desire for our fellowship is lost on a society that cannot connect a legal contract with any desire on the lawyer's part to invite us to dinner. We see agreements not as a covenant relationship but a legal commitment as if it had nothing really to do with the persons who drew it up. It is here we can mistakenly limit the scope and force of the New Covenant, which Jesus instituted on Calvary, to what God has promised us, and we become somewhat dispassionate about what we promise *Him*—our faithfulness. We can risk excusing sin as just "that old nature" which God has yet to crucified wholly—as if our sin was *His* fault or as the Jews in Paul's day argued "Let's sin that grace may abound [Romans 6:1]."

In the Biblical world, and especially with God, a covenant is a detailed, communicated love. Isn't this what a marriage "contract" is all about? God makes agreements with us because He seeks this relationship. God is a

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89. Brown, Page 357.

90. Richards. Page 237

91. *Ibid.*

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Covenantal God which begins to explain why a Cross was in His future even when He drew up that first agreement with Adam and Eve [Genesis 3:15].<sup>92</sup> Such a covenant to Adam and Eve might have seemed in its profound simplicity only a thoughtful reference to possible choices. To God, however, it was opening a door to eternal life with Him.

God would never forsake this idea of making a covenant with man. He couldn't. He is a covenantal God. A covenant is essential as an expression of His holiness. What might we mean by this? Simply, God cherishes our love, but to love God, we need to be holy, too. The sin systemic in human behavior and nature must be removed. It was as if there were poison in that fruit Adam and Eve bit into and it altered human nature<sup>93</sup> turning a simple desire for happiness into an addiction for pleasure—lust—by which Satan now can draw men into sin.<sup>94</sup> I believe it is more. Adam *chose* evil over God. Paul used the terms “crooked and perverse”<sup>95</sup> to describe this mystery.<sup>96</sup> Another way of looking at this: A relationship requires the voluntary participation of two persons in that relationship. Our faithfulness must cooperate with the grace of God to make our salvation real.

God sought a relationship with us which necessitates such trust—faith and faithfulness. Such a relationship must be built on a covenant—knowing one another and experiencing that knowledge intimately. Said another way:

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92. And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.

93. Ephesians 2:3 among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

94. James 1:14 But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed.

95. Philippians 2:15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,

96. 2 Thessalonians 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work;

## The Reason for Calvary

relationships are built on trust and trust takes communication—an awareness of the true self, each to the other. This is what covenants are all about—faith and faithfulness. To be in a relationship means we relate to God and God to us; and bear in mind, He is a *holy* God. We are invited into His world because one day He entered ours to rescue us from the evil we sought to discover. A covenant, also, means that God takes this relationship as eternally meaningful. His love is eternal because He is eternal. Ours is a covenant of eternal love with God.

All this explains why God repeatedly brought up the idea of making a covenant with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Israel—to name a few. It was not that He didn't know the heart of man or that He expected man to be faithful to a covenant with Him. He knew that back with Adam—let alone the fact that He is omniscient. He wanted to keep the need for this relationship with Him alive in our history. The record of Israel's rebellion could not be simply forgiven or forgotten as if God's word meant nothing [Acts 17:30].<sup>97</sup> If God gave up on us, He would not only forsake His vision of communion with us but He would forever deny His own heart and live alone with an everlasting unrequited love. Not even we could picture such a possibility!

### **We find God reasonable because we are made in His image.**

But it was this covenant that sent Him to the Cross. There is one verse in the Old Testament and one in the New upon which this explanation of the Cross pivots: Leviticus

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97. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent

## The Reason for Calvary

26:25<sup>98</sup> and Matthew 5:17-18.<sup>99</sup> A broken covenant must be honored (avenged) if indeed God cannot lie (and He cannot lie). When Israel broke their word when they promised faithfulness to God [Deuteronomy 27:15]<sup>100</sup> punishment had to be administered. God had to recognize both sides of this agreement—the blessing and the curse.

### The Curse must be Administered

But in talking about Calvary, we must mention “the curse.” Galatians 3:13 reads the same in 15 English translations: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us,” Only in the New Living Translation do we read, “But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung [hanged?] on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.”

Who is the 'us'? Whose "curse" did the Savior bear?

Lightfoot says, "The expression [redeemed from the curse] is to be explained partly by the Hebrew idiom ... but still more by the religious conception which it involves."<sup>101</sup> This idea is prominent in Leviticus 16:5-10 with the type of the "scapegoat" [a goat sent into the wilderness after the Jewish chief priest had symbolically laid the sins of the people upon it]. Verse 10 reads, "the goat on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD, to make atonement upon it."

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98. And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant....

99. Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets.... I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.

100. 'Cursed *is* the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets *it* up in secret.' "And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen!'

101. Lightfoot. Galatians, Page 139

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Paul clarified, according to scholarship, that he and "the Jewish race" were "redeemed" or "ransomed" by Christ taking "the curse," which Lightfoot interprets was, "pronounced" by the Law, Torah. This tells Lightfoot that the 'us' is Israel! Paul's use of the term "curse," which comes from Deuteronomy 21:23 ['he that is hanged is accursed of God'] specifically and solely concerns Israel's status before God and makes no reference to the Church or to Gentiles [Deuteronomy 27:15-26 lists a dozen curses for Torah breakers, in particular].

So Lightfoot clarifies [Galatians 3:14] "The Law, the great barrier, that excluded the Gentiles, is done away in Christ." Israel broke the Law and inherited the curse; the Law was simply blocking the Gentile's way to Salvation. To continue Galatians 3:14, " .. the Gentiles [now that Israel's curse is removed] are put on a level with ...Jews and, so united, [We, now, can]... receive the promise in the gift of the Spirit through ...faith."<sup>102</sup>

So says Ephesians 2:14-16. Reading from the Amplified, "For He is ... our bond of unity and harmony. He has made us both [Jew and Gentile] one [body], and has ... destroyed... the hostile dividing ... us, By abolishing in His... flesh the enmity [caused by] the Law with its decrees and ordinances ...that He from the two might create in Himself one ...out of the two, ... making peace ... to reconcile to God both [Jew and Gentile...] in a single body by means of His cross."

Wright comments, "The curse which has come upon Israel has thus caused the promises made through Israel to get stuck! And it is this curse, with this result, from which, according to Galatians, the Messiah has redeemed 'us'."<sup>103</sup>

Wright continues, "The point about the" curse", and the Messiah bearing it on behalf of others, is not that there is

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102. Ibid. Page 140.

103. Wright. Page 140.

## The Reason for Calvary

a general, abstract curse hanging over the whole human race."<sup>104</sup> It "hung" only over Israel! The curse had to be [the Amplified Bible says] "abolished." Wright called it "stuck" [like a log-sham?] which had to be removed to free the way for our, Gentile, salvation.

Among the reasons for Jesus' death, then, is removing Israel's, not Adam's, curse. But Paul never meant to even imply here that our salvation was not equally a rescue from sin. Paul, on occasion, liked to use different wording sometimes that mapped out a different path to repentance and reconciliation between Jew and Gentile because of the different starting points between them. Accordingly, Paul told us [Romans 3:30 NIV] "...there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised [the Jew] *by* faith and the uncircumcised [the Gentile] *through* that same faith [2 Peter 1:1 NASB95]."

Though scholarship has identified the "curse" as occasioned by Israel's unfaithfulness to Torah Law, Paul debating the Judaizers of his day argues that the Gentiles were, with respect to Calvary, on an equal footing with Jewry., for, "God is no respecter of persons" [Romans 2:11]. To say that Adam and Eve knew nothing about the "curse" of disobedience or that there is an eternal punishment different for non-Jews because they didn't have Torah misrepresents the Scripture.

Trust was broken through Israel's unfaithfulness. Trust is not easily restored unless there is repentance and change, which would only come through Calvary. Death was now inevitable [Romans 6:23].<sup>105</sup> [*Avenge* in our Bible is better defined as Judgment<sup>106</sup> and not wrath.] "...To avenge the breaking of the covenant," that is, to honor the agreement God made with Israel, the curse must be administered

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104. Ibid.

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

106. Kittel, vol II. Page 443.

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because God cannot lie [Leviticus 25:26]. Spiritual death was now inevitable. The problem with punishment is that punishment meant death—perhaps, our word is inappropriate as an explanation [Matthew 25:46].<sup>107</sup> As Jesus explained: the law had to be “fulfilled,” not abrogated [Matthew 5:17-18]. All must be fulfilled, but if fallen man had to die, this would end the vision of God for fellowship.

### The Incarnate God

The better plan was to allow a sinless man [2 Corinthians 5:21]<sup>108</sup> as proxy to represent all humanity [Matthew 20:28].<sup>109</sup> The curses outlined in Deuteronomy 27 are now on Jesus. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’)” [Galatians 3:13]. Moses warned all Israel that those guilty of a capital crime would be hanged and the body removed before sunset. This defined the curse Jesus experienced in our stead [Deuteronomy 21:22-23]. The fact that the details of this sentence of death were carried out on the Cross is prophetic proof that the Father was even then arranging for our salvation.

### Jesus Took the Punishment For Us

The divine genius was made evident when God, in the person of His son, Jesus, came as a human to represent all humanity [God’s “scapegoat”]. This would entail more than just wearing the physical form or body but would

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107. .And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

108. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

109. just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

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require being, in every sense, human [Philippians 2:7],<sup>110</sup> to suffer [Luke 17:25],<sup>111</sup> to learn [Hebrews 5:8],<sup>112</sup> to grow [Luke 2:40].<sup>113</sup> His temptations were real [Hebrews 4:15].<sup>114</sup> They had to be, if He was to recreate the first temptation in Eden but without yielding to the tempter [Matthew 4:1].<sup>115</sup> And He had to endure this trial as a man if He could be called, truly, “unblemished” or sinless [1 Peter 1:19].<sup>116</sup>

We must never forget that this is also *God* incarnate. No part of sinful humanity could represent fallen man because all humanity, except Jesus, was indicted [Romans 11:32].<sup>117</sup> Jesus was both man and God. There is no further reasoning needed to explain this. He was a sinless man who came to accept the eternal punishment for all mankind but He was, is and always will remain God. Paul’s use of the word “emptied” (kenosis) does not mean that Jesus laid aside His divinity. He couldn’t [Hebrews 13:8].<sup>118</sup> Kenosis

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110. but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

111. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

112. though He was a Son, *yet* He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

113. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

114. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, *yet* without sin.

115. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

116. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

117. “*For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all.*” No one can say they were not there when the crime against God was committed. In Adam all sinned. Therefore, all are under the umbrella of God’s mercy ...and that’s His point. As Godet put it, “...enclosed in such a way that they have only one exit...” [ Godet, Romans, Page 415] And that exit is God’s mercy.

118. Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.

## The Reason for Calvary

speaks to His coming as a true *servant* [Philippians 2:7]<sup>119</sup> to submit to whatever was required to satisfy the Old Covenant that we all “in Adam” broke. His plan was to restore us under the terms of a “New” covenant, this time, written upon the heart [Jeremiah 31:31-34].<sup>120</sup>

### The New Covenant Requires Faithfulness

We accept this new covenant by faith which carries a dual significance [Romans 10:9].<sup>121</sup> One, we believe and trust God in this matter of His eternal love toward us, that He indeed did die in our place, took upon Himself the punishment [Romans 3:25].<sup>122</sup> Secondly, that we want to honor the covenant by being faithful to Him [Hebrews 10:38].<sup>123</sup>

### The Implications

The implications for our theology in this approach to understanding Calvary are demanding. Relationships

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119. but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.

120. Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah —not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. **33** But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.

121. if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

122. whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

123. Now the just shall live by faith; But if *anyone* draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

## The Reason for Calvary

always need maintenance because they must be nurtured, else they are allowed to die.

- ◆ A relationship with God does not survive without prayer, because prayer is dialogue with Him [Rev. 5:8].<sup>124</sup>
- ◆ A relationship is built on trust, which requires that “we be found faithful” [1 Corinthians 4:2].
- ◆ A relationship is not legislated because it represents the unique union of two governed by a loving awareness of each other [Rom. 6:15; Gal. 5:23].
- ◆ A relationship with God and with His saints are bound together, as the one requires the other [1 John 1:7;<sup>125</sup> Hebrews. 10:25].

### A Reasonable Salvation

If we still struggle to believe this explains a reasonable salvation, consider Paul, who confessed, that it is, indeed, a great mystery [1 Timothy 3:16]. Nevertheless, the secret as to why “God was manifested in the flesh” was somehow tied to His interest in providing for us a “fair” salvation, a salvation He could justify within Himself, to His holiness,<sup>126</sup> and a salvation not culturally limited that would herald the call of faith to the entire world.<sup>127</sup>

God’s salvation understandably has escaped the confines of our logic, yet Paul, in turn, called the sacrifice of our service to Him as “reasonable” [Romans 12:2]. And Peter admonished us to be prepared to answer the spiritually hungry who want a rationale that explains our hope in

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124. golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

125. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

126. Justified in the Spirit

127. Preached among the Gentiles

## The Reason for Calvary

Christ [1 Peter 3:15]. The Church has been discussing this mystery from the start—and it should! It is our commission [Mark 16:15].

Extracting the story of our Salvation out of the many metaphors used to explain it is a reasonable endeavor; for, there are many cultures around our world in which the metaphors familiar to the evangelist or missionary may not be sufficient to describe such a glorious salvation. Although, for example, the sacrificial offering of an animal is ubiquitous, it is not universal. Nor is the idea of a ransom paid to free slaves universal, especially in societies that have outlawed slavery. Christians in western countries understand salvation in terms of a debt paid but many indigenous groups do not live in a debt driven economy. Many Africa nations are only pay-as-you-go based even regarding medical concerns.

There is nothing wrong with the metaphor. The Bible is replete with figures of speech as a poetic description for what God wants explained. The use of analogy, the parable, and other figures of speech are a well accepted literary style in all Biblical languages, but, the story of our Salvation is a concrete and literal truth. His death and resurrection, as well as the new birth for a believer, is factually accurate and not symbolic. Ritual, for one, Paul called a mere, “shadow of what was to come; the substance is Christ” [Colossians 2:17]. This is true of the sacrifices, as well, the Tabernacle and all its form. They are correctly “types” according to the theologian: “a copy and shadow of the heavenly things [Hebrews 8:5] ... as was the law [Hebrews 10:1].

We can now allow for other cultures to view our Salvation from God’s perspective, God’s heart and mind. As Vincent Donovan, missionary to Tanzania, found, “It is extraordinary the way people will play the gospel back to you, if it is presented to them in an uninterpreted way.” When we allow the story of the Cross told through the homegrown medium of their cultural experience and their

## The Reason for Calvary

new found love for God to replay the love of Christ without weakening or compromising the message, “the power of God unto salvation” [Romans 1:16] is the Spirit’s opportunity to draw all men unto Him [John 12:32].

We can explain salvation on our part as simply and only a matter of faith and faithfulness. We revive God’s interest in our salvation without legalizing or ritualizing their experience based solely on our experience. Being spiritual is a matter for the Holy Spirit not the American church. We want to, in a truly indigenous framework, put the administration of the our witness back in God’s hands. The provisions of Calvary, alone, are, hereby, sufficient to empower God’s people for His service. And we have become more aware of the great role prayer plays in all we do.

When we emphasize only what the Lord has done for us or what He has given to us, we may develop a selfish interest in the Cross as well as forget the privilege that is ours to partake in the fellowship of His sufferings [Philippians 3:10] or to glory in tribulation [Romans 5:3]. We begin to see our salvation as nothing much more than our name written in the book of life that gains for us an entrance into God’s heaven. We need to understand in a practical and a faithful way that the Kingdom of Heaven is *within*. We need to emphasize our Heavenly Father’s interest in Calvary, why He sent His Son to the Cross for us. It is a reasonable Truth to embrace.

### **Why Did Jesus Go to Calvary’s Cross?**

Perhaps, God could not forsake His interest in us no more than we could our children who might no longer see the value of our company. There is a reason why natural affection is called “natural.” Perhaps, the reason Jesus had to die for our sins might be searched out in some undiscovered recess of our own nature—after all, we are made in His

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image, [Genesis 1:27]] whose minds are being transformed [Romans 12:2] to understand and appreciate better God's decisions in our lives, and now being conformed to the image of His Son [Romans 8:29].

God says of Israel, and by prophetic extension all the world, "When Israel was a child, I loved ... My son!" God lamented, "... How can I give you up? ... My heart churns within Me." [Hosea 11:1, 8]. And somehow this makes infinite sense to any true parent's heart. Jesus, Himself, cried over Jerusalem while the tears graced His cheeks, "How often I wanted to gather your children together... but you were not willing!" [Matthew 23:37].

He is the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep [John 10:11]. And when we wandered off, He just had to rescue us [Isaiah 53:6]. Somewhere in the heart of God, in the nature of God, in the unfathomed depths of His inexhaustible grace, lies the secret to His passion.

Perhaps, no scribe or Jewish scholar, nor any Christian theologian, truly appreciates the significance of the word 'God,' in referring to our God, the only true God, written in the plural, *Elohim*. We say it references the Trinity, which in Old Testament parlance is a stretch. Jewish thought, if I understand it, references the multi-aspects of His nature—the reason we talk of the "simplicity" of God, whose justice and mercy are always expressed in unity.

Perhaps, the plural, *Elohim*, is more about the immeasurable size of His heart, the bottomless depth of His mercy and kindness, the extent to which His love would go to save us. Isaiah [Isaiah 55:3] relates God's mercy with His covenant which is forever. And, interestingly, mercy is also in the plural, *mercies*, a very Biblical idea!

Perhaps, in eternity a thousand timeless years from now, we may begin to unravel the mystery of Godliness [1 Timothy 3:16], but—truthfully?—I think not. It will take "the ages to come [that] He might show the exceeding riches of

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His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." [Ephesians 2:7]—His Covenant Faithfulness.

## The New Covenant

Though the gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition, though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor ethical code, but a Person and a Life." - J. B. Lightfoot

An interpretation of Scripture that is merely historical or theological but fails to offer a serious and practical approach to living the Christian life is—what I call—a linear view of God’s Word. But His Word is far more dynamic than this, which is to say, His Word is a source of daily wisdom that can, from a spiritual perspective, address any stressful circumstance or decision which should occasion an answer from God. And life is crammed full of such moments! Faith is far more than creed. Faith must include a life that honors the growing relationship the believer has now with God through Christ. Calvary provides us by faith an eternal *life*, but a linear perspective sees the word “eternal” and may fail to emphasize the “*life* in the Son” which has commenced at salvation. “And this is the record,” John explained Salvation, “that God hath given to us eternal life.” But there is more: “and this life is in his Son” [1 John 5:11].

We have been emphasizing the idea that Salvation is being in covenant with God, as much as, Abraham or Moses ever were. God is a Covenant-God and He has more than drafted a “New” covenant for us. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, it has been officially instituted. As we have been saying, this speaks to a relationship we have with Him. The covenant view honors the commitment between God and us with an emphasis on our devotion and faithfulness to

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God. Covenant is an agreement, a contractual arrangement, in which both parties are responsible for that relationship. I know: we are excited about God's part in protecting us, healing us, providing for our needs, etc. But we might become lax as regards our part?

We have also noted that certain biblical terms carry the idea of covenant which must be underscored. To be clear: fellowship is intimacy<sup>128</sup> and "...[righteousness] implies relationship." Nothing yells "new covenant" more than this! Scholarship learned, "A man is righteous when he meets certain claims which another has on him in virtue of relationship."<sup>129</sup> In a word: covenant.

Emphasizing the relationship with God is a realistic and reasonable approach to a study of the Word. This requires a more dynamic understanding of Scripture, a view of God's Word more like personal letters written to each believer. And this requires that our knowledge of God is experienced and not just an academic pursuit. Such learning results in a growing intimacy with God [Philippians 3:10]. "... Though the gospel is capable of doctrinal exposition," Bishop Lightfoot observed. "though it is eminently fertile in moral results, yet its substance is neither a dogmatic system nor ethical code, but a Person and a Life." As Paul asserted, "For me, to live is Christ..." [Philippians 1:21].

### Christ and the Church

The marriage contract had its psychological roots in the believer's relationship with Christ [Ephesians 5:32]—not the other way around, as often understood. It was our future eternal relationship with God through His Son's death that gave us the lesson of marriage oneness taught to two persons without parents [Genesis 2:24]. It was God's desire for our

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128. Thayer. 352

129. Kittell. vol. II. 195

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fellowship that he made Adam and Eve capable of a henotic<sup>130</sup> relationship.<sup>131</sup>

Put another way: The story of Eden is best understood as God's relationship with Adam [and Eve] more than Adam's relationship with Eve. When God said "It is not good for man to be alone" [Genesis 2:18] you can almost hear Him saying, "I desire *their* fellowship. Think of it this way: When a man reads Paul's instruction to his wife about submission, he may fail to appreciate the emphasis in Paul's wording. The man's delight in the relationship with a woman is learning to love her in a sacrificial sense [Ephesians 5:25]. In terms of the Church's relationship with Christ, it is an act of humble submission in which a believer's attention is now off him or her self and totally on Christ.

Said, again: our conversations with Him—our prayer life—should be in large part all about Him and what burdens or concerns Him and not our "many" needs. Just to be able to praise Him for His awesomeness and His great love for us is like a husband who washes the dishes after cooking dinner for his wife expecting nothing in return—nothing!

### **Covenant or Will**

The New Testament word for "will" is the same word for "covenant." The main difference is whether or not the document represents a mutual agreement between two. A "will" drawn up to leave an inheritance needs only the approval of the testator not the benefactor, but a covenant is an agreement between two. In the King James Bible 12 out of 33 uses are translated "testament;" the remainder are translated "covenant" References of Jesus' shed blood were

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130. Greek for oneness

131. This also shows that the relationship is a life long monogamy. This also reveals the "conscience" of God that makes "gay" relationships unscriptural, if not sinful.

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understood as part of a “testament” upon “the death of the testator” [Hebrews 9:16-17]. But Hebrews 9:15 talks about an old and a new “will.” [or is it a covenant?] If the writer was referencing a “will” how does one “transgress” it? A transgression speaks to a mutual agreement between God and man which man broke.

Reference to the Savior’s death is simply that: the Old Covenant is now fulfilled; the New Covenant drawn up upon the believer’s heart [Jeremiah 31:31f]. The writer does reference a “will” in verses 16 and 17 by analogy pointing out how there would not be, nor could there be, a New Covenant until or unless Jesus died first for our sins in our stead.

The language of the New Testament is the language actually of a new covenant or new agreement accepted by faith [Ephesians 2:8-12] in which God agrees to “take away their sins” [Romans 11:27]. It is a covenant which “cannot be annulled” [Galatians 3:15] because it is “established upon better promises” [Hebrews 8:6] and this is because the law of God is written on the heart not stone tablets [Hebrews 10:16], “not of the letter, but of the spirit” [2 Corinthians 3:6]. By mutual agreement the relationship is established, “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” [Hebrews 8:10] forever [Hebrews 13:20].

And what was wrong with the first covenant? [Hebrews 8:7-8]. “They continued not in my covenant...” God explained [Hebrews 8:9]. Even the word, transgression, used throughout, speaks of breaking covenant.

### **The Covenant**

If a covenant is a mutual agreement, as we have been maintaining [Deuteronomy 30] it depends on the relationship established between the two who agree to it [Deuteronomy 27]. There must be a mutual understanding that establishes intent to agree. The biblical Covenant, drawn

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up—as we want to say—in the blood of the Savior, establishes that relationship. As we already noted [Romans 3:21-26] a covenant of God’s faithfulness was established which we accept by faith [and our faithfulness to it] whereby we have been declared just and righteous and now will be conformed to the image of His Son [Romans 8:29].

A wife, I discovered, does not want to be neglected—a sign of objectifying her—and neither does the Lord. Prayer is a vital part of our mutuality [Matthew 11:29-30<sup>132</sup>; Ephesians 6:13-18].

### God Seeks Our Praise

David knew that God dwells in the midst of our worship [Psalm 22:3]. The Lord reminded us through Isaiah [57:15] that He “dwells with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” In John 4:23 Jesus informed us “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” But we, as often happens, stopped listening too soon, for Jesus continues, “the Father is seeking such to worship Him.”

Recently at the revival underway at Asbury University (and also in over 200 schools and universities) one speaker called the devotion and worship that was now in its third week (as of this writing) with persons from around the country and the world gravitating—almost like a pilgrimage—to the campus chapel to participate—he called it— in elevating Jesus Christ as a focal point, a radical humility, humanizing compassion, raw confession, a self emptying consecration and a life altering commitment.<sup>133</sup>

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132. The yoke spoke of the beam or bar across the shoulders of two beast of burden pulling a plough together.

133. Asbury Revival accessed 02/25/2023 [https://www.youtube.com/live/4lZL9d-g\\_fc?feature=share](https://www.youtube.com/live/4lZL9d-g_fc?feature=share)

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It was the contrite heart the prophet described experienced by a generation (generation Z) of young hearts losing interest in everything except to celebrate the Savior's Death and Resurrection, the Father's Love, and the Spirit's Presence. Many were meeting Jesus for the first time even without the evangelist's convincing rhetoric or inspirational words. It was the Spirit alone doing the talking and calling. Another speaker called it "normal Christianity, why Jesus died."<sup>134</sup>

I was informed by a friend that this was happening on Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal College and University campuses. I recall Jesus' prayer [John 17:23] for unity. It is being answered! The speaker then referenced James 3:17 as a description of what was happening—and is happening. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy" Jesus explained in Luke 17:21 "The Kingdom of God is within you."

In the midst of all this, one could envision God, perhaps with cherubim attending [Ezekiel 10:3] walking, strolling, joyously, between the rows of worshippers, touching hearts, saving souls, healing bodies, doing God's thing God's way, loving a generation who wanted Him almost as much as He wanted them. "He seeks such..."

### **A Woman at The Well**

Jesus corrected a woman desperate for love, hungry for a peace that would calm the storm in her soul. The Father seeks such, and this Samaritan woman was thirsty for love. In her desperation and need, Jesus brought her to another well, saying, "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into

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134. *ibid.*

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everlasting life” [John 4:14]. She discovered what generation Z was discovering in Asbury Kentucky that Jesus is the source of an unending joy and peace, a stream of living water that eternally quenches the thirst for meaning, for belonging, for love. God is not a religion but a most personal and intimate, loving, God who has been waiting for His opportunity to enter our lives with an eternity of promises [2 Peter 1:4], like a bridegroom with gifts anticipating the wedding [Song of Solomon 1:4].

Our worship should not, cannot, end because the God we worship is eternal. He can never tire of our fellowship. God created us for this moment, for this purpose, for this eternity. His love sought us to have us back ever since that day in Eden when Adam did what Adam did—and we in him.

### **He Seeks Such to Worship Him**

“He seeks such.” Jesus said. And this is what worship is all about. This was why God created us new in Christ. This is why Jesus went to the Cross. “He seeks such.” As the song writer wrote, “Take joy my King in what you hear; let it be a sweet, sweet sound in your ear.” As the chorus is sung, “To worship You, I live to worship You, I live, I live. To worship You.”<sup>135</sup>

Indeed, this all made available through the Savior’s death—from God’s perspective—yes—a most reasonable salvation.

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135. Accessed 02/25/2023 <https://youtu.be/AoS8R7-Fvh0>

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