

OUR JEALOUS HUSBAND

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Exodus 20:4-6¹

Suppose you were hungry, homeless, sleeping under a bridge or in a cardboard box; could you celebrate Thanksgiving? Most of us tell how we say thanks for nice homes, cars, food, good jobs, friends, fun. Can those who have none of this have Thanksgiving? Don't say yes if only the Red Cross, ADRA, or Salvation Army gives them a turkey dinner. That lasts only one day, then back under the bridge again.

There's a Bible Thanksgiving that gets lost in the normal celebrations: thanksgiving that you don't have to die the second death; thanksgiving that you have actually been given eternal life "in Christ." That refuge under a bridge may be very uncomfortable, but it's your privilege to rejoice that "in Christ" you have already been redeemed from hell itself. The Son of God also was homeless, had nowhere to lay His head, He says; but He was resurrected to eternal life, and "in Him" you too inherit the same. Welcome to sharing your living space with Him!

It's astounding, but its Bible truth: you have already been "elected" to eternal life "in Christ." Not that you deserve the gift for which you celebrate such transcendent Thanksgiving; Paul says, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of

yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any one should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9; when it says "not of works" it means not of your own volition). Face reality: if Christ had not died for you, you would most certainly have been eternally lost. But He did die for you, and rose again; the "you" in Ephesians 1 and 2 is the "you" of the entire human race. All have been redeemed. Your seat at the heavenly banquet has your place card on it with your name.

Now, don't blow everything by choosing to disbelieve this gospel truth. Yes, you can be lost, and many will be; but not because they weren't elected or got overlooked. John 3:16-19 says the problem was only unbelief. Believing the good news will give you a Thanksgiving Day 365 times a year; and I believe such faith will enable you to find a way out from under that bridge.

Too many of our celebrated holidays are of pagan origin and bear those marks even today; but one is free of it—Thanksgiving.

But even that one last touch of national gratitude to God is marred now by Thanksgiving becoming "Black Friday Eve." A popular Bible text for Thanksgiving Day sermons is, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

The one gift above all gifts He has given us is this: "God so loved the world that He gave . . ." It was all that He had in the gift, not the loan, not the mere offer, of His Son (John 3:16). The Son of God is now the Son of man; He is eternally a member of our human race; but that wasn't far enough for the

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Father to “give.” He went further in pouring out the “gift.”

Have you ever tried to help someone stop an addictive behavior through faith in Christ? Let’s say it’s someone who understands enough of the gospel to know it’s a sin to defile the temple of God, his human body, so he knows it’s a sin to indulge this habit. (Yes, there are many physical therapy programs and medically designed helps, but this person recognizes he has a spiritual problem with sin). Do you teach this person to ask God to take away his habit, or do you teach him to make a choice not to smoke, and then to pray? Can you get the cart before the horse? Does God deliver us apart from the exercise of our choice?

Scripture seems clear: We are not to “yield” our members as “instruments of unrighteousness unto sin” (Rom. 6:13). We are to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Titus 2:11; the NIV says say “NO!” to them). We are to “strive” against the evil lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:17). We are to “choose this day whom we are to serve” (Josh. 24:15). We are to choose “not my will but Thine be done” (Mt. 26:39), and voluntarily: “take up [our] cross daily” (Lk. 9:23). God can do great things, but He cannot violate our own power of choice, and He cannot (not only will not!) save us against our will.

“But,” someone says, “the choice is hard! It’s easier to let the Lord choose for you!” Ah yes, but He cannot do that; in fact, choosing to believe is the only difficult step in salvation from sin. But the choice becomes easy when we understand and believe that Christ has already forgiven our sin.

Salvation is not a meritorious work by which we earn a reward; it’s a “thank You for saving my soul!” choice to let the Lord deliver us.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5), meaning that Christ is trying His best to give you His “mind” if you don’t stop Him! You ponder those seven steps that Christ took in condescension for your behalf, and then you realize that now you choose to follow Him. It’s not you who is raking up “brownie points,” but “it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (see vs. 12). Yes, a thousand percent, salvation is due to God taking the initiative; but it’s our job to choose to let Him do it, to stop resisting Him because of our “carnal mind [which] is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). You never become your own co-savior, but you do cooperate with “the Saviour of the world” through appreciating the choice He made to go to hell to save you.

The Father gave Him to take seven steps in stepping down lower, itemized in Philippians 2:5-8: [1] He abandoned His high heavenly position; [2] “emptied Himself” like you turn a bottle upside down to drain it; He suffered the loss of His pure reputation, He Himself was covered with disgrace; [3] He took the lowest level of social honor; [4] He became One “made in the likeness” of fallen man (Rom. 8:3, 4); lower than the angels; [5] became a slave washing people’s dirty feet (Jn. 13); He took a nose dive below that—[6] humbled Himself as low as a human being could go so He could “taste death for every person,” (the only being in the wide

universe of God who has ever become “obedient unto death”; no suicide is “obedient unto death,” for death is “reality,” and suicides flee “reality”), the only one in 6000 years to do so (a suicide is running away from reality, but this “death” that Christ was “obedient” to is the real thing—the “second death,” the “curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13; Rev. 20:15); and lastly [7] which had to be the most horrible death one could know, “even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:5-8).

That’s the death that involves “the curse of God,” the awful condemnation of final conscious ruin, a death infinitely worse than the physical pain involved (which itself was terrible!). See Gal. 3:13 to learn what is “the death of the cross.” It was the concentrated death of humanity, for He “tasted death for every man” (Heb. 2:9), the total, final, giving of Himself, the “pouring out of His soul unto death” until there wasn’t a drop left, “numbered with the transgressors, bore the sin of” everybody (Isa. 53:12).

If a picture is worth a thousand words, there we have it: this is *agape*, and “God is *agape*” (1 Jn. 4:8). No other being in the wide universe of the heavenly or earthly cosmos has ever made such a Sacrifice! Any “other god” is therefore an anti-*agape* “god.” That means, to worship any “lesser god” is to worship Satan himself. No, God, our heavenly Father, our Saviour and Redeemer, is not divinely selfish-refusing to share His throne with “lesser gods.” He knows that to worship any “other god” means death to us; and He loves us too much to allow that. The final crisis of earth’s history will be a

challenge to “worship the Lamb” alone, or to worship Baal. All worship of self which is disguised as the worship of “christ” is Baal-worship. Time to think!

“Thanks” for that, says Paul!

But that was not far enough down, as most people understand it: the death which He died was far more than the physical, social agony of His cross. It was what the Bible calls “the second death,” the death in which there is no hope of a resurrection (that was the death that Christ saved us from!). He carried with Him that hope of a resurrection all His life, up until when He was “made to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21), when He cried out in most bitter agony, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). That point there was where the “giving” was the greatest; it was a gift for eternity, an infinite gift.

Contemplating that gift of His love has a subduing effect upon the human soul; no one can be the same after his heart grasps that!

If the idea can be translated and the consciousness of its “breadth, and length, and depth, and height” can be grasped, there is salvation in the very thanksgiving, as there is salvation in faith. Such thanksgiving is close to what faith is! The human heart is moved forever. Those heavenly beings who are still humans (the “24 elders,” see Rev. 4:4; 5:9) never cease to give their thanks; neither will you, once you grasp what that “unspeakable gift” entails.

Even priests and pastors often leave out a vital part of the ten commandment law—that preamble

that gives us good news before we even hear the first commandment: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage” (Ex. 20:1). That word “Lord” is part of the name of Jesus, which means “The Lord saves.”

God wants us to hear the Good News gospel before we even begin to hear about the Law!

He tells you He is your God, your Savior, even before you knew about Him, even while you were living in darkness, alienated from Him. Jesus’ very name proclaims, I AM already your Savior! I have already brought you out of the bondage of “Egypt,” which is guilt, fear, and worry about the future, yes, the prison-house of sin. What we all have needed is the knowledge of that good news. Without it, we cannot keep God’s holy law, but with that knowledge, we can.

Once we have seen and believed the truth of what the Son of God accomplished by His sacrifice on the cross, we cannot worship any other “god” instead of our one true Creator-and-Redeemer—God of the Holy Bible. Since He reversed the “condemnation” that came on the human race through Adam, now He treats us as though we had never sinned. He brought us out of “Egypt,” out of the “house of bondage.” It’s time to tell Him “thank you!”

What we have always thought is the “second commandment” turns out to be the second statement of good news. Here it is:

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,

or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a *jealous* God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments” (Ex. 20:4-6).

Let’s look at the good news that is in this second commandment:

Our God and Savior is too great and wonderful for any idol on earth to represent Him in any way. He is the Creator of heaven and earth! The Maker of the Milky Way! The ocean is but a teacup in His hand! And He knows every one of us, all of our secrets, better than a mother can know her children. How could we drag Him down to the level of any “thing” that humans could devise?

He is not only “great” in the sense of vastness, bigness, and power. He is “great” in the sense that His love for each of us is personal and never ending. Not only did He fling into endless space the numberless suns and worlds of the Milky Way, He also designed and made the tiny humming bird with its delicate wings. And Jesus told us that when one of them flies against my window in summertime and breaks its neck and falls, that same infinite Father in heaven looks down and notices what happened and He is sorry.

After telling us about this, Jesus said: “The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt. 10:30, 31). Why, there’s not an

astronomer on earth who can tell you how many suns and stars are in the Milky Way! Nor can any mother on earth count how many hairs are in her child's head. But although "the Lord your God" knows all your secrets and even shameful thoughts, He still loves you!

Since God is Spirit, it's impossible that any idol or statue could represent Him. He wants us to learn to worship Him, not some useless idol. When mom and dad kiss baby goodnight, often he wants a teddy bear in bed with him, a kind of surrogate "mom or dad." But our loving heavenly Father is too wise to let us ever have a surrogate of Himself. No Teddy Bear "god" for anyone who has learned Lesson Number One about the love of God!

The baby's teddy bear is clutched in bed because mom or dad can't stay in the bedroom all night.

But "the Lord our God" is always with us, not down the hall somewhere: "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5). One of the names of Jesus is "Immanuel," which is translated, 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:23). David asks, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? . . . If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day" (Ps. 139:7, 11, 12).

But His nearness is even greater than David saw it to be! The New Testament reveals Jesus as One who came so close to us that He became one of us (that's what "Immanuel, . . . God with us" means). As our Creator and Redeemer, He was utterly

without sin, but He took upon His sinless nature our sinful nature, that He might know what it is to be tempted in all points like as we are, yet always without sin (Heb. 4:15). He experienced all of our temptations and our feelings. He even tasted that bitter cup of feeling forsaken. He cried out on His cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). He felt that way and conquered it, so that we might never have to feel forsaken by God.

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, come down to this earth?

Not simply so He might take us to heaven when we die. He has another blessed purpose. The angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary before He was born, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

This is how the Apostle Paul described it:

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2-4).

That was a greater achievement even than making the Milky Way! It's "easy" for the Creator to make a world or a sun; He simply speaks the word—and it's done. But conquering sin in fallen, sinful human flesh? "Condemning" it there? Delivering us who have fallen, sinful flesh from the dominion that sin

has over us? That's something God could not do by simply saying an empty word, "I conquer sin!" No, that would never do.

He cannot tell a lie, or claim to have accomplished something that's not real. So, He does it! He becomes a real Baby in Bethlehem's manger, a true human being, grows up as a child and a youth, meeting all our temptations to sin, and saying

"No!" to every one of them, even until He was hanged on a cross.

And there on His cross, the devil throws his worst temptations at Jesus, trying to get Him to sin in one tiny, almost insignificant way so that Jesus might fail of His mission "to save His people from their sins." But Jesus conquered every subtle temptation!

No, no idol or image can ever represent that glorious achievement! No angel in heaven would ever think of bowing down to an image of any kind. He couldn't do it! And neither can you or I if we have an adequate understanding of the righteousness of Christ our Savior.

Once we know this good news, we want to sing the "Hallelujah Chorus" forever!

The second commandment is not a stern warning of doom if we bow to an idol, it is good news that we simply could never get involved in any idol worship or even idol "veneration" if we remember what a wonderful God and Savior we already have.

"I am . . . a jealous God," He says. Why? Because He loves us! A husband who truly loves his wife is "jealous" if she strays from him to give her attentions to some other man. Our Lord and Savior (whose name is "the Lamb") has come so close to

us that He is eagerly awaiting the glorious day when it can be said, "Let us be glad and rejoice, . . . for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife [His church] has made herself ready" (Rev. 19:7). Such "jealousy" is holy.

That day will come once His church chooses to believe how good this good news is, and permits Him to "cleanse us from all unrighteousness," for the "fine linen" in which the "wife" is dressed at the wedding feast is "the righteous acts of the saints" (see 1 John 1:9; Rev. 19:8).

But here the good news gets even better. Look at the promise of His forgiveness in the second commandment. Although He has to "visit" the iniquity of evil fathers upon the children if they choose to continue to hate righteousness, refusing to learn any of the lessons of grace their fathers could have known, still the Lord shows "mercy to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

One day is a 365th fraction of a year. In Isaiah 61:2 the Lord says that His "vengeance" is as one "day," but His grace is 365 times as great—it's a whole "year" long.

He loves to forgive! He delights in mercy! The Bible says that He has "fun" being kind to sinners, redeeming them, saving them from ruin, treating them generously. "He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:10, 11). It does not say that His mercy is "great" toward people who do everything

just right. No, His mercy is great towards sinners who “fear Him,” who call upon Him. Joel says, “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). Luke says that Jesus’ enemies criticized Him for He “receives sinners” (Luke 15:2). But that’s why Jesus is so wonderful!

When they said that about Him, He responded by telling the story of the one sheep that was lost, and how the Good Shepherd left the 99 that were “safe” and went in search of the one that was lost. That’s Jesus, looking for you, unworthy or sinful as you may be.

In fact, while we have “fun” going to Disneyland or playing golf or fishing or playing games, Jesus has “fun” seeking out discouraged, broken-hearted people who have messed up their lives, wandered far away, lost their marriages or homes perhaps, alcoholics, or drug addicts or criminals who have lost hope, and by the Holy Spirit He whispers words of encouragement to them. Micah 7:19 says He “will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” It’s as if He says, “I am ‘the LORD your God,’ your Savior. My very name ‘Jesus’ has a built-in special meaning, ‘I will save you from your sins.’ And those sins that have brought you so much heartache and guilt, I have cast behind My back, far deeper in the ocean than the wreck of the Titanic; no one will ever be able to find them again.”

When Peter was sinking in the waves, he cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” And Jesus heard that prayer immediately, caught him by the hand, and lifted him up. He will never refuse anyone: “All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and the one

who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

You may ask, “But how can I be sure that ‘the Father’ has predestined me to be saved?” The truth is that the Father has given you to Jesus! He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). He has already paid the penalty of your sins, died the second death that your sins would have to “pay” for. And even though “the wages of sin is death, . . . the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord,” your Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Every word that God says is important. He has no fine print like lawyers who can wriggle out of a contract. He has given the gift to you, not merely “offered” it provided you first do everything right to deserve it. You don’t deserve it, I don’t either, for Adam gave us “condemnation” but Christ is the One who has already given us “grace.” “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7). Grace brings with it a special “gift”—“justification of life” (Rom. 5:15-18). The Father treats the world of sinners as though they have not sinned, “not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Cor. 5:19). You have wondered why He doesn’t strike some wicked criminals with lightning; it’s His grace, purchased for the human race by Christ’s sacrifice.

But when you realize the truth about that amazing grace, you simply cannot go on living a life of sin. It’s not fear that motivates you; it’s grace. “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness

and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV). You keep the Second Commandment. “You shall have no other gods before Me.” It’s a guarantee!

So, again the ten commandments become good news. God is tired of writing them in stone. That’s fruitless work! Now He wants to write them in human hearts, so our greatest joy is to live in harmony with Him and in harmony with the great universe where His love prevails for all eternity. He will write His commandments in our hearts, if only we will make a choice to let Him do so.

There is a marvelous blessing from heaven that has already begun. Here in California the dry season has been long and hot and now cooler, but still dry. Just to hear a few drops fall on the roof is great good news, even though the refreshing showers you want and you need haven’t come yet. But yes, there has been a beginning of the great, real “latter rain.” Many people haven’t known about it yet. But the full rain *will* come and it will prepare God’s people to “lighten the earth with glory” just before Jesus can come again.

What had begun as “the former rain” on the great Day of Pentecost long ago when thousands heard the message of Jesus preached so clearly, will now be finished with this “latter rain” of the same Holy Spirit, only in a greater way.

People all over the world are beginning to look at the message itself that is such “most precious good news.” We can be sure that the Holy Spirit sent

from God is working worldwide to help people to begin to understand.

Jesus has not forsaken His precious church, nor is He trying to raise up another church. What He is doing is giving *this* church the precious gift of repentance. It’s the greatest repentance of all the ages! The Holy Spirit is working. The Lord loves this church, just like a bridegroom loves his bride who wants the wedding day to come soon.

A wedding is an exciting time, isn’t it? Now, the greatest wedding ever is just upon us. It’s what the Book of Revelation says is “the marriage of the Lamb.” You have never seen a wedding like that will be! And it says the announcement will be made in heaven that “the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself for it” (19:7, 8). We can’t forget that Jesus is still a man, even though He is also still the Son of God. And He loves *His* bride-to-be more than any man on earth has ever loved his wife. And for His wedding to be postponed so long as it has been postponed makes Jesus to be very disappointed.

And all this long time while Jesus is still disappointed, He has to endure the pain of watching and feeling the suffering of people all over the world. If we could say something to that wonderful Bride, we would say, “Please, come; don’t delay any longer! Tell your Bridegroom ‘I do!’ in the great wedding.”

We don’t want to miss that party, do we?