

# THE BEST NEWS YOU'LL EVER HEAR<sup>1</sup>

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Have you ever had one of those days that were so filled with things to do, meetings to attend, and travel, that you lost the contact you usually have with sources for food.

The result, is that you come in the evening, and you are very hungry, very much so.

You may think of Deuteronomy 8:3 where the Lord speaks of permitting ancient Israel to discover what hunger means: “[The Lord] humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger ...”

But not to torture them, but “to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart” (vs. 2).

“He humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not ... that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

We can learn: (a) Being hungry is a blessing once in a while, if we can learn something helpful from the experience.

(b) The experience of being hungry for temporal food can teach us the blessing of being hungry for spiritual food.

(c) The Lord Jesus Himself has forever glorified the experience of going hungry [for a time!]. In the most wonderful sermon ever preached, He said, “Blessed [happy] are they which do hunger and

thirst for righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

(d) The meaning is clear: the only ones who will ever be “filled” are those who “hunger and thirst.”

(e) Therefore, we conclude that a wonderful prayer for us to learn to pray is, “Lord, make me to feel hungry!”

(f) But that’s just backwards from common wisdom; but if the Lord Jesus says that such are the ones who are “blessed,” we had better listen and learn.

Could it ever be that something good that God Himself gives can turn into something bad?

The answer is yes, and an example is the manna that God gave the people of Israel in their 40 years of wilderness wandering. From its description that we read in Numbers 11, it was an appetizing and nourishing food. Scholars variously describe the language as cakes “fried in good oil,” “as food newly baked,” or like “wafers made with honey.” Perhaps it was like delicious freshly baked bread; evidently it could be prepared in a variety of ways as a well balanced diet, and for a healthy appetite it was always appetizing. The Psalmist describes it as “angel’s food” (Ps. 78:25). Since God gave it to them, it was undeniably “good.”

But the people had to eat it on the very day that it “fell” on the daily dew each morning. Moses told them, “This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. . . . Let no one leave any of it till morning. . . . But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank” (Ex. 16:15, 20). Something very good became very bad! It had

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. 4:1-5. 111, 294.

to be eaten when God gave it. The reason: it was very nutritious, like whole-grain flour attracts bugs.

The manna is a symbol of the spiritual nourishment the Holy Spirit gives us day by day if we are willing to “eat” it. It’s Bible truth, “fresh” each morning (Isa. 50:4, 5). The hungry soul finds things “new and old” in God’s word that constantly invigorate him (Matt. 13:52). We are told to “bless the Lord”—in other words, make Him happy (Psalm 103:1, for example). How do you make a chef happy? You tell him his meal was super-delicious.

Now, ask the Lord for a second helping; tell Him you’re hungry. That will make Him happy! There’s nothing He loves more than to feed hungry people and watch them enjoy His cuisine. Eat His “manna” today. Learn to love it. Don’t lay it aside until tomorrow!

We are convicted about this. When you come hungering and thirsting for God to His house He has some bread to satisfy your yearning heart. You will always, and only hear good news.

It’s easier to believe Bad News because we’re born to do so.

Our idea is striking and controversial: what people have thought is “the gospel” turns out to be much better Good News than most have dared to believe.

An infiltration of half-concealed Bad News has plagued the Christian church for the better part of two millennia. It paralyzes people spiritually, but they can’t figure out why.

Therefore we must rediscover the original “Good News” idea that permeates the New Testament.

When the gospel took off originally, Christ’s apostles were accused of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). It wasn’t their personality or public relations. They had gotten hold of a big idea that was itself revolutionary.

People who heard it reacted in ways that could only be called violence—Jesus Himself said that those who liked it were taking “the kingdom of heaven by violence, by force” (Matt. 11:12). That is, when they believed what they heard, they believed explosively—they grabbed it with all the energy they had. There was something in the Good News itself that automatically released them from inhibitions and transformed them into joyous (yes, fearless!) capable communicators of the message.

And those who didn’t like the idea? They also became violent—in persecuting those who did like it. Thus you read of Christians being fed to lions in the Roman amphitheaters.

Humanity was divided by this apparently wild idea that the gospel is better good news than humanity could dream up on their own. The Bible was seen as Heaven’s up-to-the-minute newspaper, and those who liked the Good News in it couldn’t get enough. These believers had discovered that God’s Good News idea was so intensely interesting that what they had thought was “fun” now became boring, repulsive.

What made the Good News so amazingly good was the discovery of what Christ had accomplished for the human race. It was emphatically not what He had tried to accomplish, but what He actually had done. They shouted from the housetops. Christ has

saved the world! He has redeemed humanity has given the gift of salvation to every human soul! “Now, believe it,” they said.

But then immediately a problem surfaced: it wasn't easy for people to believe. They were so used to believing Bad News that it hurt to start believing Good News. And this problem is what brings us to a look at our big idea.

Does it seem difficult to you to believe that you are saved? Is God standing back, arms folded, disinterestedly, saying, “Well, I did my part long ago; it's up to you now. If you want to be saved, work hard at it. And if it seems too hard to you, you just don't have what it takes to get to heaven”?

Or is it true, as some timid souls think, that “God has plenty of good people ready to take my place. He doesn't need me, and I'm not really sure He even wants me in His heaven”?

No! A thousand times no!

The Bible truth is that God takes the initiative in saving you. He isn't waiting, arms folded, for you to do something. And He definitely wants you in heaven, no matter how many others may be there. Notice how the apostle Paul stresses God's saving initiative at work for us: “Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, no realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?” (Rom. 2:4). Today's English Version says that God “is trying to lead you to repent.” What the apostle is saying is that the goodness of God is actually taking you by the hand and leading you toward repentance as surely as a fireman tries to lead a victim out of the smoke and flames of a

burning building. If you don't stubbornly resist, He will lead you all the way to heaven.

Sometimes Christians pray agonizingly for a wayward loved one, assuming that they have to beg the Lord to wake up and do something. That He is unwilling to save until they arouse His pity somehow. But God's goodness is already at work, leading that loved one to repentance. The real problem is that even good Christians can thwart what God is trying to do because they don't understand the full dimensions of His goodness, mercy, and forbearance.

If God is taking the initiative in human salvation, if He is leading men and women to repentance, then why doesn't everyone repent? It is because many *refuse* to repent. It is because, as the apostle puts it, they “show contempt for the riches of his kindness.” Demanding to have their own way, they break away from God's leading. As far back as 1892 Ellen White wrote a little book titled *Steps to Christ* that expressed this tremendous insight well. “The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus; a knowledge of the plan of salvation will lead him to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins.”<sup>2</sup>

If you have supposed that *you* have to take the initiative, if you have thought that *you* must do something if you want to be saved, you may find the idea of a God who loves you with an active, persistent love hard to believe. To think that God is

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<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 27.

drawing you and that you will be saved if you simply stop resisting may seem all backward. But no matter how revolutionary it may sound, this is the “good news,” the gospel of the Bible.

A husband and wife went out one evening and left their children under the care of a babysitter. When they returned about midnight, the girl was greatly concerned that their oldest child had been crying for about four hours. Nothing that the babysitter could do would comfort her.

The father went to the child’s room and found her flushed and sobbing, her face red with long weeping. When he picked her up, she threw her arms around his neck and sobbed, “Daddy, say it isn’t true. You do love me.” He replied that of course “I love you.” The child said, “She said that if I was bad you wouldn’t love me, and I know that I’ve been bad, so maybe you do not love me.”

The father pressed her to himself, and said, “My dear child; I always love you. When you are good I love you with a love that makes me glad; when you are bad I love you with a love that makes me sad. But I love you, good or bad. I am always your daddy.” The child was already more calm, and the dawn of a smile came to her face. Father began to cover her gently with kisses, and then he told her that a good daddy had to be with her as the Lord was with Him, and with all of us who are His adopted children. She smiled and was soon asleep.

This revolutionary love of God leaps out at you from the pages of the Bible in beautiful thoughts like this one from the apostle Paul: “What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different

from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. So also, when we were children, we were in slavery under the basic principles of the world. But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:1-5).

This is a truly explosive idea that discloses what God’s character of love is really like. He counts all mankind as potential heirs of His “estate.” But before the faith comes to you individually to comprehend this and to accept it, you are like the millionaire’s barefoot child who is bossed about by slaves. Paul says further that you come of age when you grasp this truth by faith. Until then, you remain prisoners, and the law serves as a “tutor” (the Greek word means “a slave who drives the barefoot children to school”) to maneuver you to the Saviour. What you don’t learn easily by faith, you learn a harder way by discipline. And this, too, is God’s grace. All this infinite, loving care He lavishes on you individually in order to get you to Christ, that you may “be justified by faith!” (Gal. 3:24).

It’s so easy for you to think of God as drawing circles to shut you out. But He draws His circles large enough to include you—each one of you—at least until *you* shut *Him* out by unending resistance to His love. The Lord calls you a sheep who has wandered away—not a wolf to be shot down on sight. His grace always seeks a way to intrude into the lives of those who are potential heirs of His estate.

What a pity that so many church people, who should know better, don't yet themselves understand this great love of God. Too often they treat the "unsaved" as if they were wolves. The church has hardly begun to love as God loves!

This good news of God's all-embracing love is so wonderful that it almost staggers the mind when you realize what it means to you. It makes you want to shout the news to everybody from the housetops. God has no chip on His shoulder against anyone; Christ's death on the cross gives salvation to every sinner. And this gift is "out of all proportion" to your sin, which is "vastly exceeded by the grace of God" (Rom. 5:15, NEB). So there is no reason why every man and woman should not be saved—except that they spurn God's gift of salvation.

Paul goes even further and says that "God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3). So God has not only given justification, or salvation, for everyone—legally by the death of Jesus Christ—but He has also given everyone a measure of faith to appropriate that salvation. All you have to do is to say Yes and exercise the faith God has already given you. What more could God do?

It all adds up to the conclusion that if anyone is eternally lost at last it will be only because he or she has persistently rejected what God has already done to save that person. And if anyone is saved, it will be only because of God's own initiative in providing salvation.

C. S. Lewis expresses this idea in his book *The Great Divorce*. He makes a parable of it, imagining

the Holy City to be a mere bus ride from hell. Anyone in hell who wishes to move to the Holy City is welcome to do so, but those who come to visit can't stand the place. They want to board the bus back to hell as quickly as possible. The lost, Lewis is saying, shut themselves out of heaven. They end up outside the city, not by any arbitrary decree of God, but by their own chosen inability to be happy there and by their refusal to accept God's gift of eternal life.

In the final analysis, then, you must choose. Whether you are saved or lost depends on your choice. But in the light of the love of God, as it is revealed at the cross, even the choice to be saved becomes easy.

Of course, if we eclipse the cross of Christ and the love He demonstrated there, we must admit that it becomes terribly difficult to follow Him. The springs of motivation dry up, and temptation to evil becomes overpowering in its appeal. This is what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of the Saviour as "a root out of dry ground" and says that He has "no beauty . . . to attract us to him" (Isa. 53:2). But if we see the unadulterated grace of Christ, the choice to bear the cross with Him becomes easy.

Perhaps the power steering in your automobile can help you understand how easy it is to be saved and how hard it is to be lost. Have you ever tried to turn the steering wheel when the engine was not running and the power steering was not engaged? It's possible, but extremely difficult. On a large highway truck it takes a giant to turn the wheels

unless the engine is providing power to the steering mechanism.

But if the engine is running, even a child can twist the steering wheel this way or that with ease. Yet the driver must still *choose* which way he wants to go. You can't sit in your car, fold your arms, and say, "Take me to the post office." But once you choose to turn right or left, once you apply ever so little effort to turn the wheel, immediately the power mechanism goes to work and makes the task easy. That's what the love of Jesus does spiritually for you when you appreciate what He has done for you and choose to respond.

See what Paul reports in his second letter to the Corinthians:

1. If One had not died for all, we would all be dead. Apart from Him, all any human really deserves is the grave.

2. Whether or not we confess it, the truth is that all we have and are, we owe to His sacrifice on the cross.

3. Believe this, says Paul, and "henceforth" you find that the "constraint" goes to work immediately. It's not that we strain and push ourselves, trying to be good. The power plant of grace supplies more than sufficient motivation, so that we "henceforth live . . . unto him which died for . . . [us] and arose again." "Should not . . . live unto themselves" in the original language does not convey the idea of our usual vain exclamations, "I should do better; I should stop this or that bad habit; I shouldn't be so selfish," et cetera. The idea is that we will find it

impossible *not* to serve our Lord enthusiastically once we see what happened at the cross of Christ.

"But," someone may ask, "didn't Jesus say, 'Make every effort to enter through the narrow door'" (Luke 13:24)? Aren't we to 'struggle against sin'" (Heb. 12:4)?

Yes. You will have endless conflicts with temptation. Christians are soldiers in battle. But the point is that you never have to fight alone. You are joined in a yoke with Christ. He does the pulling, and your job is to cooperate with Him, to stop resisting. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ" (Phil. 2:5). Your own effort is useless, of course, apart from the grace of Christ. But if you don't lose sight of Him, your part is always easy.

It is Christ who has the difficult part. Was His part easy for Him in Gethsemane or on the cross? No. His battle against sin and self in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross was so severe, the Bible tells us, that He sweat drops of blood. His very heart was ruptured in His final agony.

Does this mean that He was telling a lie when He said, "My burden is light?" No. The burden He speaks of in Matthew 11:30 is the burden that *you* carry; His was infinitely heavy. The faith that expresses itself by love (see Gal. 5:6) makes your burden light, for you appreciate the heaviness it was to Him.

The only difficult thing in following Jesus, then, is the choice to surrender yourself to be crucified with Him (Gal. 2:20). But you are never called to be crucified alone—only with Him. Thank God it is a million times easier for you to be crucified with

Christ than it was for Him to be crucified alone for you. Looking at the Lamb of God and the cross makes it easy.

As Isaac Watts expressed it in a hymn:

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my  
pride.

Rick and Kim Hoover were about to have lunch when they heard a knock on the door. Their elderly neighbor had heard strange noises coming from the city trash can outside his home.

“He just thought it was a small animal that got in there, maybe a baby squirrel or something,” Mrs. Hoover said. “My husband went over to take a look.”

But when Rick Hoover lifted the lid of the large black bin next to his neighbor’s modest one-story ranch home, he could barely believe his eyes. Inside was a tiny baby girl wrapped in a stained, taupe-colored towel, her umbilical cord still attached.

“He came running back into the house and told me to call 911 and tell them there was a baby in the Dumpster,” said Mrs. Hoover. “We weren’t sure if she was breathing, so my husband thought he was going to have to do CPR on her, but then she started whimpering a little. I just keep seeing her little face. That image will be forever burned in my mind.”

When police and EMS units arrived on the scene five minutes later, the couple told police they found

the baby in the black bin on a heap of garbage under a blistering noonday sun. The infant, dubbed “Baby Doe,” was a female little more than two hours old at the time she was discovered.

A woman at a Bible Institute gave a never-to-be-forgotten testimony. She stood before the great audience and said, “I was found on a doorstep in a basket in Leeds, England, when I was six days old. I was found by the Lord Jesus Christ here at this Bible Institute.”

Many people might think it a great disadvantage to be abandoned by a mother and left to the mercy of the world. To be found by Christ, however, is life’s greatest experience because it is the beginning of eternity. You may have been born in the wealthiest of homes, been surrounded by loving care, a child of privilege, but to all and indiscriminately Jesus comes, drawing them with His everlasting love. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32).

And if even this still seems hard, don’t forget that it remains much harder to go on fighting against love like that, beating off the persistent leading of God’s Spirit in order to be lost, than it is to surrender and be saved.