

# **THE BEST NEWS YOU'LL EVER HEAR**

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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 from these lips.

Ezekiel tells how God showed him Israel as a valley filled with dry bones, “bleached by the sun,”—a vast panorama of spiritual death. Then He asked the prophet a simple question: “Can these bones live?” I said, ‘Master God, only you know that.’” It was a representation of the spiritual state of God’s true church then. The primary focus of the vision is not the physical “first resurrection” and the “new earth,” although that can be one application. But no one who is spiritually dead now will have a chance of coming up in the “first resurrection.” It’s NOW that we must experience a living conversion.

According to what Christ says in Revelation 3:14-21 of His true church in these last days, “the valley of dry bones,” is disturbing. It’s not ancient history.

Ezekiel could have prayed for those “dry bones” 24 hours a day for a century (endless prayer meetings!), and nothing would have happened. (Some churches fast and pray and still nothing happens to change their spiritual death.) Now note: some ten times in Ezekiel 37:4-12 (Peterson), the Lord told the prophet what to do: “prophesy upon these bones”—and he did. God wasn’t about to resurrect them unilaterally; He demanded the prophet’s help. Even the final “breath” that entered them was the fruit of Ezekiel’s “prophesying” (vs. 10). They must have “the everlasting gospel.” The “dry bones” must be fed with the Word.

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 they’re so “lukewarm” in their devotion. We must rediscover the original “Good News” idea that permeates the New Testament.

Does it seem difficult to you to be 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, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" Romans 2:4.<sup>1</sup> 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."—Page 27.

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,

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<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations not credited otherwise are from the New International Version.

persistent love hard to believe. To think that God is 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.” Galatians. 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!” Galatians 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.” Romans 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.” Romans 12:3, KJV. So God has not only provided 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." Isaiah 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.

"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'" (Hebrews 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." Philippians 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 Galatians 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. See Galatians 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.