

GOOD NEWS FOR THE WORLD

By Paul Penno Jr.

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American Heritage recently reported a meeting in East Anglia, England, of World War II Air Force veterans who gathered to reminisce their dangerous bombing stories. Local Britons remember the waves of B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators and fighter planes that took off each morning. Always more went out than came back.

“Each one here was a proxy for those who weren’t,” says John McDonough. Veteran Dan Coonan remembers: “When you’re in a plane getting shot at, you become very close to your associates.” When Don MacGregor’s B-17 was strafed by a Messerschmitt, three of his crew were killed, but he survived. “I had such a tremendous sense of guilt over those three guys it took me forty-three years to . . . talk about it.” In September 1944, Al Ball was part of a crew that became lost. He found three of his buddies years later in a cemetery in the Ardennes, and wondered why he was alive and they were in their graves. Air Force veteran Roland Webber says, “As a POW I had a lot of time to think about fate. . . . I tried to . . . find the combination of factors that made it favor some and not others. . . . I never found it.”

American Heritage sums up the feelings of these men who survived: “Many of the men who were here had the disturbing sense that they had lived on time borrowed from the ones who were not” (April, 1990, p. 108).

If you survive a war in which your buddies didn't, you are forced to look at life very soberly unless you are completely hard-hearted. You ponder those crosses "row on row" "in Flander's fields" with an ever-intruding conviction that you could easily be there too. A serious sense of reality invests all of life with a different color.

The same feeling is shared by survivors of an air crash. And many who escaped the Holocaust are like the WWII veterans; they feel an indefinable sense of guilt—they too should be dead. If they had been in a different seat, or flown a different mission, or sailed on a different ship, or stood in the line that went to the gas oven, they would be dead. They don't deserve to live. In some instances, veterans know that someone else deliberately took the bullet that should have been theirs.

When these survivors sense that they are living on time "borrowed" from others who lost life, they realize that they don't own their life. Every new day becomes an undeserved dividend. Nothing they have done has motivated them to adopt this new attitude toward life; they have simply seen something that others have never seen. If they could articulate their deepest feelings they would say, "I was strafed, I was torpedoed, I crashed, or was gassed, together with my buddies. Nevertheless I live, yet not I; and the life I now live is the life I 'borrowed' from someone else."

This was precisely the apostle Paul's gut feeling he had about his own life after his Damascus road experience. "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live," he proclaims, "and the life

stove, lights, vacuum cleaner, whatever, 24 hours a day. Your switch turns it off, otherwise your lights would be on all the time!

Likewise, your decision to follow Christ is not what turns His salvation on; He has already given you the gift of His salvation. That's what John 3:16 is saying; it is your unbelief that turns the gift off. The message that was "sent" to us in 1888 is better Good News than we have been in the habit of thinking. Our salvation is 100% due to God's initiative, not to our own in any way. But we let Him save us; by repentance, we stop turning the switch off! "The blessings of salvation are for every soul. Nothing but his own choice can prevent any man from becoming a partaker of the promise in Christ by the gospel" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 403).

which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20, NKJV).

He adds forcefully: "The love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). The reality that Paul discovered is that Christ died the death that "all" deserve, and which all would have died if He had not died their death instead. He saw himself as the survivor of the greatest Death that anyone ever died, the death of the Son of God in which death he also died corporately. "He is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). By His righteousness "the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life" (Rom. 5:18). It is "acquittal and life for all men" (NEB). Thus it is a legal justification for "all men," for "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2).

When the apostles saw this grand truth, the cobwebs and fog were blown from their minds. Just to be alive when you know you should be dead is itself good news aplenty. But they saw much larger Good News implicit in this obvious truth—a new motivation that will deliver us from the curse of self-centeredness that poisons our life otherwise: "He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2. Cor.5:15). The "should" is the motivation of that *agape*. It's not a works trip.

An insensate animal that escapes out of a trap where another one perishes can feel no sense of gratitude, no sense of dedication, although it may

indeed enjoy a renewed lease on life. But a human being created in the image of God can sense an entirely new motivation imposed by grace. He must live henceforth for the One who died his death and rose again!

This is phenomenal. It completely negates all legalism. Hope of reward and its converse, fear of hell, are transcended. From the moment that this fact of life becomes real to the myopic, self-centered sinner who has up to now wallowed in his or her worldly pride, a new purpose in life takes over. The previously dominant motif of What-can-I-get-for-myself? becomes instead, What-can-I-give-for-the-One-who-gave-His-all-for-me?

The affluent “take thine ease . . . and be merry” citizen of the First World can no longer look upon his materialistic treasures as his own “hard-earned” wealth. He realizes he is no more deserving of what he has than are the impoverished denizens of cardboard shanties in the Third World. The same imponderable “fate” has blessed him that has blessed the survivor of the Holocaust or our Air Force veteran.

Are well-fed Americans really more righteous than starving famine refugees in Ethiopia? Maybe our blessings are a consequence of the “accident” of living under a Constitution given us by liberty-loving founding fathers, something we don’t deserve, an advantage others can never know. Maybe prosperous Western Europeans have also inherited some happy fall-out from a Marshall Plan of a previous generation, and are no more “deserving” than are the hungry ones left in Eastern Europe.

Being only an “aim” or an “intention,” He is reduced to being a semi-savior, and our own work must fill in the void. This reduces itself to the salvation-by-faith-plus-by-our-works idea. A highly popular doctrine widely published!

But if Paul’s gospel is allowed a hearing, Christ’s “aim” and “intention” were fully realized: He DID “save the world.” He DID reverse the condemnation that Adam brought on the human race. He

entered into the stream of fallen humanity, taking upon Himself our flesh, our nature, became the “last Adam,” firing the “first Adam” from his job as head of the human race, became the new Head of the human race, redeemed the human race, took upon Himself “the iniquity of us all,” died the world’s second death, and “finished” the work the Father “sent [Him] to do.” The Father fully accepted His accomplishment and “hath made us accepted in the beloved,” “having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph 1:6, 5).

Is Paul teaching the heresy of “Universalism”? No. Like Esau of

old who “had” the birthright in his possession and then “sold” it for a luscious dinner entree, we can give up, abandon, “despise,” “sell,” what Christ accomplished for us and actually GAVE us. If you are wondering what the Bible means by the word “unbelief,” that’s it precisely.

Perhaps you think that the switch in your house turns the electricity on. Wrong! Your electricity is turned on at the power house, and it is flooding your house, wires running all over, ready to run your

(vs. 3). Once the final message becomes clear, every honest-hearted human soul will heed the call to “come out of her [Babylon], My people” (vs. 4). It’s the gospel that’s “the power of God unto salvation,” not its accouterments. Once the humblest soul grasps what it means, his inmost soul becomes that “well of living waters” “springing up into everlasting life” refreshing all who come near him (Song of Solomon 4:15; John 4:14; 7:38). The power won’t be in “the training of literary institutions” (though that can glorify God, too); it’s easy to say that it will be the Holy Spirit but that’s a cop-out if we forget that He “is the Spirit of truth,” and if we forget that that truth is “the truth of the gospel” (John 14:17; Gal. 2:5, 14). That’s where “the power” is.

What stands in our way? Jesus tells us: our “rich and increased with goods” evangelism pride (Rev. 3:17).

When Christ “gave Himself” as a sacrifice for the world, did He merely “aim” at saving the world, only “intend” to save the world, or did He actually do it? A clear focus in answering that question makes tremendous difference in our Christian experience. Is our salvation 100% the work of Christ or is it 50% our own? If Christ’s sacrifice is only an “intention” or “aim,” then there must be a missing element that “completes” His work. An “aim” is never sufficient for hitting a mark. Something must either transform the “aim,” into an actual “hit,” or there must be an element that nullifies the “intention.” Either way, according to this view, what Christ accomplished by His sacrifice is only a half-way effort on His part.

This new motivation of grateful service in response to the cross of Christ is no fanatical goody-goodyism. Newly envisioned people who feel the constraint of His love still have a sinful nature, still are tempted as anyone else is tempted to indulge the clamors of self. They are “alive” in every sense of the word, even more sensitive to subtle temptations to indulgence than are the often besotted, semi-conscious victims of worldliness. Like strings of a finely tuned piano, they are not flabby but taut with a constantly heightened sense of obligation in life; but they make beautiful music. They are an honor to Christ.

This new life is not a “works trip”. The first idea of merit being earned is instantly repulsed. The burning vision of the cross of Christ cauterizes all thought of reward.

This new motivation makes service for Christ and others “easy” rather than “hard.” Many Adventists scour the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy for little snippets lifted from context in a desperate attempt to make it seem “hard” to follow Christ. They have not seen the true dimensions of “the width and length and depth and height” of “the love [*agape*] of Christ” revealed at His cross. They think they are forced to disbelieve His Good News declaration: “My yoke is easy, and My burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). A glance into that open grave that is our just desert renews our gratitude to Him for the life we now have, and makes all burdens hence-forth to be light.

The gospel is not an instruction manual of “do-this” or “do-that” in order to go to heaven. It is Good

News of One who took our rightful death and gave us the grace of His life instead.

Jesus clearly spoke of current cultural conditions when He said, “Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love [*agape*] of many shall wax cold. . . . There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Mt. 24:24). An example is the apparent demise of Christianity in Western Europe. Christian conviction there has “waxed cold.” During the last decades since World War II, Europe has become the least Christian of any of the continents. Yet it was the home of vibrant Christianity from the 16th through the 19th centuries. Now the grand cathedrals are almost empty on Sunday mornings except for gawking tourists who marvel at the architecture. Many churches have been de-consecrated and remodeled into stores, business offices, homes, even granaries. Youth in a post-Christian society are absorbed in pleasure and secularism. The fastest growing religion in Europe is now Islam. Why this phenomenon of a dying Christianity? According to the Bible, the problem is not the fall of genuine Christianity but that of apostate Christianity—“Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen . . .” (Rev. 18:2).

Jesus says something good is coming. The last message from heaven will focus on Good News, not Bad: “This gospel [the word means Good News] of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (Mt. 24:14). Justification

what it means to “believe in Jesus” that we haven’t yet grasped. If that “well of living water” is not flowing out from within our soul as the ultimate evangelism, it’s obvious: we haven’t yet learned to “believe” in the sense that Jesus meant when He spoke on “that last day . . . of the feast.”

Could it be that there is a method of evangelism that we have “in a great degree” overlooked? Truly successful “evangelism” requires two criteria:

(a) Propagation of an “evangelistic” message by every method available, including TV and state of the art electronic productions.

(b) But the message itself must be correct, faithful to biblical revelation. Paul says that he is “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom. 1:16). The “power” is built-in within the message itself; “the truth of the gospel” is so dynamic that it is virtually self-propagating if it is freed of the confusion that Babylon’s “wine” produces. Jesus’ dictum is true: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Perhaps we haven’t realized how true those words are! The Lord said that if we can break through the clouds of confusion from “Babylon” that envelop His cross, we shall see great success in genuine, lasting soul-winning: “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all unto Me,” He promised.

Consistent with this promise is the prophetic account in Revelation 18—the coming time when the earth is to be “lightened with [the] glory” of the closing message. It will specifically be free of any confusion from “Babylon’s” “righteousness by faith”

presentations using state of the art electronic facilities. Wonderful work; deserves our offerings. Huge public meetings have been held for nearly 200 years and yet world population grows faster than the combined efforts of all Protestant churches to reach them with “the gospel.”

Could it be that the Bible teaches a more effective method of “evangelism,” one that we have “in a great degree” overlooked?

It could be summed up in one statement Jesus made near the end of His ministry: “In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said [Song of Solomon 4:12-15], out of his inmost soul shall flow rivers of living water. . . . This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive” (John 7:37-39).

It means that the humblest person who “believes in Jesus,” even the uneducated, will become “a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams of Lebanon.” Unconsciously, in an unstudied way, he will pour forth the ultimately powerful message. It will be that “the love of Christ constraineth us,” compels, motivates, empowers, makes effective the agent who cannot help but communicate the message—all with one proviso, that he “believe in Jesus.” That’s what Jesus said in John 7.

It sounds deceptively simple. For two millennia people have “believed in Jesus,” haven’t they? And yet in spite of all our best efforts, the task gets bigger all the time. There must be something about

by faith will penetrate the fog of a post-Christian mentality. The special message of Revelation 14 is “the everlasting Good News,” not Bad News (vss. 6-12). The fall of Babylon will be proclaimed as “light” that will “lighten the earth with glory” (Rev 18:1-4), and God’s true people, more numerous than we have assumed, will respond as they hear “a Voice from heaven, saying, Come out of [Babylon], My people.” If you hear the “Voice” today, respond!

Millions of people around the world are beginning to take another look at the cross of Christ. The old hymn says that His cross “towers o’er the wrecks of time,” but seldom has it been clearly understood. The terrible events of the Dark Ages that were done in the name of Christianity (such as the awful Crusades) could never have been done in the name of Jesus if those people had understood the cross, besides wear it around their necks. The shameful persecutions of Protestants by Catholics and those that were vice versa, could not have happened if Catholics and Protestants had understood what happened on the cross. The shameful religious strife that has brought sorrow to so many people even in our time—all was the result of a famine for understanding the truth.

When Jesus said that just before His second coming “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (Mt. 24:14), He was talking about a revelation of the truth of the sacrifice of the cross. We read in Revelation 18 that “another angel” is to “descend from heaven, having great power, and the earth [is to be] lightened with his glory” (vss 1-4).

And Revelation emphasizes 25 times that the final light that lightens the earth with glory will be the revelation of Christ as “the Lamb.”

One brief but clear example of how pagan error has crept into the Christian church to becloud the glory of Christ’s cross is the doctrine of natural immortality—a teaching that is extra-biblical. It hides the reality that on His cross Christ suffered the horror of the second death (but His glorious *agape*-love triumphed over that experience of hell). There is a “length, and breadth, and depth, and height” of that love that has a far more powerful effect on human hearts than has been seen in our pathetic history for 2000 years. For Christ to win the final “election” in His great controversy with the enemy, there must come a clear and powerful demonstration of that same love in human hearts worldwide.

How can the gospel ever truly lighten the earth with glory? How can it capture the attention of earth’s billions? Many are too poor and hungry even to want to understand it; others are too wealthy and pleasure-loving to care about it.

Yet God has promised that His gospel is not going to die out in a whimper. In Mt. 24:14 Jesus promised, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.” And He promises in Revelation 18:1-4 that the full message of the pure gospel is yet to “lighten the earth” with glory. “The honest children of God” everywhere will respond; they “will sever the bands that have held them. Family connections, church relations, are

powerless to stay them now. Truth [will be] more precious than all besides. . . . A large number take their stand upon the Lord’s side.” *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

Zechariah tells us of that day. Let me read his prophecy from the Living Bible: “People will write their friends in other cities and say, ‘Let’s go to Jerusalem [that’s a symbol of the church] to ask the Lord to bless us. . . I’m going! Let’s go now. Ten men from ten different nations will clutch at the coat sleeves of one Jew [a child of God] and say, ‘Please be my friend, for I know that God is with you’” (Zech 8:22, 23).

Well, it all seems impossible now, with so many people totally absorbed in want, work, or pleasure; but the Lord Jesus Christ gave His blood for the salvation of this world. Satan cannot win the great controversy between Christ and Satan. Revelation pictures Christ as the bleeding Lamb of God who alone of any being in the universe can open the mysterious seven seals of cosmic destiny. That message of the Lamb—the message of His sacrifice on His cross—this will lighten the earth with glory. Is it lighting your own heart with glory today? Don’t get left behind!

Everybody who believes the Bible teaching of the second coming of Jesus must also believe that something great must happen before He CAN come again: “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and [only] then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). It is commonly understood that this means huge expenditures of money in public meetings and TV