

LOOKING UNTO JESUS

By Paul Penno Jr.

May 14, 2011

Before our age of television, news photographers were generally a sedate group who felt little need to create celebrities, certainly not to pry into their private lives as the “paparazzi” of today who stalked celebrities so relentlessly. But now we live in a new age where people are bored with daily life, having largely left their rural homes (where life was interesting) for big city life. Virtual worship of celebrities brightens their dull existence. They want to know what their favorite celebrity is doing.

Well, we have a favorite celebrity: Jesus Christ. But for centuries He has seemed as remote to ordinary people as the President has seemed remote to most people—a shadowy figure one is dimly aware of, who has an existence, but quite far removed from our day to day acquaintance. Has the Governor seemed closer to you than Jesus? Many people will have to say yes to that question. “We see him all the time on TV or in the tabloids! We never see Jesus!”

What is Jesus doing now? And can we see Him? Has He bared His soul to us as celebrities do in their interview with the media when they share their soul secrets? I’ve raised all kinds of questions I don’t have time to answer. But yes, He has bared His soul—yes, even in the last hour of His life before He drew His last breath—read Psalm 22. That’s more than any celebrity could do for us in their last hour.

And yes, we *do* see Him, for Hebrews 2:9 says clearly, “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, that He by the grace of God should taste death for every person in the world.” And yes, we see what He is doing 24 hours a day 7 days a week—preparing a people for His second coming which will be soon. Look to Him in the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. You will see Him and know Him far more clearly than you ever saw or knew favorite celebrity. And that will end your boredom.

Paul writes: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). The “faith of Jesus” recognizes the cosmic Day of Atonement when our great High Priest, Jesus, cleanses the sanctuary from *all* the sins of God’s people and thus prepares them to be translated at the glorious second coming of Jesus. This is what the Bible calls “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

When you and I can emerge from our spiritual childhood and begin to grasp what Jesus accomplished for us, a change takes place within us. It’s not a works trip; it’s not our trying harder. It’s *seeing* something; it’s what Paul called being “able to comprehend” a wider view. It’s not a secret trick, or technique; it’s looking. Which is why the Bible so often urges us to “behold.” “Looking unto Jesus . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.”

What we begin to comprehend (and the most experienced followers of Christ are still in the kindergarten) is the four grand dimensions of the love (*agape*) that drove the Son of God to go to hell

to save us. It's mind-stretching, what David calls "heart-enlarging" (Ps. 119:32; Eph. 3:16-19).

Someone says, "That hurts!" Yes, there are growing up pains. We choose to "be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by . . . cunning craftsmen" (4:14). It's probably the biggest problem God has had to deal with in the thousands of years of earth's history: a people standing on the very verge of eternity, soon to meet the Son of God whose eyes are flames of fire, a no-nonsense look there, who demands that we "may grow up into Him in all things, . . . even Christ," and yet here we are content to remain infants in understanding.

There's no way that TV, for example, could be a snare to us if we could "behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"! We would cast off our obsessions like so many filthy rags, even our absorption in sports, if we had an adult idea of what Christ endured in our behalf.

But someone asks, "Is spiritual imbecility really a sin? I know I'm saved (the preacher told me so!), so can't I wait until I get to heaven and then join a class for looking/beholding?" In the judgment now in the Most Holy Apartment of the heavenly sanctuary, a choice to remain imbecile spiritually may be written in the Book of Life as avoiding Christ. What the heart says is what gets written.

The righteousness of Christ now can cleanse from the one greatest sin of all time. According to John's profound statement in 3:14-19, it's the sin of *unbelief*, not the mere passive ignorance of never knowing but the active sin of disbelieving truth. "He

that believeth *not* is condemned. . . ." That "not" discloses the darkest guilt of sin.

But what is unbelief, this sin of *disbelieving*? It's the sin committed by the most righteous people on earth, those to whom God's Messiah was sent (the Savior of the world). They made the eternal Prince of glory become the slain "Lamb of God" by the people who slew Him. The cross of Christ extends its arms over the universe of God—the truth of eternity encapsulated in time at Calvary for us to "see."

Unbelief is the sin of cherishing hard hearts that cannot be melted, of eyes that cannot shed tears of repentance, of souls that "survey the wondrous cross" with callous disregard. It's the sin of hearts unmoved by the love (*agape*) that "constrains" any believing heart to total consecration to the One who died our second death for us. It's "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1). It's poisonous sin, the most subtle and deadly of all time.

Unbelief is the sin that infiltrates the great world church of Laodicea, the "seventh" and last of all time, the church that torments the resurrected Son of God to the point of acute nausea (Rev. 3:14-21). Each individual professed believer in Christ is a microcosm of the world church, no one holier than everybody else, all sharing a corporate sin of unbelief, all desperately needing a corporate repentance before God, all awaiting the long-promised Elijah who will proclaim a heart-reconciliation, the final atonement. Let's not cap off history by crucifying the Lamb of God afresh. Let's overcome where ancient Israel failed.

When you're 7 or 8, because already deep neurological paths have formed, creating selfish, loveless thought and emotion patterns and addictions that continued through life.

Do you know anyone who is addicted, by "sin which doth so easily beset us? Addiction to alcohol is slavery; addiction to drugs is probably worse; addiction to gambling is horrible; addiction to cigarettes can be fatal; addiction to shopping is idolatry; addiction to pornography is more than a disease; and addiction to sex—the Bible forbids it as violation of the 7th commandment (that also is more than a disease).

The list of addictions is endless, and somewhere down the line is gossiping, "once a gossip, always . . .," and "once an over-eater, always . . ." And last of all the inevitable ground principle, "once a sinner, . . . always a sinner." All the addictions have a common root.

Why do we lose self-respect and common sense in a craven slavery to self-destructive habits? The Bible gives us several insights: (1) Sin is ingrained within us, so addictions follow naturally: "Whoever committeth sin is the servant [slave, Greek] of sin" (John 8:34). It has an enslaving element built-in. The particular outward form it takes varies with us as individuals.

(2) Its root is not chemical, but spiritual. Before the chemical form takes place, there is deep heart-alienation from God: "To be carnally minded is death. . . Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:6, 7).

(3) That "enmity" at last flares up in the murder of the Son of God: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer" (1 Jn. 3:15). "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life." "Ye slew and hanged [Him] on a tree" (Acts 3:14, 15; 5:30).

(4) Those who crucified Him were acting as our surrogates. The enmity against God's law which is natural to all our human hearts is the same as motivated those who killed Him; just (a) give it time to blossom and (b) opportunity, and it will flare forth in the same sin. Thus in the final Judgment, the lost will be arraigned before the tribunal of the universe on the charge of murdering His Son (Rom 3:19). What drove the scribes and Pharisees (and the Romans too) to murder Jesus? Addiction of self.

Someday you and I will be in God's eternal kingdom of glory, thanks to our Saviour. We'll look back on our earthly pilgrimage, wondering why it took us so long to overcome our worldliness, our selfishness, our sinful addictions, yes, our Laodicean lukewarmness. We will see that pure "river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb" (Rev. 22:1). "The Lamb"? Yes, the crucified Christ. We will at last understand why Paul said long ago that he would "glory" in nothing else "save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14), why he "determined not to know anything among [us], save Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). We will then begin to understand, "clear as crystal," how Christ as the Lamb of God "tasted" our second death, endured the horror of hell in our behalf,

endured being made the “curse of God,” “made to be sin for us who knew no sin,” experienced in Himself all the agony of the total of all our human terror multiplied by the unspeakable agony also of divine terror, endured to the fullest the reality of every man's worst nightmares,—and then at last we will sing with new understanding the anthem, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Heb. 2:9, Gal. 3:13, 2 Cor. 5:21, Rev. 5:12).

But what a pity if we can't begin to understand all that today! Or can we? If we could, we would find the victory over our worldliness, our sinful addictions, yes, our deep-seated selfishness, not sometime far off in eternity but *now*, today.

True, a little child can't appreciate what happened on the cross; he/she can only laugh and coo and enjoy his superficial level of life (thank God he/she can!). But who of us is content to remain a little child forever? Is it not time to begin to “grow up into Him,” to “come” into “the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown person, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:14)? Ask the Father to lead you to His Son's cross so you can begin to see what happened there. You'll never be the same person again.

Have you ever tried to carry a hundred-pound bag of cement on your back? It's quite a burden! If you're struggling under such a weight it is hard to smile and laugh at the same time. The physical body has its weights to carry; but the heart also has its burdens. And no burden that the heart can carry is heavier than the nagging fear that God is against

you, that He rejects you or at best, ignores you, does not accept you.

When Cain brought his offering of fresh fruits and vegetables and flowers to lay on the altar, we read that God “had not respect unto his offering”; and as a consequence, Cain's countenance “was fallen” (Gen. 4:5, 6). He began carrying the heart-burden so many try to carry until this day.

We know what Cain's problem was: he was trying to find acceptance with God by the good works he was doing. And he was a great farmer! Any Farmer's Market or State Fair today would have been dazzled to see his “offering” that day. It represented the very finest, most patient and hard-working horticultural skill and devotion possible! But Cain's problem was his “work;” his problem was his strict obedience to the commandment of God when He told Adam and Eve, “cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life . . . Thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (3:17-19). Hadn't Cain sweated as he did just that? He was happy as a lark when he brought

his “offering” to the altar that day, rejoicing in his “obedience,” positive that God would reward him for his “works,” but disappointed when God ignored it. What Cain missed was simple heart-appreciation for the shed blood of the Lamb of God; his problem was “unbelief,” a failure to appreciate what it cost the Son of God to save him. Let's learn the lesson!

It was in a little Bible Study group in a local church that was discussing Paul's words about “the shield of faith” in Ephesians 6:16 (“above all, taking the

shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one”).

The leader of the group asked, “What *is* faith? What is the definition of faith?” Jesus is the Author and Finisher of faith. Different ones quoted Hebrews 11:1, “substance of things hoped for,” “key to unlock heaven’s storehouse,” “breath of the soul,” etc., etc., all telling what faith *does*, but no one defining what faith *is* so we can learn how to obtain it.

“Faith is trusting God!” was the general idea, the same as the popular Evangelical leaders who believe and teach the doctrine of natural immortality. But anyone who believes that the human soul is naturally immortal is unable to understand what happened on the cross of Christ—thus automatically blinded to what faith *is*, certainly so in the light of “the everlasting gospel” of Revelation 14:6, 7. Driving a Model T is better than going by ox-cart; but why can’t we “grow up” out of our infantile understandings (Eph. 4:15)?

The inspired apostle comes close to a definition of faith in these words: “You, being rooted and grounded in love [*agape*], may be able to comprehend. . . the width and length and depth and height—to know the love (*agape*) of Christ which passes knowledge.”

A thoughtful and reverent-minded author in a magazine article of July 24, 1888 had the idea: “You may say that you believe in Jesus, when you have an appreciation of the cost of salvation. You may make this claim, when you feel that Jesus died for you on the cruel cross of Calvary, when you

have an intelligent, understanding faith that His death makes it possible for you to cease from sin, and to perfect a righteous character through the grace of God, bestowed upon you as the purchase of Christ’s blood” (Ellen G. White, “How Do We Stand?” *Review and Herald*).

It hurts to “grow up.” But never will any church succeed in lighting the earth with the glory of “the everlasting gospel” (Rev. 18:1) until we learn to “appreciate the cost of our salvation” purchased at the cross of Christ. That’s beyond contented spiritual infants.

Sometimes we say that we are saved by our faith in Christ, and we want to emphasize this so we don’t lapse into the idea that we are saved by our works. But again we want to be careful that we grasp the truth accurately. Truth saves (John 8:32) and error produces the lethal lukewarmness that permeates the church of the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-21).

God’s people in the last days are distinguished in Revelation as those who demonstrate two great identification marks: they (1) “keep the commandments of God and (2) the faith of Jesus” (14:12). The former is not possible to “do” except by the latter. But it never was their faith; it was something they have received from Jesus.

Thus we are not saved by *our* faith in Jesus, but by *his* faith. He alone is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). That is, in all the 6000 years of human history Christ is the one Man who has totally believed the saving truth. His faith alone works by love (Gal. 5:6).

He is the one and only human being who has fully experienced what it is to be “forsaken” of God (Matt. 27:46). No one else has been capable of sensing to the full what that means; it was He alone who has been “made . . . to be sin for us who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore, no one else has ever “tasted” lostness as fully as He did as He hung on that cross in the darkness. It was *his* faith that saved Him from eternal despair! God saw fit to record the story in Psalm 22 (and also 69).

The faith that we are to exercise is therefore second-hand; we got it from Him! Rightly defined, it is a heart-appreciation of what it cost Christ to save us; it is to “comprehend with all saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love [*agape*] of Christ which passes knowledge” (Eph. 3:18, 19). Our salvation is in “comprehending.”

Why did Jesus pray? Did He have to pray?

We read that He was God in human flesh, “Immanuel, God with us” (Matt. 1:23). Did “God” need to pray to “God”? If Jesus was the Son of God, couldn’t He accomplish His mission on His own without getting down low on His knees every day and talking humbly to His heavenly Father about His problems? It takes time to pray and He had lots to do; none of us prays unless we feel the need to pray. Did He feel such a need? Or was He simply acting out a charade as an example for us to copy? And what did He pray for?

The stark truth emerges that Jesus in His incarnation *had* to pray, or He would have gone under. Isaiah says that “the government” of earth

and heaven was “on His shoulder,” a weak, human shoulder (9:6). On His own He had to fight the infinite battle of eternity known as “the great controversy between Christ and Satan.”

The enemy of God had invented something never before known in the universe, a virus that threatened universal death, and it had taken up residence in fallen human flesh or human nature. That virus was sin, and it had to be defeated in that same fallen human flesh or nature, or the universe eventually would have had to succumb to sin and its “wages, . . . death” (Rom. 6:23).

In the human nature which Christ had “taken,” He had to win the fearsome struggle with sin; He had to “condemn sin in the flesh,” in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (8:3). No gladiators fighting hand to hand in the Roman Colosseum ever had a more fearsome personal struggle. Jesus was forced to battle on His own with none of His divine prerogatives; divine, yes; the Son of God, yes, but with no special advantage over us except His faith. His righteousness must be limited to righteousness by faith. He must be “the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2), the Author or Inventor of faith itself. But that’s just what He gives to us—“the saints . . . keep . . . the faith of Jesus” today (Rev. 14:12). Accept His faith! Let that Author teach you how to pray!

But what is faith?

The best definition I have found for “faith” is this: it is a heart-appreciation of the love [*agape*] of Christ.

(1) We know that whatever faith is, it is something that the heart performs because we read, “With the

heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom. 10:10).

(2) But just what is it that “the heart” does?

(3) The heart “chooses” to “behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

(4) It is not a WORK that the heart performs—which “work” could be readily understood as having some merit (and for sure, our “carnal minds” would naturally seek for something to take credit for! Compare Rom. 8:7).

(5) Faith is simply a response of the sinful human heart to the revealing, the pouring-out, of the love [*agape*] of Christ.

(6) It’s a positive response, not careless or negative in any way; the sinner immediately receives the gift of repentance for his hard-heartedness.

(7) Isaac Watts long ago said it well:

“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.”

(8) To “survey”—the exact, right word; but how do you “survey”?

(9) Quietly, alone, on your knees, every earthly voice hushed, radio, TV, cell phones, all our apparatus; you invite the Holy Spirit to enter into your thinking, your comprehension, to be your Teacher while you “wait” patiently “in school” before Him.