

JESUS THE TEENAGER'S FRIEND

By Paul Penno Jr.

October 8, 2011

Young people generally think they're immortal; they'll never be like the old folks they see in nursing homes. A kind heavenly Father says: "Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young,

"Before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes,

Before your vision dims and the world blurs
And the winter years keep you close to the fire.

In old age, your body no longer serves you so well.

Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen.

The shades are pulled down on the world.

You can't come and go at will.

Things grind to a halt.

The hum of the household fades away.

You are wakened now by bird-song.

Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.

Even a stroll down the road has its terrors.

Your hair turns apple-blossom white,

Adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body.

Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest,

While your friends make plans for your funeral."
(Eccl. 12:1-5).

Beautiful poetry here, but also common sense! The leaders of the Sanhedrim let their intellectual faculties become hardened with age so that when the young Man from Nazareth came with His refreshing message, they had "no pleasure in" it.

When God poured out the "former rain" gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, they missed the blessing.

In His loving patience, our heavenly Father tries time and again to interest us in the most precious beginning message of "the latter rain." But if we have loved our intellectual ease more than stretching the mind to grasp it, we will drift beyond the capacity to appreciate fresh revelations of truth. Our problem is worldliness, "conformity" to society in or out of the church. While we have left even a semblance of youth, let's "be transformed by the renewing of [our] minds" (Rom. 12:1, 2). Old people can have young, renewed minds!

It was night when Samuel heard the voice of God calling; he immediately got up to listen (1 Sam. 3:3-9). The Lord gave him four calls and he responded each time. It's quite possible that because "the Lord [our] God is a jealous God" (Ex. 20:4), we'll have only one call to listen to "the latter rain" truth. "Buy the truth and do not sell it" (Prov. 23:23).

Teenagers have plenty of heartaches. They are the most burdened people in the world. A teen says, "I don't know myself; I don't know where I'm going, and there's always someone waiting to put me down."

Jesus tells teenagers, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give My yoke is easy, and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30, NKJV).

You might ask, "How can I come to Him? I can't find Him, I can't feel Him He's a trillion miles away, and His yoke seems hard, and His burden heavy."

Most people don't know how near He actually is. He says, "It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you." That Helper is His Vicar, the One sent in His place. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 16:7; 14:16-18.). We are closer to Jesus by the Holy Spirit today than His disciples were then.

And yet many teenagers have the idea that Jesus is a mysterious, shadowy figure far away. You don't see anything in Him. You study your Sabbath school lesson like you take a dose of medicine; you go to church, but you can't wait until it's over so you can go home and listen to some "rock" music. You don't see Him. And you can't be blamed for what you don't see!

Many see Christ as Isaiah describes Him, "a root out of dry ground." All that many youth see is a desert with this ugly root sticking out. "There is no beauty that we should desire Him." "He has no form nor comeliness" (Isaiah 53:2.). Why? An enemy has done the work of an antichrist, and misrepresented Christ.

There is a little letter the apostle John wrote at the back of your Bible; just before Revelation. He says, "Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.¹ Oh yes, they say He's come, and you can see churches everywhere with steeples and crosses on top. They

¹ 2 John 7.

all say, "We're Christian. We believe in Jesus!" But John puts his finger on the root of the problem when he says that there is an antichrist. They do not see that Jesus is come in our flesh, for the only kind of human flesh there is in the world is our flesh.

Antichrist says that Jesus came in some different kind of flesh, pale-faced, hollow-eyed, sunken cheeks, a halo around His head like you see in old stained glass windows, hardly ever smiled, thin, emaciated, intoning His words like a preacher at a funeral—effeminate, an ugly "root out of dry ground." This is "Christ" to many people. He appears as plastic as "Abraham Lincoln" at Disneyland. Many teenagers wonder, "How could Christ be my best friend?" And because they think that mother and dad, maybe even the preacher and the Sabbath school teacher, have kept saying, "Don't do this, don't do that, you're bad," the teenager feels that Jesus talks that way. "He must be my worst enemy. I could have a good time if it wasn't for Him."

This antichrist—this horrible antichrist—is masquerading as Christ. The Greek prefix *anti* can mean three things: "instead of," "in place of," or "against" He has advanced himself instead of Christ, he's against Christ, and he misrepresents Christ, while professing to be for Christ. No wonder lots of people are deceived.

This is why we need to understand Daniel and Revelation. These books are the heart of Bible prophecy. There is a false Christ, and that false Christ is revealed as the little horn of Daniel 8:11 to

13: “He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host, . . . and he cast truth down to ground. He did all this and prospered.” He sets up “the transgression of desolation.”

Daniel is wondering, “How long must this antichrist be allowed to lie about Christ and hide Him from view?” Then the angel answers, “For two thousand three hundred days [prophetic years]; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed.”² Then the clouds must be rolled away, and Jesus must be unveiled to the world as He truly is. And to unveil Him to the world has been the special task of this remnant church ever since 1844.

Right now, our special project is to see Him as a teenager, for there is no one that the antichrist wants to deceive more than teenagers.

What does the Bible say about Jesus as a teenager? Matthew says nothing except one little phrase, “He dwelt in a city called Nazareth.”³ But that says a lot, because Nazareth was morally equivalent to Skid Row.

Mark completely skips Jesus’ early life. He begins with His baptism at the age of 30. And so does John. Only Luke says anything about Jesus’ teenage years, that He “grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.”

We cannot suppose that any conscious memory of His preexistence remained with Him in His earthly childhood. As a babe in His mother’s arms in the

² Daniel 8:14.

³ Matthew 2:23.

stable at Bethlehem, He had no conscious intelligence beyond that of other human babies at birth. He could not acknowledge the adoration of the shepherds or the wise men from the East.

As a child in Nazareth, did He entertain Joseph and Mary with tales of the glories of heaven which He knew in His preexistence there? Like a fortunate child who has been to the “big city,” did He tell his playmates in the rustic mountain village of His exploits as the Commander of the heavenly angels? No; as a child, Jesus learned wisdom as we must learn. “The Child grew” and “increased in wisdom and stature” (Luke 2:40, 52).

The wonder of Christ is the wonder of His birth, God in human flesh, subject to the laws of mental and physical growth as we are all subject to them, yet “without sin.” Certainly He was not born with any miraculous memory of His divine preexistence. All these divine advantages He laid aside.

By the time a child reaches that age, very deep thoughts can course through his/her mind. Patterns of choice are being formed that determine the whole of afterlife.

Jesus was twelve when He first visited the national festival of His people known as the Passover. For the first time He looked upon the famed temple and watched the white-robed priests lay a bleeding sacrificial victim upon the altar. Alert and reverently inquisitive, His young mind sought the meaning of the strange symbolism of this offering of an innocent lamb. No one could tell Him what it meant, not even the priests themselves. They mouthed

phrases and performed rituals the meaning of which they could not grasp.

For four thousand years God's servants and offered the blood of beasts as an atonement for sin. To the Youth's inquiring "Why?" no one could give an answer, nor could anyone explain the mystery of blood sacrifice. Is it possible, wondered Jesus, for the "blood of bulls and goats" to take away sin?

The Boy turned away from the idle chatter and frivolous play of His companions. Not even His earthly parents could help Him. Silent and alone, He pondered the sight of shed blood that had impressed Him so deeply. Paul tells us what happened in His mind as he came to realize that the blood of goats, calves, or lambs could never atone for human sin. Not only in heaven before He came, but also as a youth on His knees, He gained an insight and formed a heart commitment:

"For this reason, when Christ was about to come into the world, He said to God: 'You do not want sacrifices and offerings, but You have prepared a body for Me. You are not pleased with animals burned whole on the altar or with sacrifices to take away sins. Then I said, 'Here I am, O God, to do what You want Me to.'" Hebrews 10:5-7, TEV.

It was as if He prayed: Father, You have no need of all these rivers of beasts' blood! You have no delight in them because they cannot avail to wash away sin from even one human heart. But you have made Me what I am—I have a body that I can give! / have blood that I can shed. Here I am, Father—let *Me* be the Lamb of God! I will die for the sins of the

world. *My* blood will be the atonement! I will be that "suffering servant" of Isaiah on whom the Lord has laid the iniquity of all. Let *Me* be wounded for man's transgressions, bruised for his iniquities, that with *My* stripes he may be healed. Lo, I come—to do Your will, O God!

Paul adds that Jesus took away the Old Testament typical offerings, and established instead the antitypical offering of Himself:

"So God does away with all the old sacrifices and puts the sacrifice of Christ in their place. Because Jesus Christ did what God wanted Him to do, we are all purified from sin by the offering that He made of His own body once and for all" (Hebrews 10:9, 10, TEV).

No memory of his pre-existence could interpret for Jesus the solemn meaning of that mysterious Passover service. He could not recall the fateful agreement with the eternal Father before the world was, when "the counsel of peace" was "between Them both" (Zechariah 6:13), and the Son gave Himself to be the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. His own pure mind, undefiled with sin, gradually discerned the import of what He saw.

It dawned upon Him that these lambs and sacrifices "cannot make him that did the service perfect in regard to the conscience" (Hebrews 9:9), and that "the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect" (Hebrews 10:1).

This is all a *type*, He reasoned. Someone innocent, sinless, holy, and undefiled, must die as a Lamb of God if lost human hearts will ever be reached! The whole vain round of types and shadows must be dramatically brought to an end in the offering up of some divine sacrifice.

This was a conclusion that the wise men and priests of Israel in the course of millenniums had not discerned. But now, seeing for the first time what others had witnessed countless times “not discerning the Lord’s body,” this Boy of twelve understands. Through His youthful soul there surges the irresistible power of a mighty resolve. These poor souls, looking vainly to human efforts for salvation, must not be left mercilessly to what will prove at last only hopeless despair. *He will sacrifice Himself.*

The Boy of twelve “saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment. He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor; therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him” (Isaiah 59:15, 16). “Christ . . . through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God” (Hebrews 9:14).

Behold the amazing work of love! He tabernacles in human flesh, a Boy of tender years, with the mysterious past all unknown to Him except by faith in the Written Word. He makes the same decision which as Commander of the heavenly hosts He made in the councils of heaven. *He chooses to go to the cross.*

When the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given to us, we choose the way of the cross as readily as the Son of God chose it in the heavenly council ages ago, and again as a Boy of twelve in the Jerusalem temple. In each instance, whether in the heart of the Son of God or in the heart of a believing sinner, the results lead to resurrection—which is as much a part of the principle as is the cross. There is Good News: “He who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal” (John 12:25).

There are two crosses: the cross of Christ, and the cross for you and me on which we die with Christ as did the penitent thief. There was a third cross at Calvary, but there was no redemption for the impenitent thief who died on it. He was caught in a suffering and death to which he never surrendered. Rebellious, he cursed his fate and God unto the bitter end, *and perished*. Shall we rebel against the principle of the cross and follow him to eternal darkness?

Bearing our cross is made easy through seeing that other cross on which our divine Example died. Through understanding His cross, we can discern our own and find strength to bear it gladly.

When Jesus was twelve He went with Joseph and Mary to Jerusalem, where He had a meeting with the university teachers. When it came time to go home, He stayed behind for three more days, asking questions that stumped those gray-haired professors. And His mother came in and found Him.

She berated Him; you'd say she bawled Him out: "Son, why have You done this to us?"

Jesus knows what it's like to be falsely accused by your parents. Respectfully, He talked right back: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" . . . Then He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them, but His mother kept all these things in her heart." Then Luke continues, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."⁴ That's all we have in the Gospels regarding Jesus' teenage years.

Nazareth was so bad that Nathaniel asked Philip, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"⁵ Something good did come out! Good news for any youth who lives in a bad neighborhood! Jesus was not exempt from the real problems we have today.

No youth needs to yield to temptation, if he understands the good news of the gospel. But confusing sentiments from antichrist ideas of the gospel infiltrate our thinking. Let the Lord speak to you in your Bible and in the Spirit of Prophecy. And don't accept anything I may say as your pastor unless you check it according to God's Word.

As a teenager, Jesus studied His Bible and refused to let anyone mislead Him. When Paul says, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation,"⁶ he means there is powerful good news in it. If a youth has gone

⁴ Luke 2:40-52.

⁵ John 1:46.

⁶ Romans 1:16.

astray, very likely the reason is that those false concepts from Babylon have somehow confused him. Jesus overcame completely in a difficult environment.

Those were painful years for Him. He was "subject to" His parents. Not that He agreed with them all the time, but still He was "subject to" them. What a comedown—from the theological seminary in the Temple to the junior division in His local Sabbath school, where He had to sit and listen.

It was His habit to go to the synagogue every Sabbath. He had to hear the most awful sermons you can imagine that misrepresented the character of God. And for all those seventeen years He was forced Sabbath after Sabbath to see people misled by the false teaching of the leaders of Israel. He did what He could to counteract this false doctrine, I'm sure, because we know He would speak to individuals and try to encourage them, "God isn't like that. He is your loving heavenly Father." But there wasn't much He could do. He preached the gospel as best He could by His life. He didn't try to grow up too fast. He was content to be as young as He was, "subject to" His parents.

Not only did He have problems with His parents, but also with His older stepbrothers and stepsisters. And with His teachers. But the worst problem Jesus had was with His neighbors.

Something happened during His ministry that you can't understand except in the light of those hidden years at Nazareth. When He was grown-up, He came back to visit His home town. "When the

Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, 'Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him?'"

The word "Man" is in italics; it's not in the Greek. What they actually said was, "How does this kid know all these things? We're astonished." They grumbled, "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon?" It never crossed their minds that He would be the Son of God. 'And they were offended at Him.'⁷

Luke goes into more detail. When this young man got up in church that Sabbath morning, He asked for the Bible, and somebody handed Him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus quietly opened it to chapter 61 and began to read the wonderful story of the Messiah. What a glorious work He's going to do when He comes!

Those villagers were smiling, so happy to hear about the coming Messiah. Someday He will drive out the hated Romans and make us a great nation! Then Jesus rolls up the scroll, quietly sets it aside, and announces simply, "'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' I am the Messiah. I've come to do this work."

Then the trouble began. Jesus could see His neighbors were rejecting His message. So He told two stories. When the Lord wanted to feed His

⁷ Mark 6:1-3.

prophet Elijah, He sent Him to a Gentile widow. Why? Not one in the whole of Israel had the faith to take care of the prophet of God!

The second story Jesus told was about Elisha. There were plenty of lepers in Israel, but not one had faith to be healed except Namaan the heathen. Then Jesus' neighbors got so angry that they "rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff."⁸

Many churches would never employ Jesus as a minister, because they say you've got to make it in your own home town first, before we'll listen to you, and Jesus' home village rejected Him. He had to walk alone.

We read that "His mother kept all these things in her heart." There are mothers who don't know how to talk to their children. Many teenagers tell me, "I just can't talk with my parents." Mary was apparently a very quiet person. For example, she never told Jesus who He was; He learned it by the Holy Spirit. So she couldn't be much help to Him in planning His ministry or preparing Him for His work.

Jesus had to pray, or He would have failed. While Hebrews 5:7-9 speaks of Him as an adult, it also speaks of His youth: "In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him that was able to save Him from death, [He] was heard because of His godly fear." The word for "fear" is not *phobos*

⁸ Luke 4:16-29.

(from which we get *phobia*). Jesus never feared in the sense of terror, but He revered His heavenly Father. “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”⁹

Did you get that? Jesus prayed with tears. He loved to go out in the woods and pray. And young people, if you go out in the forest all alone with the squirrels and the deer and the birds and kneel down beneath the open sky and talk to your heavenly Father, you’ve missed something wonderful. Every time Jesus saw a tree, He longed to kneel down and pray.

He loved to get up early in the morning before sunrise because God woke Him up. He says, “He awakens Me morning by morning.”¹⁰ While His family slumbered, He would go out and climb the hill behind Nazareth. In the forest He would catch the first rays of the sun and sing a hymn. He loved it.

We read that He “increased in stature.” There are two kinds of stature. You can grow until you are six or eight feet tall. But He “increased” in the “stature” of knowledge, in experience, in understanding human beings, in love and sympathy for others, and in the knowledge of God’s Word.

In every age God has called youth to fulfill a special purpose for Him. God has a plan for your life as surely as He did Jeremiah’s. The same Word which made Jeremiah fearless in the face of imprisonment and persecution will strengthen you

⁹ Hebrews 5:8, 9.

¹⁰ Isaiah 50:4.

to accomplish the task at hand. God asks only for a willing, believing heart.

Do you believe God has called you to a special work for Him?

Are you willing to follow Him wherever He might lead?

James Hudson Taylor, life-long missionary to China, committed his life to the Lord at an early age. The son of godly parents, Taylor determined to go wherever the Lord led. His initial intent to become a surgeon soon faded before the tide of a deep conviction that He must be a missionary to China.

At age 21 James Hudson Taylor embarked upon a ship to begin his lifelong venture. All he held dear he left behind in England. Writing later about this experience he recalls, “My beloved mother had come over to Liverpool to see me off. Never shall I forget that day, nor how she went with me into the cabin that was to be my home for nearly six long months. With a mother’s loving hand she smoothed the little bed. She sat by my side and joined in the last hymn we should sing together before parting. We knelt down and she prayed—the last mother’s prayer I was to hear before leaving for China. Then notice was given that we must separate, and we had to say goodbye, never expecting to meet on earth again.

“For my sake she restrained her feelings as much as possible. We parted, and she went ashore, giving me her blessing. I stood alone on deck, and she followed the ship as we moved toward the

dock-gates. As we passed through the gates and the separation really commenced, never shall I forget the cry of anguish wrung from that mother's heart. It went through me like a knife. I never knew so fully, until then, what 'God so loved the world' meant. And I am quite sure my precious mother learned more of the love of God for the perishing in that one hour than in all her life before.

"Oh how it must grieve the heart of God when He sees His children indifferent to the needs of that wide world for which His beloved, His only Son suffered and died."¹¹

Taylor understood what it meant to be constrained, or compelled, by the love of God. He also understood the grip-ping sorrow God feels for His children lost in sin.

Among the final generation of youth on earth will be those who sense God's grief over His separation from His children. These youth will not be content to sit silent any longer. No more will life be "business as usual." Nothing will be "too hard for the Lord." He longs to prepare a people—His church, His temple, His bride—for the long-awaited marriage.

"I am willing. Maybe God can use me. I don't have many skills, though. If only I had experience. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was founded by young people with a dream of carrying the three angel's messages to the world. Consider Ellen White, who received her first vision at the age of seventeen. She, her husband James, and other

¹¹ Dr. and Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Biography of Hudson Taylor*, pp. 83, 84.

early pioneers were barely out of their teens when they founded the movement that became the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The challenges and opportunities before today's youth are unprecedented. In the immediate future lies the culmination of the great controversy. God calls each of us to have a part in the proclamation of this message to the world.