

JESUS YOUR FRIEND AT COURT

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Oct. 15, 2011

October 22, 1844, is a date that was fixed by Jesus Himself, the Wonderful Numberer. Jesus, the Prophet, revealed to Daniel when He would commence the final process of “finishing the mystery of God”. As our great High Priest He entered the final phase of the work of atonement in applying His blood to the hearts of sinners responsive to His love revealed at the cross for them personally. It is called the cleansing of the sanctuary (Daniel 8:14).

1844 was our great disappointment in Adventist heritage. The hope was that Jesus would make His return visit in glory to this earth to purify it from sin and take His own with Him. That seems like such ancient history now some 165 years later. Was Jesus prophecy untrue? Is His blood incapable of cleansing a people properly so that they can appear with Him at His second coming? No!

For some the answer is to forget October 22, 1844 in the story of salvation history and acknowledge it as simple human error. However, to deny a date fixed by Jesus Himself, is to take our eyes off the only remedy for our sin problem. He is the Heavenly Psychiatrist who has the solution to our heart alienation with God. By faith we are to follow Him into the Most Holy. “But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands. . . . How much more shall the blood of Christ, who

through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:11, 14).

There is a sanctuary in heaven as real as there was in antiquity a sanctuary on earth amidst ancient Israel. God’s temple is composed of Himself and the Lamb and all the living beings who abide with Him and live by the impulse of their Creator. Jesus promises those who overcome that they will become a pillar in the temple of God. It is a glorious prospect that we are being prepared now by Jesus to take our place in His living temple above.

God has endowed to every one the right to justice. Wrongs are to be made right. The righteous are to be vindicated. The unjust are to be condemned. There is cosmic justice for all. As a young person I used to think that it was so wrong that the wicked bullies should get away with pushing around those minding their own business and staying out of trouble, trying to do what was right. Surely God must set things right. Good must triumph over evil.

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10). And I can remember as a lad hearing the preacher proclaiming the judgment hour message that at any time my name could come up before the bar, and would I be ready? What answer would I give for my life? I heard many say that they hoped their good deeds would outweigh their bad deeds. The conventional wisdom was that if you were a good person and helped the poor and the elderly, and

didn't curse and have bad thoughts, then you were in. But the nagging thoughts was always there, have I done enough to tip the balances in my favor with the judge? So the thought of judgment and standing before the great law of God was a fearsome thing for me as a lad.

I was like that Roman governor, Felix, before whom the Apostle Paul "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" (Acts 24:25). Felix could only think of self in the light of cosmic justice, and he trembled. One has not only to think of the deeds he has done in the body, but also the very thoughts and intents of the heart, for it is enough to cause anyone to tremble for fear of self. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14).

Before automatic railroad warning sensors, British law required bridge keepers to flag down trains if the bridge was out. One night a passenger train plunged into a river because the bridge keeper failed to do his duty. At the trial, the judge asked, "Did you wave your lantern in warning?"

"Yes, your honor," he answered. But later, after being exonerated, he told friends, "I'm glad the judge didn't ask if my lantern was lighted."

It's true that wrongdoers often face a partial judgment even in this life. But imagine a judgment in which *everything* comes out in the open. The Bible describes such a judgment that will take place when life is finished, for "man is destined to die

once, and after that to face judgment." Hebrews 9:27.

The Scriptures bring this universal final judgment into focus by explaining: "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

The absolute justice in this trial is assured by what is written in the books. No one will be able to bear false witness or bribe the court. The record is all there in the "book of life" and in the other "books." There will be no partiality for rich or poor, small or great.

The magnitude of this trial, which takes place before the whole universe, is portrayed graphically by the prophet Daniel: "At that time [the time of the end] shall Michael [another name for Christ] stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Daniel 12:1).

Here is a pledge straight from heaven—even though a "time of trouble, such as never was" engulfs the world, God's people will have nothing to fear for they "shall be delivered" because they are "found written in the book." Clearly, in this time of judgment, this "book" is of supreme importance. To be written in it means eternal life. To be blotted from it means eternal death or as the record states:

“Whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

This “book of life” was in existence long before Gutenberg changed history as he began printing books and reason proclaims that the heavenly court doesn’t need computers to log the records of the human race. But the Bible is clear; there was a “book of life from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). Equally clear, we are told that the true worshippers of God are written in this “book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (13:8). This book is the Lamb’s book and the Lamb is none other than Christ Himself. This means that the life of God’s people is written in Jesus. This is explained by Paul: “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

John provides in his epistle a further description of how Christ is the book of life: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:1, 14). Unmistakably this “Word” that was from the beginning is Christ Himself and He is the One God gave to the world and He is God’s message to the human race. Paul in Hebrews sharpens this truth by proclaiming that God has specifically “spoken unto us by His Son” (1:1, 2). This was heaven’s mutual plan. The text states: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto

them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). God does not hold our trespasses against us for they are written in Christ, God’s book of instruction to the human family. This is His gift to the world, which is none other than the “book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Revelation 13:8.

All of this makes sense. We are written in Christ the Lamb that was slain before we knew our lost condition—before we existed, before the foundation of the world. This is because “in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The way we are written in this book defies forgery. Thomas, the disciple who had doubts, was deeply concerned with only the genuine and so he demanded to see the print of the nails in Christ’s hands which would confirm the crucifixion and the resurrection (John 20:25). Here was a record beyond question that would last for eternity. The scars in His hands could never be erased and this Word, this “book of life” would forever declare the justice of God and enable every sinner to stand before the judgment without fear. Indeed, the redeemed will gladly acknowledge they made these marks in His hands. The nails were their writing instruments that as sinners they used when they wrote the record. But this dare not engender fear for the promise is beyond question: “There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:1).

Being written in the “book of life” can be compared to being written in another book called the “a book

of remembrance” (Mal. 3:16) with a similar result in the judgment. Those written therein belong to the Lord and have nothing to fear. The account explains: “Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord harkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not” (Malachi 3:16-18).

Is my name written there,
On the page white and fair?
In the book of Thy kingdom,
Is my name written there?

Jesus gave the assurance that there should be rejoicing “because your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). They are written there because He “humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). This is the record that stands in the day of judgment.

We had planned a pleasant overnight get-away at Lake Tahoe and booked a room online. Upon arriving late at night we went to the desk to complete the registration for the accommodations. The clerk informed us that our name was not on her record. She was completely booked and could do nothing for us. We were faced with either turning around and coming home or making other

arrangements. It is so disappointing to not have anyone expecting your arrival or hold your reservations.

The word *books* is obviously a euphemism; recent human technology in processing and storing data helps us understand that God certainly has all the information about our lives accurately recorded, including data impossible for any man-made computer to catch—our thoughts and motives. God’s “commands are boundless.” Psalm 119:96. His law describes what He is like and is the principle on which His universe is founded. (James 2:12 calls it “the law that gives freedom.”) Any act or motive that conflicts with this law puts us at odds with God and becomes a part of our life record—the “books” by which John says we will be judged.

Revelation 20:12 makes clear that there are “books” and there is another book, “which is the book of life.” The contrast is clear. We have seen that this “book of life” is none other than Christ Himself and we are written in that book by the print of the nails. But what about those other books that are opened and “the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works”?

If Christ is the book of life, then sinners must be the book of death. Paul refers to the believers as “epistles” or letters, each one a small book known and read of all men (2 Corinthians 3:20). There is no way to escape the personal biography that each person writes in the life lived. Those who by faith agree they are sinners are written in the book of life, Christ Jesus, for He “came not to call the righteous,

but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Those who do not have faith in the pardon bought at infinite cost must stand on their own record and be judged accordingly. Sinners find pardon when they believe and understand that they made the record by the nail prints “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). What a glorious promise, no condemnation in the judgment for those who believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Since God gave “His only begotten Son” for “the world” (John 3:16), it means that the entire human race has been written in Him, the book of life. The record in the “book of life” is the final means of determining the cases of the righteous in the judgment. Though unworthy, they are not condemned because they overcame “by the blood of the Lamb . . . and they loved not their lives unto the death” and they “came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Revelation 12:11; 7:14).

In what appears to be a happy exception to Paul’s statement about “all” appearing in judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10), Jesus declares good news: “In very truth, anyone who gives heed to what I say and puts his trust in Him who sent me has hold of eternal life, and does not come up for judgment, but has already passed from death to life.” John 5:24, NEB. The word *judgment* here means the condemnation of the judgment; the point is that God

wants to exempt us from the terrible experience of facing judgment and being condemned.

The Father has turned over to Christ the task of judging men. “The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son.” “And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man.” John 5:22, 27.

Our judge, then, is Jesus Himself. No one more friendly to us could be found! If in a human court, the judge and all the jury members are warm personal friends, you could hardly wish for a more favorable chance of acquittal.

The happy prospect is that Jesus will not even judge the lost. “And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:47, 48). The gospel and the law will bring about a recrimination of a self-condemning conscience.

Yet the Son of man will do for us what no earthly friend can do when we are in trouble. John says, “I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world!” 1 John 2:1, 2.

How can Jesus be our Advocate in a law case if He is also our Judge? God puts all the odds in our favor. Jesus is both Judge and defense Attorney. He can defend us because He has already suffered

the condemnation we deserve in the judgment. The death that Jesus died on the cross was the condemnation sin requires carried to its ultimate degree. “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us.” 2 Corinthians 5:21. Jesus died as the eternally lost sinner will die—“forsaken” by His Father—because “He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.” 1 Peter 2:24. Since He is the second Adam, we are “in Him” corporately if we choose to believe it. The idea is that when Jesus died, we also died. “I have been crucified with Christ,” said Paul. Galatians 2:20. Any lightning bolts of hot wrath that should fall on sinners already fell on Christ at the cross.

By accepting Jesus as our Saviour by faith, we are identified with Him. There is not the slightest reason why anyone should have to duplicate Jesus’ experience of dying for sin unless that person rejects his identity with Christ. What Jesus did on the cross is far more than a legal maneuver to satisfy the statutory claims of the broken law. It does that, of course, but it involves more—our personal identification with Him and His death. By faith the believing sinner accepts that he is “in Christ,” accepts the divine judgment on his sins, but actually suffers it “in Christ.” Justice makes no further claims against him. This is why he “does not come up for judgment.” And everyone can have this advantage if they will accept it!

The whole human race has this privilege of being acquitted in the judgment for “as in Adam all die,

even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). The only reason condemnation comes upon anyone is because they choose “darkness rather than light” (John 3:19), and deliberately reject God’s love for “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). This is the reason that “all” shall be made alive, saint and sinner, and at His second coming even “they also which pierced Him” shall be made alive to see the result of their choice (Revelation 1:7). The fact that the ungodly come up in the final (second) resurrection is evidence to them and the whole universe that they were written in the book of life but they are lost because they refused to believe “in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

The day of God’s judgment is a glorious event to bring gladness to the whole universe. It is the crowning act in His plan of salvation which was laid from the foundation of the world and every son and daughter of Adam can rejoice and be glad “because your names are written in heaven.” The One with the print of the nails in His hands will at last “see the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:11, 12).

There is a precious little book called *Steps to Christ* which presents the gospel of Christ very clearly. Some publishers printed a special edition in which they printed on the back cover these words: “Jesus Wants to Be Your Best Friend.” They sincerely thought they were doing the right thing, but they were vitiating the message of the book and transforming its Good News into Bad News.

The implication was clear: Jesus is not your Best Friend and He will not be your Best Friend until you do something right first which will change Him into becoming your Best Friend. And thus the book becomes a subtle statement of our old-fashioned legalism.

Question: Did the repentant, believing thief crucified with Jesus make Him become his Best Friend? Or was He so already? Had God already loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son to save us? Or did we do something first to induce Him to love us?

Was Jesus already the Best Friend of the cruel men who nailed Him to the cross? He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). One of them did repent and we trust he will be saved eternally—the centurion (vs. 47). He came to know Him as his already-Best-Friend Savior!

Caiphas never in his life had such a Best Friend as the Jesus of Nazareth whom he condemned to be crucified. All these deliberately unbelieving people will realize in the final day of judgment how evil and stupid they were not to realize that the Jesus whom they rejected was the only true Friend they had ever had. May the Holy Spirit enable us to present Him thus to every person whom we shall meet! Including children and youth!

There is nothing to fear. May God's day of judgment come soon!