

JESUS YOUR ALREADY-BEST-FRIEND

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Long ago a missionary on furlough from service had saved up \$300 to buy a kerosene refrigerator to take back. But he lent the money to a church friend so he could recover his pickup truck, which had been foreclosed for lack of payments. He was an old friend; it was certain he would repay.

Meanwhile the missionary pursued his itinerary. Week after week, month after month, he waited to receive a check from him by mail; but nothing came. Time got short; he worried. Was his friend unfaithful?

All this while he had been receiving bank statements from his inactive account in his little hometown bank. He tossed them all unopened in a drawer, for he wasn't using the account.

Finally, he looked at them. There, months before, was a mysterious deposit to his account of \$300. All this time he had been doubting his friend, while he had been faithful.

By virtue of His great sacrifice on His cross, your Savior deposited to your personal account the gift of justification, forgiveness of sin, eternal life. He details all the items of this Grand Deposit in Ephesians 1. Thus "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . chose us in Him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will." "In Him we were also

chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will." Ephesians 1:3-5, 11, NIV. You knew nothing of it. You did nothing to merit it or to effect it. It was yours all this while, while your human heart was in alienation from Him. You needed to learn what is the true Good News of what He has already done for you.

Then when you learned the Good News of the gospel, and you believed, you EXPERIENCED justification by faith, you rejoiced in sins forgiven, you began to know the new quality of life that is "eternal life." But it was all purchased for you at the cross of Christ, and deposited to your account "by grace." Totally undeserved.

Now give some thought to those myriads who have never understood the true Good News. They have to understand HOW "God so loved" that "He GAVE" all for them. Then genuine faith can grip their hearts and work the works of obedience.

There is a prayer that we can pray that the Lord will always answer with His enthusiastic "Yes!" Let's not denigrate the wonderful promise that the Lord Jesus makes to us in His Luke 11 parable—(and thank you, our beloved Gentile brother who has saved these fascinating stories for us!).

It's when we ask Him for some bread of life to give to someone else:

"Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him?"

“And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee.

“I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth” (Luke 11:5-8).

(a) There is enough “good news” in this parable for many sermons!

(b) You have been suddenly awakened at midnight by a dear friend who has come on a long journey.

(c) He is hungry.

(d) Your pantry is empty, not even a loaf of bread.

(e) So, you go bang on the door of your sleeping neighbor: “let me have three loaves of bread, not for myself, but for somebody else: a friend has come on his long journey and he is hungry. I am asking, so I can give to him.”

(f) Your selfish neighbor doesn’t want to help you; he and his children are deep in sleep; but you keep on banging on the door. You don’t stop.

(g) Finally, so he can get rid of you he gets up and gets you the bread you are asking—for someone else.

Jesus told the story to illustrate what the Lord is NOT like: He loves to give when we need something to give to someone else. Even at midnight.

(b) The Lord Jesus is presented as in contrast to the unwilling neighbor who must be begged and pleaded to give him a bit of bread to give to someone else!

(c) You don’t have to beg the dear Lord to answer this prayer; it’s the prayer that He promises ALWAYS to answer with a resounding “Yes!”

(d) “Asking to give” is what the Lord Jesus loves to hear us pray!

We become an essential part in His great plan of redemption for this lost world. We learn to participate by experience in His love for lost souls. Our naturally selfish heart has become awakened to the experience of His heart, which is love (*agape*).

Is anybody out there pals with Pope John Paul II? Talked with him on the phone lately? Had breakfast with him? Gone camping with him? Knows him personally, intimately?

He could be from another planet, he is so far away. Yet many accept him as “the vicar of Christ,” God’s vice-president on earth.

Jesus is closer to you than that. Yet to many people, He seems far-distant, some great celebrity, but not one intimate with them. The Bible insists that He is VERY close to us. The first page of the NT bills Him as “Immanuel . . . God with us” (Mt. 1:23). He tells us in the last book of the Bible that if we will open the door to His knocking, we will have a dinner date together in what the language means is close intimacy (Rev. 3:20). Isa. 50:4 says He is a private Tutor to us “morning by morning” if we will only listen like attentive students and not rebel against Him. Then Hebrews 2:9-18 describes Him as closer to us than a blood-sibling, closer than parents can ever be, an Alter-ego who tapes all our intimate conversations but never betrays our

confidence, Someone “made in all things like unto” us who is an Intimate so close that no English words can describe the relationship properly: “a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” That’s beyond the *Oxford English Dictionary* to define. The NT high priest to you is like your physician, except you are the only patient he has. He is the physician of your soul, a divine psychiatrist, one who understands your secret feelings. Heb 4:15 says “touched with the feeling of our weaknesses,” compassionate, but never soft with you, never excuses you for wrong doing but holds you to a high standard because He loves you. He reasons from cause to effect, is compassionate as well as firm with you. The best Friend you will ever have. And much closer than a Friend; your Savior. Tell Him your problems; don’t burden some earthly friend. Right now you are deciding for Him or for eternity without Him, depending on the way you are treating Him now. Make a choice to begin to appreciate what He is to you; you may feel like you’re talking to a statue because you are so alienated from Him. But be reconciled to Him. The closeness will come.

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!

My friend had just given me the little book that he hoped would find a treasured spot in my library. It had the price sticker still on it—97 cents. It was entitled “Seeking the Savior.”

The author was faithful to his title: the book went on to tell the many things I must do in order to find Jesus. The basic idea of the book is that the Savior of the world is hiding somewhere, and one must diligently search Him out.

My friend meant well; he wanted to help me. Thanks to him. And thanks to the author of the book who sincerely wanted to help his reader. I appreciated all the good intentions.

But the idea of Jesus hiding and waiting for us to find Him through diligent search is an Old Covenant idea, and Old Covenant thinking “genders to bondage” (Gal. 4:24).

The faith of Jesus is not another shop set up alongside Buddhism, Islam, Shintoism, etc. where you come to buy salvation. Jesus has given Himself to us; the Father “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” that whoever believes in Him should not go on perishing within himself (the original has this idea). But may have (now, present tense) eternal life.

The Bible idea is just what hungry, lonely hearts yearn to understand:

The Father is infinite, which means that He gives His full attention to every person on earth. He faithfully, meticulously watched over you when you were an embryo in your mother’s womb. (Psalm 139:13-16, NKJV).

Kneel before Him, and let each word penetrate; you’ve come to where you need to “enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6,

KJV). Just wait, wait; let Him say to you what He yearns for you to receive in your heart. The Lord Jesus is your Savior, He has given Himself to you. It’s not your job to go and dig Him out somehow, somewhere.

It’s your job to let the Holy Spirit melt your hard, worldly heart with the truth of His nearness.

The Father has so loved us, unworthy sinners, that He gave us His only Son, a gift for eternity. He is the “brother born for adversity” (Prov. 17:17), and our “Friend closer than a brother” (18:24). Jesus will forever remain what He was given to be—one of us, the Son of God but now forever, the Son of man. As He sits at the Father’s right hand in heaven, He feels lonely there, for His heart is with us.

He can never forget His divinity nor can He forget His humanity; He is one. He has promised to come again the second time, visibly, personally, literally; but not only does He want to keep His promise, He wants to come on His own—that His people may be with Him, one with Him (cf. John 14:1-3). The reason? He loves them!

That means He is lonely in heaven; He has loved every individual believer since the world began, vast multitudes now sleeping in the grave; He loved each one individually but the Lord Jesus knows them personally and He longs to bring us together in the resurrection morning. Think of the joy that awaits Him! Only someone infinite could experience a joy that will be infinite in itself!

We have often thought of the joy that will be ours in that glad morning; but let us enlarge our hearts a bit and think of the joy that will be His! And think

how He longs for that day to come, yet He has been disappointed time and again as His own people have in various ways postponed the joyous day.

In a great evangelistic campaign broadcast by satellite the speaker continually assured the worldwide audience that “Jesus wants to be your Best Friend.” Night after night this assurance was offered; but the implication was that He is not—not until you do something to make Him become your Best Friend, that is, you must first believe and obey.

There are sincere people who are alienated from God. They believe that He exists, but they have suffered so much pain in their lives, often from childhood beyond anything they did, good or bad, that they find it difficult to believe that He is already actually their Best Friend. They wish He were; but this idea has a resemblance to the carrot-on-a-stick allurements. Jesus will become your Best Friend IF, IF, you take the initiative in a change of your heart.

Is that the “evangel” that the Lord Jesus wants them to be told? Some say yes, or that wouldn’t have been told night after night.

He has commanded us to “Go into all the world, and preach the gospel . . .” (Mark 16:15). But what is the gospel?

Scholars and theologians contend endlessly; the best answer is the simple words of Jesus: “God so loved the world that He gave . . .” (John 3:16). That love came first; it was not dependent on any change of heart on the part of the sinner.

So much did He love that He gave His only Son; the deed already done. The giving on His part was for eternity; for each individual of the human race

He “tasted death” (Heb. 2:9, Greek). In other words, He died everyone’s “hell,” everyone’s second death (Acts 2:27). Yours.

Do you want a better Best Friend than that?

Thank Him from the depths of your soul for what He already is; and let the revelation of His love lead you to consecrate yourself totally to Him.

“Who is Jesus Christ?”

This simple question has engrossed the minds of sincere theologians and pastors for the better part of several centuries. Whenever it is suggested that He is the Savior of the world, the Savior of every man, severe caution has been expressed: don’t slide into the evil doctrine of Universalism for the Bible is too clear that many will eventually be lost and go into the lake of fire after the second resurrection when they gather around the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15).

So the idea has prevailed that Jesus Christ cannot be the Savior of every man unless every man first receives and believes Him. It’s only those who “believe in Him” who will not “perish,” John 3:16 says.

A few years back a prominent evangelist declared to young people worldwide that “Jesus wants to be your Best Friend,” but the idea is of course that He can’t be unless you open your heart, etc. (A very thoughtful, enlightened writer once wrote a book entitled Steps to Christ that said that Jesus Christ is already your Best Friend; then the publishers put out an edition for youth that said on the back cover, “Jesus Wants to be Your Best Friend.” This highly popular idea is intended to preserve the necessity

of obedience to the law; true, no one persisting in willful disobedience to the ten commandments will be saved eternally; he couldn't be happy!)

But there is not yet unanimity among theologians and evangelists as to who Jesus Christ is. They cannot embrace strict Calvinism that says He has predestinated some ("like the sand of the sea"?) to be lost eternally, and a few others to be saved eternally. (That idea has to be out.)

Hence an idea that rejects strict Calvinism—Jesus Christ is potentially "the Savior of all men" IF they take the initiative to elect Him to be so. Through the better part of several centuries this idea has prevailed.

But wait a moment. The problem is—therein lies the basic root of the idea that the sinner's ultimate salvation is due to his own initiative; and there lies the source of the nearly universal lukewarmness that pervades the church in these last days (Rev. 3:14-21).

What the Bible has been saying all along is that Jesus Christ is already the "Savior of the world" (John 4:42), the Savior of "all men" (Rom. 5:18), the sinner's Best Friend; but those who will be lost at last have chosen to resist and reject Him through unbelief; they have "frustrated the grace of God" (Gal. 2:21). This simple disclosure clarifies the theological conundrum.

The bottom line: repentance at last comes into focus (Rev. 3:19).

Is the Holy Spirit our Friend? You say, Yes, of course; but think: Jesus says that His first work is to "reprove the world of sin" (John 16:8). Is that fun?

The doctor does a scientific test and convinces you that you have a lethal disease. You "feel" okay and it hasn't worried you, but he says you must do something drastic now. Fun? Is the doctor your "friend"?

Now suppose he has many, many patients all with a lethal disease they don't want to recognize; and suppose they all reject his counsel to do something, even though he is genuinely their friend. Wouldn't he be unhappy?

Is it impossible to conceive of a patient being concerned for the reputation or happiness of his physician? Patients are usually consumed by a me-first mind-set; few make appointments to inquire how the doctor is, and give HIM treatments. Few if any are concerned that he not be forced out of business. The Good News is that the Holy Spirit is "reproving" or "convicting" "the world of sin." The Bad News is that most who need help (His "patients") reject His reproofs and convictions of sin, so that Satan hopes that in the end the Holy Spirit will be proven a failure. Satan's last hope is that "the people of God" will reject His reproof and be involved in the general ruin coming on the earth.

There's a better reason to listen to the Holy Spirit's conviction of sin, than our own little personal salvation. He is Christ's Vicar; His job is to "convict of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment," the latter because "the prince of this world is condemned" (John 16:9-11). In listening, in receiving His reproof, in giving up the sin He convicts you of, you honor Christ in this last battle of the millennia-long great controversy. The Holy Spirit is your Friend; now be

a friend to Him also. Say thanks to Him for His work.

People can make God very happy, or they can make Him sad. Abraham made Him so happy that He gave him the title “Friend of God” (James 2:23). He was so delighted with Abraham that He declared that all who embraced the same faith that he had must inherit the whole earth for an everlasting possession with everlasting life to go along with the gift!

Further, God was so happy with him that He promised him and all his descendants to become a great nation, the “head and not the tail,” the outstanding example to all the world of what God's salvation is all about. According to the Bible, what made God so happy was that Abraham “rejoiced to see,” to perceive, to understand, to grasp, to appreciate Christ as the world's Savior. He “believed in the Lord” (John 8:56; Gen. 15:6). Remember, the gospel was preached to him as it has been to us, Gal. 3:8.

Abraham's descendants were to be a corporate body on earth, a “nation,” God's church on earth that should evangelize the world. They would corporately honor His name before all the pagan nations.

It was a glorious idea! Israel was to be a nation of special people who would survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, whose richest gain they would count but loss, and pour contempt on all their pride. The Lord would fight for them and give them possession of the promised land; they wouldn't need to bear the sword (Ex.

14:14; Deut. 1:30; 3:22, etc.). He would use some agency that the wisest commentators still don't fully understand called “the hornet” (7:20) that would drive out their enemies.

But Israel largely failed. Even their best leaders blew it. God gave King Saul great military success with his sword; but it went to his head. Even David who praised the Lord in all his Psalms committed adultery with the wife of his bravest, most loyal soldier, Uriah the Hittite, and then murdered him. Solomon's vast wealth and wisdom went to his head. Kings such as Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat for whom the Lord wrought great miracles sullied their life record with tragic mistakes of pride. The prophets all longed for a national repentance that never came until Israel crucified their Messiah.

Now God has a world church through whom He longs to glorify His name before a bewildered, confused modern world in gross darkness. There is Good News: what Jesus died to accomplish will yet be achieved in His church—when they can pour contempt on all their pride.