

WORTH MORE THAN GOLD¹

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Electronics and computers are a fascination to me. I cannot understand how they work. When I look inside the machines I try to imagine how both voices and pictures can be sent through the air without any wires.

Our modern world is full of such marvelous inventions.

But no invention that man has ever made is as wonderful as man himself. Think of the mysteries of your own body, your muscles, bones, nerves, and your brain. Even the mind of a child is the most intricate mechanism of earth. It contains billions of tiny brain cells, and each designed to hold some vital item of information. Each is joined by a gigantic network of nerves which is more complex than any telephone grid in the world. Your power of memory is organized more expertly than the finest electronic computers ever devised. You are God's handiwork. God made "man a little lower than the angels, and has crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou has put all things under his feet" (Ps. 8:5, 6). Should not a human being therefore be the most highly respected subject on earth?

But as we look about us in the world today, we see that something has gone wrong. Man has been degraded and humiliated, and human life is cheap. Millions are ready to throw themselves away for

nothing, almost like prostitutes who will sell themselves for a little cash.

In Western societies, human beings become cogs in the giant wheels of progress. For example, they spend the better part of their lives assembling nuts or bolts on cars or putting tiny electronic parts together. Millions do this daily drudgery in giant factories.

Why do people think so little of themselves? The difficulty is that an enemy has deprived man of his proper place in creation. Satan is continually seeking to make us think that we are worth nothing.

But Someone came to fight this enemy and to set man free from his grasp, to restore him to the "glory and honor" he was made to enjoy. He lifted poor despised human beings to an entirely new way of life. He put into their hearts new hope, and gave them something worth living for. That Man is Christ. He made you worth more than gold. Because of what He did for you, you should respect yourself highly, and hold your head high anywhere.

You have tremendous possibilities wrapped up inside you. Before you is a life of infinite development of all your powers that are at present largely unused. The Lord says, "I will make a man more precious than fine gold" (Isa. 3:12). That person is *you*.

Who is the real Jesus Christ? Is He just a good man, perhaps better than other men? or should we consider him to be the Son of God?

If He is just a good man and nothing more, then He turns out to be the greatest liar and the most deluded fanatic ever to live on this earth, because

¹ Micah 5:2. 109, 111.

He claimed to be the Son of God and to have come from heaven! If He is nothing more than a good man, then the people who worship Him are idolaters. What we decide on this matter is extremely important.

Jesus Christ is a very unusual man. He has changed all human life all over the world. Many people believe in Him, and many say they do not; but even those who say they do not believe in Him speak of Him whenever they write the date. "A. D." means "Anno Domini," the year of our Lord. And even those who do not believe in Him admit that He was the best man who ever lived. Strange, isn't it? How can a person say that Christ is a good man, and yet consider Him a liar? If He was a good man, He must have been an honest man. And if He was a wise man, as you admit, He could not have been a deluded man.

Now, if you believe someone to be good and honest, you must believe what that person says, or else you must give up believing he or she is a good person. To go on saying "I don't know" is not good enough. The Bible says, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matt. 22:42). Let us see what the Bible says about who Christ is.

God wants all of us to have perfect freedom to decide about Him. We read in Matthew 16:13 that Christ asked the disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man am?" The disciples replied that the people were divided. Some said he was John the Baptist come back from the dead, or the prophet Jeremiah, or another of the prophets. John tells us that some of the people said, "He is a good

man; others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people" (John 7:12). It was rather like it is today, wasn't it? "There was a division among the people because of Him" (John 7:43).

Finally Jesus asked the disciples, "Whom say ye that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). They were silent for a moment, and it seemed that no one dared to speak. They had often wondered just who He was. They saw that no other man was like Him. What amazed them was not so much the miracles that He performed, but the perfect love impressed in everything that He said and did. Finally Peter spoke up for the group: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vs. 16).

The evidence that led Peter to decide this way is available for us to consider. No one can force us to believe one way or the other. But if we are honest in our hearts, the evidence will compel us to confess the truth!

Jesus gave good reasons in support of his claim to be the Son of God. Once the Jews arrested Him, intending to put Him in jail. One thing that annoyed them was that He claimed to be the Son of God. Because of his claim, they wanted to kill Him. But He made a strong defense before them, recorded in John 5:17-47.

Like any prisoner charged before a court, He knew that his own testimony would not be accepted as evidence. He started his defense by presenting his forerunner as his first witness: "There is another [John the Baptist] that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness that he witnesses of me is true" (vs. 32). What did John say: At the beginning

of Christ's ministry, "John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me" (John 1:29, 30).

Jesus proceeded to bring forth another "witness" in his defense before the Jews: "But I have greater witness than that of John; for *the works* which the Father hath given me to finish, *the same works that I do, bear witness of me*, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36). The miracles which Jesus performed were not merely wonders such as magician performs to excite people's wonder. Christ did not work a single miracles just to satisfy curiosity or to give proof that He as the Son of God. Each was simply a work of mercy to some person who was in great need. To the hopeless leper He said, "Be thou clean" (Matt. 8:3). To the blind man, He said, "Receive thy sight" (Luke 18:42). To the man with the paralyzed hand, he said, "Stretch forth thy hand" (Luke 6:10). To the stormy sea about to swallow up His disciples, He said, "Peace, be still" (Mark 4:39). To dead people whom their loved ones mourned, He said, "I say unto thee, arise" (Luke 7:14). And always to the guilt-stricken sinner He said, "Thy sins are forgiven" (Luke 7:48). Every act, every word, was an expression of divine love.

But there was still greater witness: "*The Father Himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me*" (John 5:37). We read of this great witness at the time of Jesus' baptism. "Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straight away out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He

saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon Him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:16, 17).

So far, Jesus had brought three great witnesses in support of his high claim. Now He brings an even more important witness: "*Search the Scriptures. . . . They are they which testify of me*" (John 5:39). Although we may not see John the Baptist, nor witness Jesus' actual miracles, nor hear the Father's mysterious voice from heaven, *we can examine the testimony of the Scriptures*. In fact, what the Bible says is a more powerful testimony than any miracle could be. If Christ were here in person to perform a miracle, many people would gather to watch it, and they would try to explain it away somehow, or consider it to be mere magic. But the Bible testimony is so clear that we can study it as much as we like until we are satisfied. Here are some examples of Bible testimony that Jesus is the Son of God, the world's true Saviour:

Christ was to be born of a virgin. "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call his name Emmanuel" (Isa. 7:14). ("Emmanuel" in the Hebrew language means "God is with us"). Matthew tells us how this prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus:

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise, when as His mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. . . . The angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary

thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. . . . Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God is with us” (Matt. 1:18-23).

The Scriptures also foretold the place of Christ’s birth: “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from old, even from everlasting” (Micah 5:2).

Mary and Joseph were living in a town some 90 miles away from Bethlehem. There seems no way for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem. But something happened:

“There went out a decree from Ceasar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. . . . And all went to be taxed every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from . . . Nazareth into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem” (Luke 2:1, 3, 4).

Mary went along with him, probably because she was afraid to stay alone in Nazareth. She was pregnant. It would appear that she did not expect the birth to take place so soon, because she was not prepared when the Baby came in Bethlehem. Luke writes as though the birth in a stable was unexpectedly sudden: “And so it was, while they were there, that the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth their first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling

clothes, and laid Him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn” (Luke 2:6, 7).

This little helpless Baby lying in a donkey’s feedbox in the Bethlehem stable was born in the most humble circumstances possible. And yet, as Micah said, He was the one “whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” Jesus said, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world.” “Before Abraham was, I am” (John 16:28; 8:58). In fact, this is another clear proof of Jesus’ divinity: the story of his birth rebukes our human pride!

Some wise men from the East recognized the star of Bethlehem as the sign of the birth of the Messiah. These were non-Israelites living far away, who had been studying the prophecies of the Old Testament. They were watching for the evidence that the Messiah had come. This is the prophecy that they had read: “There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17).

One night these men living in that far country saw a strange, beautiful star which they had never before seen in the sky. “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the kind, behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship Him” (Matt. 2:1, 2). If they had not been studying the Scriptures for themselves, think what a blessing they would have missed!

Isaiah gives further evidence that Jesus fulfilled prophecy. He says that when the Messiah, Christ, would appear, people would not see anything in Him to attract their eyes. He would appear as a humble man. We know enough about human nature to realize that if some dishonest person tries to pretend to fulfill Scriptures prophecy, he makes himself out to be some great person. But notice what Isaiah prophesied: “Behold, my servant. . . shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. . . . He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street” (Isa. 52:13; 53:2; 42:2).

Worldly-wise people saw nothing unusual in Jesus. This is because the wisdom that was manifest in Him was not mere human wisdom. It was greater than human wisdom, and only the eye of faith discerned Him for what He was in truth.

The greatest fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy in Christ was His message. Isaiah spoke of Him: “The Lord hath anointed Me to preach good tidings unto the meek; He hath sent Me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa. 61:1). When Jesus stood up to preach in His home village, He quoted this very passage: “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:21, 22). No one else has ever proclaimed “good tidings” like Jesus did!

His message was like honey to every hungry human soul. This in itself is conclusive evidence that He was the One sent of God.

The Old Testament Scriptures predicted that the true Messiah would be rejected by His own people. It seems strange that the Jews should be so foolish and so evil as to murder Him. This mystery has perplexed many people. But here is the clear proof that He is the true Messiah. This Scripture has opened the eyes of many individual Jews: “He is despised and rejected of man; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: . . . and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. . . . We did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:3, 4).

Not only the Jews, but the Romans as well, and the kings of the earth, despised Him. David prophesied that this would happen: “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His anointed [Messiah]” (Ps. 22). This was fulfilled in the attitude of Pilate and Herod Antipas against Jesus.

The way in which Jesus died was prophesied in the Old Testament. No other execution in all history has excited so much interest and wonder as the death of Jesus in a cross. If the Jews had only had eyes to see, they would have recognized that prophecy was fulfilled before their very eyes: “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for My meat; and in

My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink” (Ps. 69:21, 22). “The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced My hands and My feet. I may tell [count] all my bones: they look and stare upon me” (Ps. 22:16, 17); this was written about a thousand years before Christ).

Only a death on the cross could have fulfilled such a prediction.

At two times in His life, Jesus felt apparently forsaken by God. One was, of course, on the cross when He cried out, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Mt. 27:46). We read reverently the inspired account of His battle with temptation, in Psalm 22. He complained that His prayers were not being heard (vs. 2). It bothered Him that other people’s prayers were being heard, but not His (vs. 4, 5). His sense of self-esteem was at its nadir, He felt like He was nuthin’ going nowhere except to hell (vss. 6-8; see Ps. 16:10). You have never felt so depressed! He suffered the equivalent of what we would call a close encounter with a nervous breakdown; He was coming unglued (vs. 14, first part). And He felt that God was doing all this to Him (vs. 14, last part). The horror of the second death was closing in on Him, and it seemed no one cared, in Heaven or in earth. He was frightfully alone.

You ask, What good does His experience do you? You have your problems! The answer is: faith enables you to identify with Him. “I am crucified with Christ,” says Paul in behalf of all of us (Gal. 2:20). Yours and my poor little souls are stretched outsize to contemplate His experience; then, lo and behold, we find strength to endure our own temptation to

wonder and to doubt. The assurance comes quickly, You are a “joint-heir” with Christ so that if you “suffer with Him,” you will “also be glorified together” with Him (Rom. 8:17). You become intimately one with Christ; by understanding His experience of God-forsakenness, you overcome your own painful depression because the One who now lives in your heart is not only the Prince of sufferers but also “the Prince of life.” And just as His sufferings become yours by identifying with Him, so now your suffering becomes His so that He feels it all Himself. You have discovered life “in Christ,” and the package comes with “joy unspeakable” built-in—joy that still functions within the suffering (see 1 Pet 1:8).

The first chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews shows that Christ is fully God, telling how the angels worship Him when He was born in Bethlehem, and how the Father called Him God: “And unto the Son he saith, Thy throne *O God*, is for ever and ever” (Heb. 1:8).

But the second chapter of Hebrews proves just as conclusively that Christ is also fully man: “. . . Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same. . . . In all things . . . made like unto His brethren” (Heb. 2:9, 14, 17).

Being fully man, Christ “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:16). The “ladder” joins to *our* human nature; Jesus got under our load, fought our battle, knows how we feel, felt the pain we feel, endured our sickness, suffered under our guilt, and “tasted death for every man.”

Not only is Christ fully God; He is also fully man. In His loneliness and distress one night, Jacob had a dream that revealed the divine Saviour to him. He saw a ladder stretching all the way from heaven right down to where he was. Christ is that ladder, for He referred to Jacob's dream when He told Nathanael, "Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51). The ladder must not only reach into heaven himself (Christ must be God), it must also reach to the lowest depths of earth (Christ must be man). Christ gets hold of you and me down here and lifts us right up to heaven. He makes you worth more than gold!

Did the New Testament writers cleverly invent the story of Jesus? If so, why present to the world a Messiah born in a stable, cradled in a donkey's feedbox, rejected by the great men of the world, and finally executed on a cross like a common criminal? This was not the kind of Messiah the world wanted! And if we say that the disciples were clever enough to foresee the world would love the story of Jesus, then we get into an even greater difficulty; how could a handful of poor, uneducated fishermen in Galilee be clever enough to think up such a story?

Does your heart say, "Thank you, Lord"? those who reject Christ find it difficult not to believe the truth. They have to *fight* all this clear evidence in order not to believe.

But whether or not a man believes or disbelieves, the fact remains that he owes a "Thank You!" to the Lord Jesus who made light and life possible for him

to enjoy. Christ is the unseen, often unrecognized Benefactor of the entire world. "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:9-11). He "hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). For "every man that cometh into the world" He has brought *life*; whether you believe or not, your life has come through Him. And for them who do believe, He has also "brought *immortality* to light."

Don't you think the time has come for the truth to be known, to set the record straight, to tell the world that facts about the life, death, and coming back to life again of the Son of God?

Christ is the man who was first made "more precious than fine gold." Because of him, now you too have the same value. When you think of your weaknesses and mistakes, you may think that you are not worth much. But remember the price God has paid for you. Suppose I have a rough stone in my hand. I picked it up in a field. If I try to sell it, no one would give me even a nickel for it. This is not because a stone is inherently bad, but because it is so common it is worthless. (*Eros* is not bad; it's worthless, for it is as common as stones.)

Now suppose that as I hold this rough stone in my arms, I could love it as a mother loves a baby. And suppose that my love could work like alchemy and transform it into a piece of solid gold. My fortune would be made. This is an illustration of what *agape* does to us.

Of ourselves we are worth nothing other than the dubious chemical value of our bodies' ingredients. But God's love transforms us into a value equivalent to that of His own Son: "I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir" (Isaiah 13:12).

Doubtless you have known some example of human flotsam that has been transformed into a person of infinite worth. John Newton (1725-1807) was one. A godless seafarer who dealt in the African slave trade, he became a drunken wretch who fell victim to the people he tried to enslave. At length *agape* touched his heart. He gave up his vile business, was transformed into an honored messenger of glad tidings. Millions remember him for his hymn that discloses the "fine gold" that he became:

"Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.
'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear,
The hour I first believed."

Natural human love goes in search of God. All heathen religions are based on the idea of God being about as elusive as a cure for cancer. People imagined that He is playing hide-and-seek and has withdrawn Himself from human beings. Only special ones are wise or clever enough to discover where He is hiding. Millions go on long journeys to Mecca, Rome, Jerusalem, or other shrines, searching for

Him. The ancient Greeks outdid all of us in building magnificent marble temples on their highest hills in which they felt they must seek Him.

When you go into the shop to buy something for money, you first think carefully whether the thing you want is of equal value to your money. Then you gladly pay the money across the counter and take the thing that you have bargained for. So, God has bought *you*. "Ye are bought with a price," with the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). "Banish no longer your self-respect; for I have bought you with the price of My own blood. You are Mine."² Christ has paid us our wages, even His own blood and suffering. . . ."³

In God's sight, you are now reckoned as of equal value with His Son! He gave *Him* for *you*. *You* are the "world" that God "so loved."

You can give Him something that no one else in the world can give Him—your personality, your heart. You are different from any other person in the whole world, and He loves you just as you are. Whatever mistakes you have made, He understands why you made them, and takes on Himself all the blame. And as you believe in Him truly as your Saviour He saves you from sin, and transforms your heart.

² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 519.

³ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 330.