

RESTORATION



*Easter Edition
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Dear friends!

*“Christ is Risen!
He is Risen Indeed!”*

With the words of this ancient greeting on our lips we bring life, renewal, warmth, grace, love and blessing to each one of you this Easter. We celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and the knowledge of our Heavenly Father’s all-encompassing love.

What a joy and privilege it is to be children of God, members of His great family – the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the temple of the Holy Spirit today, we truly enjoy the blessings of His abundant life.

We want to encourage you this Easter to really take inventory of all the true riches you have been given by the Lord... of how all of this is yours by His grace. “It is finished!” Christ uttered these words as He died for our sins on the Cross. In Him all things are perfected and complete. What a difference for you and me, for all who are near and all who are far!

Celebrate this Easter rejoicing in the fellowship of the saints – the fellowship we have entered into with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! Exult over His victory and proclaim it, as you confess the Risen Lord! May His love, joy, grace, mercy, and forgiveness fill your hearts and homes; may they flow as rivers of living waters from you to all who are weary and heavy laden!
PEACE BE WITH YOU!

In His great Love,

Tatiana and Kevin Webster

A PRAYER IN SPRING

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers to-day;
And give us not to think so far away
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white,
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;
And make us happy in the happy bees,
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird
That suddenly above the bees is heard,
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
And off a blossom in mid air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,
The which it is reserved for God above
To sanctify to what far ends He will,
But which it only needs that we fulfil.

- Robert Frost, 1915



THEY CALLED HIM SIMON

They called him Simon. Every fifth boy in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas was called by that name. The boy grew up in the evening shadows of the great city nearly two miles from the Temple Mount, though just out of its view, in the suburb of Bethany, a town known for its houses to care for the sick and the poor. He went to school here and was of the class of student that excels in everything he does. His father, wealthy and well-connected, was able to send him to the great, liberal Pharisaic school of Rabbi Gamaliel, founded by the Rabbi's grandfather, Hillel the Elder. Here, as did Saul of Tarsus, he studied at the feet of the great Rabbi Gamaliel. Eventually he became a Pharisee, but at some point in his youth tragedy struck in the form of a death sentence. He was diagnosed with leprosy! Perhaps it had happened through contact with the sick in Bethany many years before, who could tell, and what did it matter? The only thing that mattered now was that there was no cure, not even in Bethany. There was no going home again. There was only one road to travel – that of the outcast – and travel it he would unto death. Now when they spoke of him at home, everyone attached an awful label to his name; from here on out he would be known as Simon the Leper.

It's difficult for us to imagine the depth of darkness that his life plunged into as he fell under the weight of his disease. Leprosy is a bacterial infection contracted, like the common cold, through a cough or contact with fluid from the nose of an infected person. Until the middle of the 20th Century there was no known cure. Throughout history the fear of it and stigma attached to it could be compared only to that of the HIV virus today. If one was infected he would never know, for a period of from two to ten years, when the first symptoms appeared. So, one morning Simon awoke and noticed the characteristic marks on his skin and was struck with terror. What awaited him but the long years of the slowly progressing illness? Eventually he would lose all feeling in his extremities, be covered by infectious wounds, lose all his masculine virility, have his face turned to that of a repugnant monster, and finally go completely blind. As an outcast from society, he could live in a leper

colony totally dependent on the mercy of others and completely cut off from all contact with his family, friends, and the work he had trained for from youth. Never again would he enter the Temple. Never again would he be welcomed at the Sanhedrin. The study of the Torah and the life of a Rabbi were lost to him forever. The inability to exercise the demands of his mind would slowly kill his soul with boredom and inactivity just as the infection was killing his body.

Years passed and with every sunrise Simon thought in the emptiness of his existence of nothing but the day's sunset when he could once again retreat from reality into the world of his dreams. In the beginning, while his mind still functioned, he despised the sleepless nights that ended with nightmares just before the dawn. But as time passed and his senses dulled, he began to sleep deeply and it seemed to him that he only truly lived in the fantastic world of his imagination. O, vanity of vanity! Finally, like a demon dragging him into hell, apathy took ahold of his entire being. He forgot what it meant to dream and lost the ability to feel anything. Of all the Scripture he once knew by heart there was left only a solitary verse of a single Psalm on the lips of Simon the Leper: "Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me." The coals of faith burned very low in his heart, but still they burned. At times he remembered this verse and would pray to God the next words of the Psalm: "Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee."

The Gospels never reveal to us how or when Simon was cleansed from his leprosy. All we know is that he was healed. Perhaps it happened through the ministry of Jesus' disciples when they were sent by Him to preach the Kingdom "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10). That was when He gave them authority to "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out devils." If this be so, then imagine with what joy Simon anticipated the meeting with Jesus at the feast he had planned in his home in Bethany. Jesus had been invited, and with him Simon had invited Lazarus, the very one who just a few days earlier Jesus had raised from the dead. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, famous in Bethany for her hard work and many good deeds to the poor and sick, had been invited to come also. This, as far as we can imagine from what we are told, would be Simon's first meeting with the Master by whose power

he, like Lazarus, had been returned from the dead to the land of the living. At last, the chance of a lifetime to meet Him personally! Would He not now answer the questions of Simon's heart – questions he had often discussed with other liberal Pharisees like Nicodemus: Is Jesus the Prophet? Is He our Messiah?

That evening, two days before the Passover, everything was made ready in the home of Simon. Life was still not easy for him. Though the priests themselves in the Temple had proclaimed him cleansed from leprosy, the people of Bethany from habit still remembered and still referred to him as Simon the Leper. For this reason he rarely went out of his home. It was



much less complicated for this Pharisee to simply sit in his rooms and receive those few whom he could call friends. Having lived as an outcast for so many years, he had learned the habits of an outcast and couldn't change them. But today was a new day! Today the whole city would come to the home of Simon the Leper because Jesus was his honored guest.

"It is well," thought Simon as he sat and waited for the party to start, "that my invitation to Lazarus and Martha strongly implied that by no

means would I tolerate them bringing their sister, Mary, into my home tonight. I wouldn't usually mind her presence, but not tonight when so many will be gathered who once respected me as a Rabbi. After all, according to any interpretation of the Law, this woman is unclean. I know that she gave up her 'profession' to follow Jesus. And, of course, I know that not only does her family love her, but Jesus Himself seems to have a respect for her. But He will understand. He, like me, is a Rabbi, and He knows the Law. I certainly didn't want to offend any of them by not inviting her, but, after all, is it not true that there is not a single man or woman in Bethany who does not know of her reputation. Once a prostitute, always a prostitute... at least in their minds!

Jesus spoke of this woman (we know from John that she was Mary) that "whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman has done, be told for a memorial of her." Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John each include this beautiful story in their respective Gospel accounts. Each has recorded different details about the feast that evening at Simon's home. If we were to read only one of their testimonies, to listen to only one of their voices, then we would never know the entire history, we would never hear each stanza of the song from beginning to end. If we disunite them, examine them individually without looking at the whole, it seems that they are quite contradictory one to the other. For example, John 12:1 says: "Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany..." and then says in verse 2: "There they made him a supper..." However, Matthew and Mark say that the supper at Simon's home occurred two days before Passover. Luke, on the other hand, includes the story with completely new information in a completely different part of his Gospel in such a way that the reader might think that there were actually two different suppers held at the house of Simon and two different women who anointed Jesus with incense. But this is not so.

John speaks only of when Jesus came to Bethany but indicates neither which day exactly Martha helped prepare the feast nor on whose divan Jesus reclined to eat. (By the way, it is essential to an understanding of the story to know that the men reclined on pillows as on a divan around a low table while they ate, and the women served them at this table but ate separately from the men.) Concerning the chronological order of Luke

one must take into account that he writes at the beginning of his Gospel (Luke 1:1-4) that “having a perfect understanding of all things from the very first” (this he gained through investigation, not being himself an eyewitness), it “seemed good” to him “to write... in order” the story of Jesus, so that those who were already believers would “know the certainty of those things,” in which they had “been instructed.” However, “order” does not mean that everything Luke writes is written in chronological order. It means, rather, that Luke was recording the life of Jesus of Nazareth in a logical order that would accomplish the purpose for which the Spirit of God had him write this Gospel. In other words, Luke’s method is one of ordering things toward a convincing logic, one that will make certain all the things Jesus taught. In chapter 7 where he records this story, he first tells of what Jesus said concerning John the Baptist and the Pharisees who rejected the baptism of repentance and could not by their own self-righteous religion enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The story of what occurred that evening at Simon’s house fits logically with these words of Jesus as a perfect illustration, so Luke includes it here. Nowhere does Luke write that this story happened chronologically right at this time in the ministry of Jesus. Actually, in the Greek, the first verse of chapter 8 which follows immediately after this story uses the exact word, “order,” that is found in Luke 1:3. It is translated into English as “afterward” (KJV). In the Greek it says here literally: “And it happened in this same order...” By this Luke is actually indicating that he has placed something out of order and is now returning to the chronological order of his story.

Allow me, dear reader, to return you again to the house of Simon, whom the people called “the Leper.” As I have mentioned, the wonderful things that happened that evening in his home are recorded by all four of the Gospel writers. These things are wonderful because they reveal to us the greatest wonder of all – the power of God’s love to forgive a person’s sin. His love uproots all shame and hatred from the heart and plants itself deeply there in their place. When it is allowed by faith to grow and blossom, it makes the person able to love others, himself, and God with the love by which God first loved him.

In this story there are, other than Jesus, three main characters:

1. Mary – she who has received God’s forgiveness and has learned to forgive herself and all who have offended her. She has learned this so well that there is no shame left in her as she stands before God. When a person is not ashamed before God, he has no shame or fear left in him before men.
2. Judas Iscariot – he who has rejected God’s forgiveness and has learned to hate himself and all others to the point that he will betray Jesus unto death, heap shame upon himself eternally, hang himself, and die ingloriously.



3. Simon the Leper (aka Simon the Pharisee) – a man in the balance with one foot in hell and the other at the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven. Healed in his body by the power of Jesus, he has yet to be forgiven in his spirit by His love. Simon has received Jesus as a great Teacher, Prophet, and perhaps even as Messiah sent by God to save Israel. But, you see, forgiveness is something so much

more than a mental agreement with who Jesus is. It is a personal experience of the heart that stands naked before the Almighty God. If someone offended you, you could forgive the offence committed formally, but no one other than God Himself could cleanse the heart of the offender and forgive his sin. As a leper, Simon knew that sin and all the consequences of sin were hidden in the depths of his spirit, soul, and body. As a Pharisee and a Jew calling himself a son of Abraham, he could never agree with this leprous fact and confess his sin. And herein lies the conflict of his inner man that completely unravels the harmony of his psyche and prevents him from coming to God. The knowledge of sin (innocence was lost) and the pride of his religion waged war in his ego on a battleground that he cannot cross to the other side without being annihilated. The fatal sin is not the harlotry of Mary; it is the unbelief of Judas. Mary is already saved, Judas is already damned; and Jesus will use them both as examples this night in Simon's home before the eyes of the host himself in order that he might see clearly how to escape the jaws of hell and achieve eternal life.

Let's read the story as it is presented by all four of the Gospel writers. As we read, we will gather the words together in harmony. Our text will be from the NASB. The words of John are written below in regular print, the words of Mark in **bold print**, Matthew's are underlined, Luke's in *italics*, and where necessary for clarity a single word has been added in (parentheses):

Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **Now the Passover and Unleavened Bread were two days away; and the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to seize Him by stealth and kill Him; for they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise there might be a riot of the people."** So they made him a supper there at the home of Simon the leper, *one of the Pharisees, (who) was requesting Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisees house and reclined,* and Martha was serving, and Lazarus was one of those reclining at the table with Him.

*And there was a woman in the city, Mary, who was a sinner; and when she learned that He was reclining at the table in the Pharisees house, she brought an alabaster vial **of very costly perfume of pure nard; and she broke the vial and poured it over His head.** Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and standing behind Him at His feet, weeping, she began to wet His feet with her tears, and kept wiping them with the hair of her head, and kissing His feet and anointing them with the perfume; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.*

But the disciples were indignant when they saw this. Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, said, “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” Now he said this not because he was concerned about the poor, but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box, he used to pilfer what was put into it.

But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? For she has done a good deed to Me. For you always have the poor with you; but you do not always have Me. For when she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. Truly I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be spoken of in memory of her.”

Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet He would know who and what sort of person this woman is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.” And Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” And he replied, “Say it, Teacher.”

“A moneylender had two debtors: one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they were unable to repay, he graciously forgave them both. So which of them will love him more?” Simon answered and said, “I suppose the one whom he forgave more.” And He said to him, “You have judged correctly.” Turning toward the woman, He said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I

*entered your house;
you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has wet My feet with
her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave Me no kiss; but
she, since the time I came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet. You
did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with
perfume. For this reason I say to you, her sins, which are many,
have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven
little, loves little.”*

*Then He said to her, “Your sins have been forgiven.” Those who
were reclining at the table with Him began to say to themselves,
“Who is this man who even forgives sins?” And He said to the
woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and
they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see
Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead. But the chief priests
planned to put Lazarus to death also; because on account of him
many of the Jews were going away and were believing in Jesus.

*Then one of the twelve, named Judas Iscariot, went to the chief
priests and said, “What are you willing to give me to betray Him
to you?” And they weighed out thirty pieces of silver to him. From
then on he began looking for a good opportunity to betray Jesus.*

“Who then must this Jesus be? Who is this Man by whose power I was
healed and Lazarus was raised from the dead?” Simon must have
meditated on these questions all night. “If He receives worship from a
woman such as Mary who the whole city considers a sinner, and if He
then forgives her sin...? Who does He think He is? God? How could this
woman who was always crazy, full of demons...? Those tears flowing
sincerely from her heart, that freedom to worship, that love... Where did
it all come from? What happened here tonight in my home, under my roof,
at my table? Yes, it’s true, He’s right; I forgot to wash His feet or anoint
His head with oil. Why, I didn’t even honor Him properly as a guest, but
treated Him as one of my servants! I thought only of myself, of what He
could do for me. I always think only of myself! Does anyone ever think
of Him? Even His own disciples don’t think of Him, and Judas quite

obviously has no respect for Him at all... Could it be that He is God? How else could He forgive her sin? And could it be that Judas so viciously hates God? But how could this Jesus dare to claim to be the Son of the Living God? Is He crazy? Is He demonized? Could He be out and out telling lies? Impossible! How could He wield power over leprosy and over death itself if He were a madman, a demoniac, or a charlatan? So, He's God... But if He's God, how can He speak of His death and burial. Can God die? And for what would He die if He could?"

So, dear reader, the Bible leaves Simon in this awful position of indecision and never lets us know exactly if, days after this when Jesus is crucified, buried, and raised again, he ever did receive forgiveness and salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus. Simon's dilemma is left purposely unresolved, because it is the dilemma each one of us must face with each new Passover. Easter is the season of new beginnings. It is left to us to decide this year who we will be and in whose footsteps we will follow. Will we follow Mary, receive Jesus afresh as our Lord and our God, and generously lavish on Him all the riches of our heart and life in extravagant love? Or will we follow in the steps of Judas Iscariot, reject the demands of our Lord, and betray Him afresh unto death? One thing is



certain; we will not be able to stand long in the position where Simon was left, shifting back and forth between two polar opposites. There are really only two roads open to a man in this life. One leads to death, and the other leads to eternal life.



IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE: THE TED EMENS TESTIMONY

I was born and raised in Northern California by my mother, and spent summers and holidays with my dad in the Bay Area. It was when I was about 8 years old that my father had his own life-changing experience with Jesus and moved to Northern Nevada to start his new life. My dad was married shortly after this and I spent my summers and holidays in Yerington, Nevada with my dad, and my new step-family. These summertime visits were when I was first exposed to God's word and the whole church experience. I was very receptive to the Gospel, I asked God to forgive me of my sins, and accepted Jesus as my Savior. Shortly thereafter I was baptized with my father. The problem was that, although I had made Jesus my Savior, I hadn't given Him Lordship in my life.

When I returned home to my mother's house in California, I simply returned to the life of a young boy with no church, and no godly influence in my life. By the time I was in my teens, I was abusing every drug I could get my hands on. I started smoking marijuana and experimenting with LSD, but it was methamphetamine, or "speed," that hooked me. I loved the adrenaline rush of the high and I started using daily before I even finished high school. God was the farthest thing from my mind, and I didn't even want to spend time at my dad's house in the summer because it would mean I had to be away from my friends and the drugs.

My father and step-mother knew by the time I was finishing high school that I had some problems, but I wouldn't allow them to have a place in my life to really have any influence on me, so all they could do was pray for me.

Right after I turned 18 I spent my first few nights in jail for being in possession of drugs and paraphernalia. I never told my dad about that first arrest. I still believed I had control of my life and didn't want to hear anything about the Lord. It was during this time that I became a father

and my girlfriend gave birth to our daughter. I was obviously not responsible enough to be a parent, and she left me, moving a thousand miles away, and taking my daughter with her. It didn't take long before I had gone to jail several times for various things, like car theft, possession of stolen property, and possession of illegal drugs. God had created me and gifted me with great mechanical and technical skills. I could just naturally understand how things worked and could fix just about anything. However, because I was a drug addict and a thief, I began using those gifts and talents to come up with more sophisticated ways to steal things and get away with it.

By the time I turned 24 years old, I had already been in jail about five times and sentenced to a 1-year rehabilitation program at a church. After I finished that program, I still hadn't surrendered my heart to God and it was barely a year after that I was back on drugs and arrested with another stolen vehicle. This was the last straw for the local justice system... the judge sentenced me to 32 months in prison.

Even through all of this, my family never turned their back on me. My dad never stopped praying for me. I finished my prison sentence and learned the graphic arts and printing trade while I was incarcerated. When I was released I was reunited with my girlfriend whom I had left pregnant when I went to prison. My first son was already almost a year old when I was released. Once again life was going well, I had a job and an apartment, but I still didn't have the peace of God. I got married and my wife and I had our second son. I started a good career at a major newspaper, and was staying away from the drugs. But as soon as life threw a few challenges at me, I went looking for a high to help numb the pain. My wife and I had some financial and health problems and we started fighting all the time. We agreed to separate temporarily and spend some time apart, and it was my opportunity for freedom. I immediately ran back to my old friends and started to use meth again... this time injecting it with a needle. It took less than six months for me to lose my job, wreck my car, and land back in jail facing a sentence of 25 years-to-life.

The California justice system was tired of playing with me and wanted to lock me up for the rest of my life, with a very slim chance of parole after

the year 2027. My life had come to an end. I had left everyone who cared about me with a broken heart. I had left my three children fatherless, and yet another girl pregnant with another son.

It was after just a few days in jail that I picked up the bible in my jail cell and started to read. It only took a few minutes for God's word to penetrate my heart. I was in tears on my knees in my jail cell telling God that I had destroyed my life, and I was sorry. I told Him that if He was really there, and really listening to me, to please take my life and do something with it. I cried for what seemed like hours as God's love cleansed me of all my sin.

I stayed in jail going to court for ten months. It was during this time that I spent hours every day reading God's word and free teachings made available by people like Kenneth Hagin, Joyce Meyer, and Kenneth Copeland. My faith was growing very rapidly because of all the time I had to spend in prayer and in God's word. I started a Bible study and prayer group in my jail dorm and God increased it until 42 of the 48 inmates in my dorm were attending daily. I saw God use me, even as a young disciple, to impact the lives of many of my fellow inmates. There were miracles of healings and deliverance from addictions, some people had their charges dropped and walked out into freedom the same day we prayed with them. It was during this time that I began to confess that God had another plan for me. I would tell people that God was going to turn my situation around. God was going to do a miracle in my court proceedings and I was going to go free.

As my trial and sentencing drew near, I was informed that the girl who was pregnant with my third son was sentenced to complete a drug program with her and my newborn son because when she gave birth to our son they both tested positive for methamphetamine. Child Protective Services (CPS) forced her to enter a drug program for women with infants, but she left there after only two weeks and she left my son there. Child Protective Services placed my baby boy in foster care for infants and came to the jail to collect a DNA sample from me, in order to verify I was his father. They told me they could hand my baby, Christopher, over to my mother once they verified I was his father. CPS returned to the jail to give me the results of the DNA test a week before my sentencing. The

lady looked at me through the glass very seriously. She picked up the phone and said, “Hi, Mr. Emens. I came to bring you the results of the DNA test on Christopher. They confirm that Christopher is your son; however, I’m afraid I have some bad news: I was informed this morning by the foster care facility that Christopher died in his sleep last night.”

I was devastated. I had only a photo of my little boy. I never got to hold him in my arms. I never got to tell him how much I loved him.

As I returned to my cell after the visit, I only remember silence and anger. I was angry at God. I wanted to know why he would let my innocent child suffer for mine and his mother’s sins. I sat in my jail cell and cried and yelled at God. After I cried for a long time, I picked up my Bible hoping to find some solace there. The place I opened up to read from was 2 Samuel 11 and 12. David fasted and prayed that the Lord would spare his son, but when the child died, David got up and went to the house of the Lord and worshiped. I heard God in that moment telling me, “I want you to worship me, even in this dark moment.” So I began to worship the Lord in my jail cell and I felt His amazing love cover me in that moment like I had never felt before. I knew that God was right there with me in that painful place.

One week later I went to see the judge to receive my sentence. I was still confessing God’s amazing grace and was so confident that the judge would read the letters sent by my family and by myself and he would be moved by God to be merciful to me and sentence me to another live-in drug program. But when the judge handed down my sentence, he showed no mercy. He said, “Mr. Emens, I’ve heard testimony of how smart and gifted you are from employers and family members, but I have seen in your actions what you are capable of. I believe a smart criminal is ten times more dangerous than a dumb criminal, so I have no choice but to give you the maximum sentence of 25 years to life in the state prison system. You will have the opportunity for a parole board to decide if you deserve to be released, but not until after you have served the minimum of 25 years. You may or may not be released after the year 2027.”

As they led me out of the courtroom in handcuffs, all I could hear were the sobs and screams of my mother. When my mother came to visit me at

the jail that afternoon, she told me she felt as if she had just attended my funeral. All that kept going through my mind was that I had failed my mother and my children, and God had failed me... again.

This time I returned to my cell with the idea that I should just tie a sheet around my neck and end my life. There was no way I could handle the rest of my life in a maximum security prison. God would not allow me to entertain those thoughts very long. As I cried out to Him in my cell, asking Him why, He filled my jail cell with His presence once again, and filled me with the strength and peace to face the consequences of my choices.

When I got to prison to start my sentence, I made it clear to everybody around me that I was serving Jesus until my life was over, and I was not going to be pressured into joining anybody's gang or prison political party. I was shunned and ridiculed for being a "Bible Thumper" for several years. However, I met a few fellow believers and we began conducting our own study and prayer group in the facility. As I continued to grow in my faith and understanding of the Word of God, I began taking turns with two other brothers preaching on the weekends. I started Bible college through correspondence and also took classes to complete my associates degree in Addiction Counseling. I completed my AS Degree with a 3.8 GPA, and helped create a youth mentoring group inside the prison.

By the time I had been there for about six years, I had earned the respect of even the hardest inmates. They would tell me that they didn't understand why I would want to live like a Christian, but they respected my choice because I didn't just say it, I actually lived it. I saw God use me in so many ways. Lives were being changed – including my own.

After 10 years of incarceration, God helped me prepare a petition to submit to the judge who sentenced me. I was asking for a new sentence based on my clean disciplinary record, and all of the rehabilitative efforts I had made with my education. The law only allowed me one chance to make this request. If I was denied, I would never be able to ask again.

When the court received my petition, they set a date to hear my case, but I would not be present. I had to call home from prison that afternoon to

ask my family what the judge's decision was. I had spent the past several days fasting and praying. I was emotionally exhausted.

The prosecutor had stood before the judge and reminded him of what a horrible criminal past I had. He told him that if he granted my request I would just get out and commit more crimes and hurt more people.

The judge looked at all the evidence I had submitted in my petition, and told the prosecutor that everything he had said was true, but it was true of the person who was convicted 11 years earlier. He went on to say that the evidence showed that I was not the same person he had convicted. He reversed my life sentence and re-sentenced me to 10 years in prison. Since I had already served 11 years, he said I was free to be released without supervision!

This reminded me of how Satan stands there to accuse us of all of our sin, and how God sees us under the blood of His Son, Jesus, and declares, "He's not the same person anymore."

I was released from prison on March 16, 2013. God, in His infinite grace, chose me for His Kingdom. Now I am not only free from my past addictions and choices, I am free from my old sinful nature and I have the Spirit of the Living God in me to lead me.

I can declare as the Apostle Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ! It is no longer I who live, but He who lives in me. And the life that I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Gal.2:20)

When I sometimes question how God could use someone like me, He always reminds me of a Word He gave to me when I was still in my jail cell, just a baby in Christ:

"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are

despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” (1 Cor. 1:26-29)

Now I am living an extremely blessed life of freedom. God has blessed me with a good job, a great family, and an amazing godly wife. We are privileged to serve the Body of Christ in our local church, and we are excited about what God is going to do next in our lives.



STALIN, AMERICA, AND EASTER FOR THE PRISONERS

Eufrosinia Kersnovskaia (1907-1994) spent 12 years in the Soviet Gulag. Her notebooks illuminate the little-studied experience of women and children in the camps, and reveal a perceptive, reflective individual struggling to integrate her values with the cruelty and inhumanity surrounding her.

Kersnovskaia's experiences reflect a tumultuous time in Russian history. Her family, members of the gentry, fled Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution and settled in Bessarabia. After Soviet forces arrived in 1940, she and her mother were turned out of their home and their possessions seized by the state.

Eufrosinia was deported to Siberia as an "exile settler" and assigned to a logging brigade. An attempted escape, during which she traversed more than 900 miles of Siberian taiga alone and on foot before being captured, resulted in a death sentence. Though she refused to ask for clemency, her sentence was commuted to ten years' imprisonment in the Gulag. During her years in the camps, she adapted to work as a swineherd, a medical

assistant, a morgue attendant, and a miner. In the process she both witnessed and experienced many atrocities and degradations, but nevertheless retained a sense of hope, decency, community, and vision.

After her release she settled in Yessentuki, a town in the Northern Caucasus, and penned her memoirs, which eventually comprised 12 notebooks and 680 illustrations. She made several copies (including the illustrations) by hand and entrusted them to others for safekeeping. Kersnovskaia envisioned the text and illustrations as an indivisible whole, a genre that perhaps lies somewhere between traditional Russian lubok engravings and the modern graphic novel. (www.gulag.su)

The following is an excerpt from Chapter 9 of the Sixth Notebook. The events describe Easter 1944 in the Siberian Gulag just hours before Kersnovskaia was exiled from even deeper into the Arctic area of Norilsk for many years. (The cover of this issue is an Easter lily drawn by her in Norilsk in 1959.)

Tomorrow would be a new day, April 14, 1944. It was Easter, but I would have never guessed. I didn't mark the days. What's the point of marking them? For a prisoner there is never a holiday or weekend. Suddenly, that evening one of the guards burst into our barracks and said, "Well, girls, tomorrow you get a day off! You can thank the Americans for that! Their President asked Comrade Stalin to let you have Easter as a holiday... Enjoy your rest!"

Such a roar arose that I couldn't understand what everyone was shouting. It must have been, "Long live Stalin!" but it sounded more like, "Long live America!"

All I could think of was Marucya Boguslavko (a historical person from the times of the battle for the deliverance of the Ukrainian people in the XVII Century). This great warrior-princess turned prisoner felt inspired to propagate the better life. She entered a dungeon with 700 poor Cossacks kept in chains and announced to them that today was the Great Holiday, Easter... O, how those prisoners cursed her:

*Marucya Boguslavko, back away!
So much happiness and joy you say
As you proclaim to us a holiday...
Marucya Boguslavko, may it be
Happiness and joy you'll never see
Because you told us about Easter!*

How sad it is to celebrate Easter all alone in a strange land, and all the more so a prisoner. But it is what it is. At least I'll get a little rest, get to sleep in. This is what I'll do: I'll sleep during the day in the sun, and before that all night I'll sit up on the roof of the barracks out under the starry sky. One is not supposed to sleep on the eve of Easter. Anyway, who wants to spend all night in the stuffy, stifling barracks, fighting with the bed bugs and listening to all the "warrior-princesses" groaning and crying in their sleep? Nope. If it's gonna be Easter, I'm gonna celebrate it like Easter!



What's so special about this night? It's not even a special date on the calendar every year: just another night... A spring night and that means a cold night, and a dark night when the moon won't even rise until midnight and will already be waning at that. All the same, just the words, "Easter Eve," fill my heart with so many wonderful memories!

There's no holiday that you get ready for quite the way you prepare for Easter. Before Easter you fast for seven weeks. Even those who do not fast know that for "40 days and 40 nights" Christ was in the wilderness battling temptation, despair,

and loneliness as a man. God was a man. And a person should feel, especially at Easter, his closeness to God... even if that person is lying on a rooftop with some old rag supported by bricks on a board as a bed... even if that person has been fasting for four years and doesn't feel God close to him or anywhere around him, and the only presence he feels is that of a completely different governing authority!

I must say, there really was some kind of enchantment that night. Especially when the sun began to rise – the huge, clear sun of an Easter morning. I didn't close an eye that whole frosty night. Some would say I couldn't sleep because of the cold; I know it was from all my memories.

Why did I follow every star with some kind of sad feeling that I couldn't understand? Why, when the sun was rising and its rays immediately warmed me, did I feel not the joy of Easter but a sadness that clenched my heart? Could that have been a premonition? It is possible that somehow I knew what I couldn't have known then: that I would never see another normal sky with a regular, 24-hour movement of day and night, for another 12 years?

I turned my face to the west. Before me was a large, sprawling city where the walls of tall buildings were being colored like purified gold by the rays of the sun and their windows were sparkling like diamonds in a giant diadem encased with the silver of the vast river flowing to the north.

But these scenes were not what my imagination focused on. No, I was looking far away to a place where beyond the purple haze of morning, far, far to the west everything once dear to me had been left behind. In that land I loved there now advanced a ferocious monster, War, turning everything to night and to death... I could not look on this, and I did not wish to see it. Mustering all the powers of my very being I sent to that place this Easter greeting: "Christ is Risen!" He is risen for all – for the living and the dead, for the near and the far, for me and for you, my dear family! Light has conquered darkness. May it ever be so! Amen.

"Christ is Risen!" I said aloud and added to myself, "May God arise, may His enemies be scattered!" My soul found peace, and I repeated to myself, "Hold on and never quit: the sun will yet rise!"



FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

Reorganizing my office after becoming Senior Pastor of YVF last January, I came across a packet of typed-out radio sermons from the founding pastor and father of our two previous pastors, Rev. Gene Chism.

The sermon printed on the following pages is from February 18, 1962, but it speaks to us as much today, 55 years later, as it did to its listeners then. I have attempted to copy it exactly as I found it with no corrections or alterations.

On October 30, 1961, the Soviet Union tested the largest bomb ever detonated in the history of mankind – the Tsar Bomb. A plane piloted by Andrei Durnovtsev, given only a 50% chance of survival from the blast, took off from an airstrip near Murmansk and dropped the 50 megaton charge on Novaya Zemlya. The blast, 10 times the combined fire power of every weapon fired by every nation during WWII, sent shock waves 430 miles away and was said to have the power to cause third-degree burns within a 62 mile radius. The Cuban Missile Crisis was just 8 months away when Pastor Gene wrote this sermon.

This was a time of reasonable fear of self-destruction in the world. Today, I think we have lost this fear along with the fear of God. The fact is that today the world stands closer to a time of great tribulation than ever before in history. As Pastor Gene writes: only in Christ can we ever truly be safe.

“FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH ON HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.” Jn. 3:16

Great have been the discussions and dissertations on the subject of love. There is no doubt that love holds the solution to the world’s problems, in my mind. And, God is love, the Bible says. How puzzling it would

outwardly seem, that our God reigneth, and yet on every front in this world we see everything but love manifested.

What a titanic struggle seems to be going on between countries. The big ones working for the chief advantage in the struggle, and the little ones aligning themselves on the side which seems to hold the greatest promise for their benefit. The whole world was shocked last fall by the unwarranted and contemptuous nuclear testing of the Russian government, setting off super-bombs so big as to be of little war-value, merely for the purpose of cowing the free world into submission. Mr. Krushchev says that communism will bury us, which refrain has been parroted by China's Mao Tse Tung and some smaller fry on the communist totem pole. At the Belgrade Conference Tito of Yugoslavia said that war was imminent. Billy Graham said awhile back that there is deep fear in Washington that the Russians have the neutron bomb, considered by some to be the ultimate weapon, and which, Mr. Kennedy said, would be used by the communists for nuclear blackmail.

All these things should make us as a people conscious of our total dependence on a higher power, for the kind of war made possible now by the weapons in the arsenals of the nations is of a sort to render flight next to impossible. There is no place to hide. One cannot help but be amused at the great talk about fallout shelters, some companies advertising them with "years to pay." Really, what practical value would they be? How many people would be able to get to one, either public or private, when the most warning we might have would be minutes at the most. How does this seem to affect us, the people of a "Christian nation?"

During the time of the Russian nuclear testing, right after the announcement to the world that the explosions had started, a columnist of national fame reported that he made telephone calls to night clubs and cabarets to learn what public reaction was to all this. One club owner told him, "Our kind of people like to live it up today and worry about tomorrow, tomorrow. If anything, we have found that checks are higher because people are drinking more than ever." The columnist also checked Las Vegas and commented: "To the people in Vegas, life is just a game of craps, anyway." Now, it would be a mistake to say that this was the total of the grass-roots response of the people of America, for they have been

angered and bewildered by the revelation of the fact that the Russian bear cannot be trusted ever, to tell truth, to respond humanely, to react with consideration of any people of the world, even their own. The West has been tragically deceived by the pretended peaceful intentions of the Bear. So it has ever been. It was so with Hitler. Even to the shedding of blood on invaded soil in Poland, the Balkans, etc., there was talk of peace. Chamberlain and his umbrella at Munich are but a picture of misplaced confidence in the words of men of heathen and devilish governments.

We cannot but wonder, will men ever learn? Studies of all nations, and empires of all strata of history but prove that man is as much a destroyer as he is a builder. As it was in the days of the tower of Babel in ancient Babylonia, so it has ever been: every tower man builds comes tumbling down sooner or later. Chaldean, Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek, Roman, all perished. Generally built on blood, "Woe to the city that is built on blood" say the Scriptures. There seems to be a tranquilizing attitude on the part of many people, because of failure or inability to face hard fact, that "God is on our side. He won't let anything happen to us." But is He? The man who studies his Bible knows that it teaches, "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." (Ps. 127:1) But, has the Lord built our house? Does He keep it? We may be, essentially more decent citizens than those before-mentioned in night-club and Vegas ways of life, but at the same time be just as ignorant of God, just as strong deniers of His Christ, just as stubborn in our refusal to acknowledge any claim He might have on our lives and beings.

A student of the Bible knows that Israel was a nation most blessed of God. "Unto them," says the Word, "was committed the oracles of God. To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever." A nation God loved, and a study of the Book makes one marvel at the longsuffering of God with a disobedient and gainsaying and idolatrous people. How they broke His heart. And how patient He was with them. He sent heathen tribes and nations to them to chasten them and make them return to Him, finally to the point of sending them out of their land into exile, under the dominion of a foreign and

heathen empire. He allowed a heathen and idolatrous nation to judge His people. The Scriptures teach that to whom much is given, much is required. If ever a land had opportunity to know God and to serve Him, Israel was that nation, and so is the United States today, who has had opportunity and blessings beyond any other of all time. Any one who will, may see the light in this land of light, where there is hardly a city, village or hamlet without the witness of the Gospel. And yet, what do we do with these blessings?

Many times we have squandered them, and wasted our God-given time on foolishness and sinful pleasures. We have defiled the Christian Lord's Day so that it is hard to tell the difference between professing Christian and the unbeliever. Both may spend their time grubbing for pleasure, selfish pursuits, and even business as usual. We have, as a nation, put more emphasis on illicit sex than any other people in history. We have robbed God of His tithes and offerings. Many Christians have no compassion on the lost of the world to the extent of dedicating their income to God, that He may use it in a blessed way, so that this is one of the chief weaknesses of most gospel-preaching churches: inadequate funds for missions, for building, for minister's salaries. "But as the days of Noah were so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came and took them away."

God's word for us today would be, "Repent or perish." He has not obligated Himself, ever, to protect people who are willing to deny Him and to persist in their own godlessness. He will judge wickedness and sin. People may look at the world scene in bewildered fashion. Confusion in the Congo, in Algeria. In Paris and in Germany, both sides. In southeast Asia and in Indonesia. Confusion and strife. Philosophy tries to explain this, to conform it to a pattern, so as to show causes, etc. Bad as all this is, it is only revealing of that common course of man, of human nature that is sin. This is the basic problem man has to face today: the problem of sin.

As the Scriptures of our text indicate, God is love, and men are commanded to love one another, and that no ill is worked when men love one another. But, why don't they? Because they can't, that's why. In his

own power it is not in man to love his neighbor, because of indwelling sin. "For ye were sometimes disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." (Tit. 3:3)

Sin. Sin began with man's fall, and the original sin has grown and multiplied, threatening to blot out the very light of God's face and His love. The poet sang, "The worst of all diseases is mild compared to sin; on every part it siezes, but rages most within. 'Tis palsy, plague and fever, and madness all combined, and only a believer the least relief can find." The original sin has spread to monstrous proportions. The blood of righteous Abel is shed over and over again in a universal blood-letting. Sin. "The heart of man," the Bible teaches, "is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?"

The mask is off the real face of communism; it is revealed in its deceit, using as they have the word "peace" so often. But one says, "Kruschev wouldn't pull a trigger which would destroy a hundred million Americans, as he has boasted. He knows better than that. He'd know that retaliation would be terrible. He wouldn't do anything as mad as that." But the Bible says that sin makes men mad. I know that communism shall run its course for already the bounds have been overstepped. God was charged as being false when the Russians sent a rocket orbiting about the sun. "No God out there!" they boasted. "We didn't find Him." But this doesn't remove the stain of our guilt as sinners before God.

Unless this nation repents, God may well allow a judgment by such godless hands as those of the Russian bear, for we had greater light than they. "There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delievered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength. Behold the eye of the LORD is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy." (Ps. 33:16-18)

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom," says the Scripture. Even if America generally turns back to God, what about you, personally, my friend? You are not going to hide in the masses of revived people from God. He sees you where you are – lost, denying God, hating

righteousness, despising His Son and His church. Robbing Him of tithes and offerings, of your life and time and talents; loving sin, and spiritual deadness. But, there is a word for you calling you back. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.” Only a turning back to God, personally, will save you, my listening friend. For God is a personal God, though He dealeth with nations. He would deal with you personally. He has done everything which might reconcile you to Himself. Only your will stands in the way. Whosoever will may come. And whosoever will, let Him take the water of life freely. “Whosoever believeth on me shall be saved.” “And as many as received Him, to them gave He the power to become the sons of God, even to them which believe on His name.”

Then with Christ in your heart, may His commandments be recognized and obeyed. You cannot do the commandments of Jesus unless you have yielded your heart to Him. But if you will do this, you may know what it means to keep the other words in our text: “I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians: both to the wise and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the Gospel to you.” (Rom. 1:14-15) “Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law... Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. 13:8, 10)



You can be safe in Christ, who saves and keeps for eternity. Bow your head and pray the sinner's prayer.



***Her sins, which are
many, are forgiven:
for she loved
much...***

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