

Cornerstone

A Voice To The End-time Church

God's Incredible Sacrifice !

by Jim Rector

TO SACRIFICE MEANS TO GIVE UP ONE THING FOR SOMETHING GREATER. ALL PEOPLE HAVE DONE THIS AT SOME POINT IN TIME. THERE IS, HOWEVER, A SACRIFICE THAT TRANSCENDS ANYTHING HUMAN BEINGS HAVE KNOWN. BOTH GOD THE FATHER AND HIS HOLY SON HAVE AN INTIMATE PART IN THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE OF ALL TIME! AS THE SEASON OF PASSOVER APPROACHES, ALL TRUE CHRISTIANS NEED TO SERIOUSLY THE MOST INCREDIBLE SACRIFICE IN HISTORY - THE GIFT OF CHRIST HIMSELF.

What images come to mind when you hear the word *sacrifice*? Perhaps you might picture some sort of ancient tribal worship scene where animals are offered as sacrifices to a pagan deity. If you are a baseball fan, you might think of a *sacrifice* bunt or possibly a *sacrifice* fly, both of which are specifically designed to advance a baserunner, even though the batter is usually called *out*. Or maybe you would remember the time when you scrimped and saved, giving up movies, candy and comic books for weeks on end, so that you could buy yourself a bike.

Certainly all of these are popular examples of sacrificing. Human beings don't necessarily like to sacrifice, but most of us do it throughout our lives. Sometimes we sacrifice things because we want to, because we have a higher goal in mind. More often than not, however, we are forced to do it. Parents sacrifice for their children or a businessman may sacrifice certain merchandise just to get rid of it. At very critical times, the president of a company or even the leader of a nation has called upon the people to tighten their belts and sacrifice for the common good.

One way or another, like it or not, most of us are quite familiar with the act of sacrificing. For some of us, giving up one thing for something more important is a virtual way of life. At this very special time of the year, as the Passover season approaches, all true Christians need to seriously focus on the concept of sacrificing, and indeed upon that one great, unspeakable sacrifice - the most significant sacrifice of all - **THE INCREDIBLE SACRIFICE OF GOD!!**

WHO WAS CHRIST?

If we do not fully understand just who our Saviour really was, then it is virtually impossible to comprehend and appreciate the enormity of His sacrifice. The man called Jesus or Yahshua (His original name) did not just suddenly come into existence at a point in time nearly two thousand years ago. Of course, I am not questioning his literal physical birth. That certainly did occur at a specific moment in history - but that was not the true origin of our Saviour.

One of the great revelations of the Scriptures is the fact that the God or Lord (Yahweh) of the Old Testament was actually the same being who later became the Messiah of the New Testament. In other words, Christ **PRE-EXISTED!** He was alive long before His human birth in approximately 4 B.C.

Although it may seem elementary to many, it is good at this auspicious time of the year to be reminded of just who our Saviour really was. In the very beginning it is written:

"And God (Elohim) said, Let US make man in OUR image, after OUR likeness, and let them have dominion" (Gen. 1:26).

The Hebrew word translated *God* in this verse is Elohim. Now that word doesn't make much sense to the average person today, but a correct understanding is crucial to grasping what is really

being revealed in these opening passages of the Bible. The word *Elohim* is **PLURAL!** It is a word much like our words *flock, herd, group* or *family*. The truth is simply that when Moses was inspired to write *Elohim* in Genesis 1:26, he was really saying, **THE GODS** or **THE MIGHTY ONES!**

Most people merely assume that any reference to God means only the Father. That, however, most assuredly is not the case. In the introduction of the fourth gospel, John clearly explains to us that more than one spirit being was involved in the creation account of Genesis 1. Notice the proof:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was WITH GOD, and the Word WAS GOD. The same was IN THE BEGINNING with God. ALL THINGS WERE MADE BY HIM; and without Him was not any thing made that was made...and the Word was MADE FLESH and DWELLED AMONG US" (John 1:1-3, 14).

This is surely one of the most profound passages in all the Scriptures! It answers in just a couple of sentences the numerous questions on the subject of the Godhead. The one who became the Saviour, the one who was made flesh and lived upon this earth nearly two thousand years ago, was a part of the Godhead or God family and was with the Father in the very beginning when all things were created.

In the record of the Old Testament, there are countless instances of God speaking to human individuals upon the earth. There are even testimonies of His having appeared to certain people. Undoubtedly, Adam and Eve saw and heard Him in the Garden of Eden. It is stated in Genesis 18:1 that Abraham witnessed Him, ate a meal with Him and later bargained with Him for his nephew Lot who lived in the city of Sodom. Moses both saw and spoke with God. Even the elders of Israel were permitted to see the great Yahweh at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:1, 9-10). Perhaps the apostle Paul said it best in I Corinthians 10:

"Moreover, brethren, I would not that you should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and THAT ROCK WAS CHRIST" (I Cor. 10:1-4).

You just cannot get much more explicit than that! The one who became the Messiah had a spiritual existence long pre-dating the time of His human birth. He was, in fact, the God or Lord (Yahweh) of the Old Testament. We know this to be correct, because Christ Himself told the Jews of His day:

"The Father Himself which has SENT ME, has borne witness of me. You have NEITHER HEARD HIS VOICE, NOR SEEN HIS SHAPE" (John 5:37).

The conclusion is obvious. Christ was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, of Moses, Joshua and Caleb, of Samuel, David and the holy prophets of old. Indeed, the one who became the Saviour of the world was the very Being responsible for the actual creation of all things. This fact is confirmed by many Scriptural proofs. Paul especially included numerous references to this effect in his letters to Ephesus (Eph. 3:8-9), to Corinth (I Cor. 8:6), to Colossae (Col. 1:12-19), and to Philippi (Phil. 2:4-9). In the opening verses of the book of Hebrews, he wrote:

"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, BY WHOM ALSO HE MADE THE WORLDS; who being the brightness of His

glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:1-3).

Imagine, if you possibly can, what Christ's former life must have been like. He was there when the foundations of the very universe were laid. He was, in fact, the one directly responsible for their creation. It was He who made the angels and all the other spirit beings and entities. He designed and brought into existence all the powers, forces and energies that serve to sustain the universe. He was present and intimately involved in the creation of all plant, animal and even human life as we know it. He has always been the liaison between God the Father and human beings. He created the earth as the perfect setting and environment for mankind. He created the human race, appearing before and speaking directly to Adam and Eve. And even though our original parents disobeyed, He continued His spiritual work, dealing with certain individuals such as Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. He talked with human beings and appeared on occasions to them. He delivered Israel from Egypt and began mapping out a plan of salvation which would include Himself at the center of it all. He inspired the prophets to predict His own arrival upon the earth and then, at just the precise moment in time, He was literally born of woman as a flesh and blood human being.

The Yahweh of the Old Testament was the one who became Jesus Christ or Yahshua ha Mashiach of the New Testament. This is a fact, and is of crucial importance for all true Christians. This very truth is what makes His later sacrifice so incredibly significant. **HE WAS GOD!!!** Whatever God enjoys, whatever privileges He has, whatever possessions He owns, whatever perquisites He has at His disposal, Christ had them all and in unending abundance! He once referred to this great former glory that He had "**before the world was**" (John 17:5).

Understanding just who Christ really was helps us to more fully grasp and appreciate the magnitude of His human sacrifice. Keep this in mind as we explore more about that great, inexpressible offering of Himself which our Saviour has freely given to us all.

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST - PART 1

The immense plan of salvation which both the Father and the Son together have devised surely began with the Son being willing to give up the glory, the luxury, the privileges, the power of God Himself. As Christians, we all ought to seriously focus on the enormity of such a sacrifice.

Prior to his human birth, Christ enjoyed eternal spirit life, impervious to pain, weakness and foibles of the flesh. Becoming a human being meant that He would no longer have such power and protection. He would have to take on the temporary, limited, vulnerable existence of man. As a spirit being, He had complete immunity against the wiles of Satan the devil. As a human being, He would encounter the archenemy face to face! He would be forced to endure all the hardships, setbacks, disappointments and disillusionments akin to being human. He would be subject to every form of temptation and the opportunity for sin would surround him.

In his former existence, Christ or Yahweh, as He was known to believers in Old Testament times, was exalted. He was worshipped both in heaven and on earth. There was nothing outside His authority or beyond His ability to control. He was one with the Father Himself and was the architect of all things. His life, in other words, was utterly incomparable - rich, glorious, absolutely perfect in every conceivable way. Yet consider that He willingly, even joyfully, gave it all up for the likes of you and me - mere pieces of clay upon an insignificant speck floating almost invisibly in a galaxy in a faraway corner of the universe! Notice how the apostle Paul described such an immense sacrifice:

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus; who, being in very nature God, did not consider EQUALITY WITH GOD something to be grasped, but made himself NOTHING, taking the very nature of a SERVANT, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He HUMBLED himself and became obedient to death - even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

Your Saviour went literally from riches to rags, from being equal with God and a dynamic part of the Godhead itself, to a mere human being - and even more. As a human being, He further humbled himself to the divine will of the Father, even unto the cruel death of the cross. What a testimony, what a legacy, **WHAT A SACRIFICE!!**

I personally like to focus on the fact that the sacrifice of Christ begins in heaven, not on the cross. It was the decision to give up everything eternal, take the unthinkable risk and come to this earth as a mere man, that constitutes the real heart of His sacrifice. But as Paul stated, it goes far beyond even that. He not only gave up His heavenly glory, he also humbled himself as a human being. He once told his disciples:

"Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28).

Coming from such a high and exalted status, one might suppose that the Saviour would have at least been able to enjoy the best of this life, but on the contrary, he lowered himself to the station of a servant and was willing to accept whatever befell one in such a lowly position. He declared: **"For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am you as ONE WHO SERVES" (Luke 22:27).**

There are many misconceptions concerning Christ. Some assume that, because he was of the royal seed of David, that he possibly was entitled to or actually enjoyed the privileges of rank. Nothing could be further from the truth! Others have taught that he was well-to-do, a large landowner, the wearer of fine, expensive garments, a member of the upper class of his day. What falsehoods! The ministers who teach these untruths do so to substantiate and validate their own desire for more of the things of this carnal life.

God selected a most appropriate time for His Son to come into this world and indeed an equally appropriate location. It was an era of great political, military and religious unrest in the land of Judea. Roman oppression abounded and the excesses of the tetrarchs, Herod Archelaus and Herod Antipas, and their tyrannies as well, certainly made for an unstable period in Judean history. It was decidedly not a time of peace and prosperity for the Jews. This was especially true in Christ's case.

When the Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, levied a tax upon the Empire, each family was required to travel to its own city of origin to register and pay the levy. Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, the city of David and, because the inns were filled to capacity, they had to lodge in a stable. This then provided the inauspicious circumstances of the Messiah's birth - about as lowly and humble as one can imagine!

Furthermore, we have strong evidence that Christ's earthly family was not upper class at all. After a woman gave birth, she had to go through a 40 day period of purification, at the end of which a sacrifice was made. For such purposes, a lamb was normally brought to the Temple. The Law, however, did contain a provision for anyone unable to afford such an animal. Notice Leviticus 12:8:

"If she (mother) cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering."

Procuring a lamb would have presented no problem for even a middle-class family, much less a well-to-do one, but notice what Luke records concerning Mary's purification sacrifice:

"When the time of their purification according to the Law of Moses had been completed, Joseph and Mary took him (Christ) to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, Every first born male is to be consecrated to the Lord), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord, A PAIR OF DOVES OR TWO YOUNG PIGEONS" (Luke 2:22-24).

It certainly does not appear as though Christ's family was rich or even prominent for that matter. It seems likely that Joseph may have died rather early in Jesus' life, probably during his teen-age years, leaving him with the added responsibility of helping his mother raise at least five or six other younger children. As I have said before, such circumstances would seem to preclude the possibility that Christ came from prosperous conditions. His background was therefore typical of many of his fellow countrymen (For a more in-depth discussion of the Messiah's human background, request our **FREE** article, **RICH MAN, POOR MAN**).

Once he began his ministry, Christ lived a spartan life of labor and service, putting his life on the line, taking chances for the sake of the gospel, sacrificing the trappings of even a normal life, much less a luxurious one. He once told a disciple who sought to follow him: **"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has not where to lay his head"** (Matt. 8:20).

Perhaps the apostle Paul said it best when, after encouraging the Corinthians to contribute liberally to the needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem, he concluded his persuasive discourse by saying:

"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich (formerly), yet for your sakes HE BECAME POOR, that you through HIS POVERTY might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

Aside from depriving himself the usual comforts of life, Christ also resisted the urge or opportunity to marry. He certainly was a normal man and very possibly tempted in this regard, but he resolutely resisted any such likelihood, dedicating all of his faculties, resources, abilities, time and energy to serving in a spiritual labor for others. How sharply this man was focused! He always kept the true goals of his calling squarely before his eyes. He never permitted himself to be turned to the right or the left. He knew where he was going, he saw where he was going, and he allowed absolutely nothing whatsoever of this life to get in the way.

One of the major trials Christ had to face virtually on a daily basis was opposition and rejection, two of the most difficult negative factors for any human being to handle. It is written that **"He came unto his own and his own received him not"** (John 1:11). The prophet Isaiah, in one of the most poignant passages in all the Bible, described the coming Messiah in the following terms:

"For he shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he has not form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is DESPISED AND REJECTED OF MEN: 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" (Isa. 53:2-3).

Time after time, Jesus (Yahshua) suffered repudiation at the hands of the leaders of His day. He had to endure their seemingly endless jokes, sneers and putdowns, their lies and plots, their petty arguments and clever attempts to cause him to slip up and sin. On one occasion, the scribes and Pharisees were being put to shame and they uttered one of the most blasphemous statements

imaginable. Notice the account in John 8:

"I speak that which I have seen with my Father; and you do that which you have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said unto them, If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to KILL ME, a man that has told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. You do the deed of your father. Then said they to him, We be not BORN OF FORNICATION" (John 8:38-41).

These evil, spiritual Hitlers, so utterly consumed with their own self-righteousness, so completely blind to reality, dared to call the Son of the Living God a **BASTARD!!** They knew the stories of His birth, how his mother became pregnant before she was married, so they turned on him maliciously with this cutting remark. What did Christ do? How did he react? He calmly took it and continued right on revealing their lies and hypocrisy. His attitude was absolutely perfect.

Our Saviour was subjected to verbal abuse of every kind. On yet another occasion, he was casting out demons from a blind man. The people who witnessed the miracle were amazed and immediately praised God. Notice, however, the reaction of the religious leaders:

"But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow does not cast out demons, but BY BEELZEBUB, THE PRINCE OF DEMONS" (Matt. 12:24).

What audacity! What blasphemy! These learned doctors of the Law were guilty of knowingly attributing the very power of God Himself to Satan the devil! In fact, when this episode is read in its proper context, it is clear that Christ is talking about what is commonly known as the **UNPARDONABLE SIN**. These leaders were, in effect, claiming that the Messiah was possessed by Satan himself, that it was by the devil's power that he was able to do the remarkable things he did. These men had said the very same thing about John the Baptist, when it dawned on them that he too was becoming a threat to them (Matt. 11:18).

When we consider the numerous confrontations and instances of opposition that Christ faced as he tried to preach the truth of God, the attitudes and approaches of his enemies, the lies, slander and filth of his accusers, I think that we can understand a little better Paul's statement in Hebrews 12:3, when he said: "**For consider him that endured such CONTRADICTION OF SINNERS against himself, lest you be wearied and faint in your minds.**"

Yes, our Saviour suffered greatly at the merciless hands of sinful men - men who often knew better, knew who he was, knew that he was of God and spoke the truth, but who could not stand to hear his words, who could not permit him to continue performing the work of his Father. Unlike most of us, he did not seek the easy way out of his difficulties. He faced them courageously. He dealt with his problems squarely. Unlike most human beings, he did not run from reality. He took it on the chin, he took it in the back. He fought the battle on every side, including even a face-to-face confrontation with Satan himself. Never once did he give in and compromise in order to gain the praise of men, to ease the pressure of persecution, to avoid embarrassment. Never once did he capitulate or weaken in the face of their taunts, their false charges, their groundless criticisms. His life, from beginning to end, was one of selfless service - **SACRIFICE, SACRIFICE, SACRIFICE!!**

You and I get up each day and face a generally routine life of relative peace and calm, of ease and simplicity. We usually do not have to contend with lies and personal insults and constant name-calling and angry conspiracies every day and at every turn. Yes, we may experience a little of this, but nothing remotely compared to the kind of opposition that Christ encountered. He not

only was forced to deal with the unkindness of others, the rudeness of others, the deception of others, the falseness of others, the rejection of others - he even had to deal with direct threats against his very life. The enemies he faced didn't just want to discredit him, belittle him or silence him. That would have been difficult enough to bare. No, they wanted to get rid of him for good - they wanted to **KILL HIM!!** In fact, when he stood up in the synagogue and preached his first sermon on the day of Pentecost in 28 A.D., do you remember what happened? Luke reports that "**all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath and rose up and led him to the brow of the hill whereupon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong**" (Luke 4:28-29).

A short time later, after he had healed a man on the Sabbath day, the leaders reacted in their typical fashion as John records:

"Therefore did the Jews PERSECUTE Jesus, and sought to SLAY HIM, because he had done these things on the Sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, My Father works hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to KILL HIM, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:16-18).

In John 8, we read of yet another account where Christ's life was threatened by the mob of Pharisees and Sadducees. In this instance, his boldness in speaking the truth to them provoked the following violent reaction:

"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it and was glad. Then said they Jews unto him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM. Then took they up STONES TO CAST AT HIM" (John 8:56-58).

When Christ invoked the very name of God Himself (**I AM - EHYAH** - contraction of **YAHWEH**) as applying personally to him, it drove the Jewish governors to the brink. They undoubtedly would have murdered him then and there, had he not hid and later escaped their wrath!

Again, in John 10:31, we read that the Jews attempted to stone him to death, but they were thwarted. And in John 11:53-54, we learn of yet another such plot to kill him. Of course, eventually all these various conspiracies and schemes, the intrigue and collusion, did finally come to fruition, when Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve apostles, sinned grievously and, for a price, betrayed his Master into the hands of murderers. Indeed, Christ faced many quandaries and dilemmas, a veritable sea of troubles, all during his life - and we need to make ourselves acutely aware of this fact, coming to deeply identify with and appreciate the depth and degree of his suffering and sacrifice. Truly, the moving words of David in Psalm 22 assuredly applied to the Saviour, when he said: "**But I am a worm and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All that see me LAUGH ME TO SCORN**" (Psa. 22:6-7).

The magnitude of what Christ gave up and what he endured is inestimable. He was very God, the magnificent Creator of the universe. He enjoyed eternal life and splendor and power on an unprecedented, unimaginable scale. Yet, for the likes of puny, insignificant human beings, full of sin, the enemies of truth, worthy only of death, He gave up everything to be their Saviour. On earth, he came with power, with truth, with hope, with love, but he suffered immeasurably - rejected, repudiated, rebuffed at every turn, scorned and persecuted without ceasing, deprived of any semblance of a normal lifestyle, denied the *good life*, falsely charged and utterly despised everywhere he went, opposed with every word he spoke.

Yes, our great Saviour indeed gave up all for us. He became flesh and blood and subjected himself to temptation and the possibility of sin and failure, to suffering the same weaknesses and

pain and frustration and perplexities of this human frame. He faced it all, He endured it all - and by submitting to the full power of God, he did it all without sin, never once giving in. Oh, how great a love he had within his heart to keep on day after day, to labor, to fight, to withstand, to resist, to be victorious - and all for you and me. Yet, as difficult as his life was, it didn't get any easier with the passing of time. In fact, Christ's greatest test and trial came at the end of his life. It was then that he had to make the greatest sacrifice of all!

THE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST - PART 2

It was not enough for Christ to give up his eternal life and his position of glory and honor in heaven. It was not enough for him to live a life of trial and suffering and sacrifice upon this earth, being rejected and despised by humanity. No, in order to fulfil the complete purpose of God, he had to go all the way - and the greatest challenge and most horrible, unthinkable test was reserved for the end of his life. In fact, **IT TOOK HIS LIFE!!**

When the Bible speaks of the sacrifice of Christ, what is usually meant is the death he willingly endured on the cross. His entire life was one long, hard, painful road to Calvary. His journey was inexorable. He could not and did not escape the destiny that awaited him. He sensed it coming, and as the days and months of his ministry passed, resulting in angrier and more hostile confrontations and exchanges and even the conspiracy of a trusted disciple, he soon could see the shape of things and he knew where he had to go. There was no turning back. The holy prophets had already long ago written down the words. He knew what Isaiah meant when he said:

"The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isa. 50:5-6).

Christ knew that these ancient prophecies had to be fulfilled, and that he was the one chosen to do it. He knew full well that Isaiah 53 applied to him. In this moving passage, the prophet describes the sufferings of the coming Messiah in some of the most piercing language in all the Bible. One can almost tangibly feel the pain and agony of the Saviour as the words jump off the page and strike like a jackhammer:

"He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was DESPISED, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him STRICKEN by God, SMITTEN by Him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, He was CRUSHED for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was OPPRESSED and AFFLICTED, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away, and who can speak of his descendants? For he was CUT OFF from the land of the

living. For the transgression of My people he was stricken. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to **CRUSH HIM** and cause him to **SUFFER**...For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53).

DESPISED! STRICKEN! OPPRESSED! AFFLICTED! SMITTEN! SUFFERING! CUT OFF! CRUSHED! In Christ, the shadow became substance, the prophecy became reality. As the Passover of 31 A.D. approached, he knew that it would all come crashing down upon him. He knew that for the first time in nearly 1500 years, the symbolic Passover lamb would finally find its fulfillment in him. He knew that he would literally have to become the sacrificial lamb, slain at the precise moment the Law required, on the afternoon of the 14th day of the first month. So he made a decision. All of his life he had faithfully observed the Passover according the Law of God and the customs of the Jews. This year would have to be different. After all, he was to actually become the Passover lamb himself, therefore he would be dead before the observance began. Therefore, a day ahead of the normal commanded time, he gathered the twelve apostles, including the traitor Judas, and ate a final meal with them, imparting the new, expanded spiritual understanding of Passover, with special emphasis on the bread and wine and symbolism of his own body and blood which was to be sacrificed just a few hours later. From that point forward, whenever true Christians kept the Passover, it was to be in memory of what would occur on the cross.

After that service, the whole group crossed over the Kidron River and into the garden of Gethsemane. He took Peter, James and John and together they walked to a private place. This was no easy time for Jesus. He was human and his humanity is clearly revealed in the excruciating anguish he experienced at this crucial moment. Matthew records:

"Then comes Jesus with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said unto the disciples, Sit you here while I go yonder and pray. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be SORROWFUL and HEAVY. Then said he unto them, My soul is EXCEEDINGLY SORROWFUL, EVEN UNTO DEATH; tarry you here and watch with me" (Matt. 26:36-38).

Luke then adds to this narrative the following comments:

"And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down and prayed, saying Father, if you be willing, REMOVE THIS CUP FROM ME: nevertheless not my will, but yours be done. And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an AGONY, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was, as it were, GREAT DROPS OF BLOOD falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:41-44).

The Messiah did not want to die. He did not want to endure the inexpressible pain and suffering he knew awaited him. He was in agony and his heart was exceedingly sorrowful. He even prayed, sweating great drops of blood, that the cup might pass from him, but such would not be the case that night. Within minutes after his third prayer, the angry mob approached the Mount of Olives, torches blazing, swords brandished. Betrayal cracked the solitude of Gethsemane! The destiny of the Messiah was moving toward him now at a blinding, relentless pace!

We know the all too familiar story - How he was betrayed by a kiss, arrested and falsely charged, despicably treated by the High Priest - how witnesses were coerced into lying about him, how he was finally led away to the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate, who could find no guilt in him, how the Jews clamored for his death, crying, "**Crucify him, crucify him!**" Herod's soldiers then

mocked him and spit on him and beat him with rods, placing the infamous crown of thorns on his head. Finally, Pilate relented, capitulating to the Jewish mob, and bound Christ over to be executed.

The prelude to crucifixion was for the prisoner to undergo a terrible scourging administered by a Roman flagellator. Usually consisting of numerous leather thongs with sharp pieces of metal or bone embedded into the ends, the dreaded Roman scourge or *cat-o-nine-tails* was known to actually cause death itself on occasion. The results of such a beating were often horrible. The Messiah suffered in this fashion - and not a single blow, not a single insult, not a single jolt of pain, not a single piece of flesh gouged out of his back - was for himself or for anything of which he was, in any way, guilty. Every time he cried out in near unbearable agony, it was for you and me! Every time he felt the hot, putrid sting of spittle on his face, it was for you and me! Every time he heard the scornful laughs, the dirty jokes, the cursings and swearings, it was for you and me! Every time the whip cut deep, shredding his bloody body, it was for you and me!

Led out of the city, the beaten Messiah trudged across the Kidron River once again, and on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, the place where Christ had spent so much time with his disciples, that special site directly across from the entrance to the Temple where, for 1500 years, the great sacrifices had been offered, here in the winepress of Almighty God, the lifeblood was squeezed from him. His tormentors and accusers nailed his outstretched hands to the cross-piece and hung his pain-racked body on a tree, affixing his feet to the trunk with a spike.

The main road into Jerusalem crossed over the Mount of Olives and led down to the eastern or Golden gate of the Temple mount. With the site of the crucifixion is such a prominent place, many people heading into the city for Passover passed by the tragic scene. It is indeed ironic that those faithful Jews making their way down to Jerusalem to observe the Passover, unknowingly turned their backs and walked away from the true Passover lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world!

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to bleed to death? A number of years ago, I woke up one morning and noticed that I felt out of sorts. As the day wore on, I began to feel nervous and tired and a little dizzy. My heart rate was elevated. I thought that I was coming down with the flu, so I took a couple of cold tablets and tried to forget about my symptoms. By bedtime, I realized that something was definitely wrong with me. My heart was beating faster and I was having trouble focusing my mind.

I spent a miserable night with no sleep. I was getting weaker and more nervous with every passing moment. I thought that if I could just tough it out till morning I would take care of matters then. When light finally came, I was so weak and my heart was beating so fast that even the slightest movement caused me to nearly black out.

I was alone in the house and I knew that I would have to get to my phone, located on the other side of the bedroom. My situation was getting critical and I knew it, but I was totally helpless. The sound of the blood going through my head was deafening. I couldn't hear myself talk. Within a short time, I couldn't even talk. For five long, tortuous hours I struggled to get out of bed and inch my way across the floor on my back, having to pause between each little movement to keep from passing out. I could hardly keep my head about me. My mind was in terror, my heart beating like a jackhammer. I could feel the blood rushing through my brain. It sounded like a tornado. Lights were flashing all in front of my eyes and my field of vision was now reduced to just a small spot at the mid-point. All my extremities were cold and numb. My chest was heaving and I was gasping for breath. I felt the life force going out of me. I knew that I was as good as dead.

Somehow I finally reached the phone and was able to get an emergency call through. I couldn't talk, but I was able to sort of grunt out the location. By the time I arrived at the emergency room of the hospital, I was almost gone. The doctors said another hour and I would have been dead! Until I got to the hospital and heard the doctors yelling frantically at each other as they strapped me down and began sticking tubes into my nose and mouth, saying that I had almost bled to death, I had no earthly idea what was happening to me! I have left out the gruesome details. It was, however,

the most frightening, the most alarming, the most horrible experience I could have imagined. I used to think that bleeding to death might not be so bad, but not any more! It makes me appreciate at least some of the situation that our Saviour faced while hanging on the cross at Golgotha.

In one sense, God was merciful to His Son, in that he died so soon after being crucified. Usually, criminals hung on crosses for days before expiring, but the Saviour was dead within about six hours. Some have suggested that he may have been stoned by the Jews while he hung on the cross, thus accounting for the scriptures that speak of all his bones being visible, especially on the front of his body, which would not have been affected by the Roman scourging. This is quite possible, since the Jewish form of execution would have been to stone a prisoner to death. There are, as well, several Jewish records which state that Yehshua the Nazarine was hung on a tree and stoned! So I would say that the possibility certainly exists that this indeed occurred.

King David, as we know, was in many ways a type of Christ Himself. On many occasions the Holy Spirit moved David to write prophetically of the coming Messiah, especially of his sufferings. By far, the most complete and most graphic of these Messianic passages is found in Psalms 22. The first verse is so familiar, because the gospel writers quote Christ as having shouted these very words from the cross. This has led some to speculate that perhaps the entire first half of this psalm may have actually been uttered by Christ in that final dark hour of his crucifixion. We need to appreciate them now as we approach the Passover:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel ...But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. He trusts in Yahweh, let the Lord deliver him, since He delights in him. Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing" (Psa. 22:1-18).

What a powerful portion of Scripture! Even to the fine details, this passage describes the appearance as well as the inner feelings of the Messiah in His last moments of life. We can sense the profound loneliness of his plight, how he knew that everyone had forsaken him in his greatest hour of need. Christ was not only the Son of God, he was also a human being and He hurt in every way! He was dying and he knew it. He felt his life rapidly slipping away. Even as he hung naked on the tree, the blood pouring out of his countless wounds, he had to endure the insults and taunts of the wretched, vile people around him. Consider how badly he was made to appear - a man who claimed God as his Father, yet he was forced to hang helplessly upon a cross of shame and ignominy, having to hear his accusers say, **"Where is the Lord now when He needs Him?"**

In another moving Messianic psalm, David was inspired to write the following descriptive passage:

"Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail looking for my God. Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me...For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face. I am a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my own mother's sons; for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me. When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn; when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me. Those who sit in the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards. But I pray to you, O Yahweh, in the time of your favor; in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation. Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O Lord, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. Come near and rescue me; redeem me because of my foes. You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you. Scorn has BROKEN MY HEART and has left me helpless; I looked for SYMPATHY, but there was none, and for COMFORTERS, but I FOUND NONE. They put gall in my food and vinegar they gave me for my thirst" (Psa. 69:1-21).

Oh, how stirring! He look for sympathy, for comfort, for someone to help - **BUT HE FOUND NONE!** The Son of God had **NO ONE!** His was the loneliest of deaths. All his closest followers had fled out of fear. They were ashamed to be near him. They had abandoned him in his moment of greatest need. Christ faced it all utterly ALONE! Yes, this was his destiny, but that did not numb the pain, the humiliation, the reproach, the agony of it all. Crucified with criminals, buffeted by derision and contempt, the perfect Son of God died the most hideous of deaths for you and me!

The beating that Christ received was so horrible that it literally mutilated his body. Notice how Isaiah graphically described his condition:

"Just as there were many who were appalled at him - his appearance was so DISFIGURED beyond that of any man and his form MARRED BEYOND HUMAN LIKENESS - so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him" (Isa. 52:13-14).

So marred that he was UNRECOGNIZABLE??? We can only imagine what it would take to produce that kind of result on a human body, and yet Christ remained conscious through it all, feeling all the pain - and the amazing thing is that he not only didn't deserve any of what he endured, he went through it all **WILLINGLY!!** Why? How could this be? Because He saw through his own present dilemma. He had a vision that transcended the mere temporary condition of the flesh. Oh, it was not easy. It was undoubtedly the hardest thing any human being has ever had to withstand, but he was actually sustained by the "joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2). He committed to this sacrifice from the beginning. It was done out of love. God never changes, neither does His Son. His love for us, even though we were and are sinners, was not dimmed because of the pain of affliction, the ignominy of nakedness, the shame of rejection. So great was this Godly man that even in the face of all his suffering, He was still able to say, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"! Would God that we, for whom he so willingly died, might have that same

mind one toward another and toward the world that so often closes in on us.

Christ was hung on the cross at 9 in the morning and expired some six hours later, about 3PM, thus fulfilling completely the types of the daily morning and evening sacrifices (offered for centuries at those precise times). He also died at the very time the Passover lambs themselves were slain - "**between the two evenings**" or mid-afternoon on the 14th day of the first month. That is why Paul was able to say: "**For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed for us**" (I Cor. 5:7).

That precious sacrifice, in all its fullness and complexity, paid the penalty of eternal death for the sins of all mankind. Does that mean that salvation is then just some sort of automatic thing, that the Saviour has done everything for us, and we can just kick back and coast on into the Kingdom? **GOD FORBID!!!** How dare we cheapen this priceless offering. Yes, that blood cleanses us from sin, but we must be brought under it. And that initial washing is only the beginning. We must proceed from there onward and upward to attain the fullness of the stature of Christ Himself. **WE DO NOT STOP AT THE CROSS!!** That is just the beginning. Please send for our tape entitled, **FIGHTING THE GOOD FIGHT**. It will thoroughly explain this principle.

What Jesus' great sacrifice did, however, was justify our past sins and square us with God. Sometimes we call this being reconciled to the Father. If we come under that blood, if we accept that offering, if we repent and submit into the hands of God and turn and truly go His way, if Christ is truly in us, then reconciliation is achieved. We have access directly to Him in heaven. Christ's sacrifice rent the veil. Paul comments on this marvelous truth, by saying:

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being freely justified (forgiven of all past sin) by His grace through redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins THAT ARE PAST, through the forbearance of God" (Rom. 3:23-25).

God literally has purchased us - bought us or redeemed us with the blood of His own Son's life. The blood pouring out of the countless wounds in his body was the price that was paid. The agony, the suffering, the pain, the loneliness, the rejection, the sorrow - all were a part of what it took for the likes of us to have a relationship with the Father in heaven. He is the ransom that has paid for your freedom and mine. Our lives would not be worth a pile of excrement without the incredible sacrifice of our Great God and His Son. There would be no forgiveness, no salvation, no eternal life, no future, no hope, no purpose - **NOTHING!!** We owe it all to Christ. Apart from him and what he willingly did for us, we are all dead men, we are already burning up in the lake of fire, we have no chance, no possibility of reprieve, no mercy, no promise - only the blackness of darkness **FOREVER!** Isn't such a heavy sacrifice worth our most serious consideration at this propitious time of the year? I believe that it is and hope that you do as well.

GOD'S INCREDIBLE SACRIFICE

The last facet of this discussion has to do with God the Father and His part in the sacrifice of Christ. I'm afraid that we don't always pay much attention to this aspect, but it is absolutely paramount that we do so. The Father was intimately involved in the giving up of His Son. It was His idea to do it in the first place! He was the one who made the initial **GREAT SACRIFICE**. Notice again that most familiar passage of Scripture in John 3:16:

"For GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish."

It was, in fact, God the Father's deep, abiding love that caused the whole process to be possible. It was His profound desire to have a family, to share all that He has with His own children, that brought about the sacrifice of Christ. John understood this fact and commented on it even further in his first epistle:

"He that loves not knows not God; for God is love. In this was manifest the love of God toward us, because that GOD SENT HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON INTO THE WORLD, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:8-11).

Paul also grasped the immensity of the Father's sacrifice when he told the Romans:

"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commends His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:6-10).

It is difficult, if not impossible to comprehend God's part in this great sacrifice, unless we fully understand one very important point. The Father was not just playing some sort of game. When He gave up His only Son, He gave him up **COMPLETELY!** Christ could have **SINNED** and thus been **DESTROYED!** And along with it, the entire plan of God, including you and me, would have been scuttled in the process! This is the calculated risk that God the Father took in this whole thing. Unfortunately, most of the world simply does not understand this truth.

Why do you think that Christ had to fast for 40 days when he was being tempted by Satan? If he was automatically perfect, in and of Himself, then fasting would have not only been totally unnecessary, but utterly ridiculous! He did it because He absolutely had to do it, to draw close enough to God to withstand the temptation. Why do you suppose that Christ had to suffer so much during his life on earth? If everything was programmed ahead of time, it was completely unnecessary. But the Scriptures plainly state:

"For it became Him (the Father), for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons (us) to glory, to make the captain of their salvation (Christ) PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERINGS" (HEB. 2:10).

Why do you think that Christ had to pray? If he was automatically perfect and righteous of himself, then that too would have been merely a waste of time. But he prayed and prayed and prayed! He was very careful to make ample time for prayer everyday, rising up early and pouring out his heart to his Father in heaven, going off into a mountain to be alone and pray, indeed praying all night long on at least one occasion. He prayed to God because he knew he had to. He would not have made it had he not done so. He would have slipped up and given in to one of the innumerable temptations - **HE COULD HAVE SINNED!!** He had to plead with God for the strength to continue on and endure everything. Consider the import of this moving passage from Hebrews 5:

"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, He offered up prayers and petitions with LOUD CRIES AND TEARS to the one who could

SAVE HIM FROM DEATH, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he LEARNED OBEDIENCE FROM WHAT HE SUFFERED and ONCE MADE PERFECT, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him" (Heb. 5:7-9).

Can you see what this passage is saying? Christ prayed with all his heart, crying tears and begging his Father for help during his earthly life and ministry. Why? Verse 7 tells us that he did it to be **SAVED FROM DEATH!** What death do you suppose is being referred to here? Was it physical death? Well, was Christ saved from physical death? Of course not! That is what he came to accomplish. The death from which he was truly delivered was **SPIRITUAL OR ETERNAL DEATH!** And verse 9 states that through all of this, He was **MADE PERFECT!** The fact is that once Christ came to this earth, once he committed to becoming a human being, he had to go through the very same process of spiritual growth, of trial and testing, of suffering and learning that every other human being eventually has to experience in order to be in the Kingdom of God! Otherwise he would not have made it - **PERIOD!**

This is why the sacrifice of both the Father and the Son is so precious, so priceless. Everything depended upon it. God took the chance of losing His dear Son, the very Creator of the entire universe, the very God of the Old Testament - for the sake of redeeming unto Himself a people from the earth, a people that could have the matchless opportunity of becoming His own eternal children. We desperately need to focus on what the Father has done for us, what kind of momentous decision He had to make, what kind of risk He was willing to take, what kind of love He really has for us. Paul told the Romans:

"What shall we say then to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered him up freely for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom. 8:31-33).

Did you catch the significance of that powerful statement? Paul said that since the Father has already willingly sacrificed His only Son, since He has already given up the very best that He has, therefore, there is absolutely nothing that He will possibly withhold from us who are to be His divine children for all eternity! What an amazing promise! God's unselfish act of offering Christ up for the sins of this world automatically means that He will give us all things, fulfil every promise, answer every prayer, issue every blessing, complete every plan, finish every good work - all for our everlasting benefit. Oh, the height and depth and breadth of God's insearchable love and mercy!! And nothing can possibly come between that love and each of us, if we remain faithful throughout our lives. Paul concludes that same 8th chapter of Romans by saying:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?... Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Yahshua) our Lord" (Rom. 8:35-39).

As we approach this Passover season, let us do so with much seriousness and deep consideration of the gravity and enormity of what was actually involved in the sacrifice of our Saviour. It was far more than His death on the cross. Both He and His Father gave up everything to redeem human beings, to make it possible for them to be born into the Family of God, to have eternal life, to be part of the coming Kingdom, ruling and reigning with Christ Himself at His return to this earth.

There is nothing you or I could possibly do, even if we had a billion lifetimes, that could ever earn for ourselves or cause us to deserve what the Father and Christ have already willingly done on our behalf. We are the unworthy recipients of the greatest act of love in the history of the universe, the most unspeakable blessing of all! God has given up His only Son for us. Let us then, in faith and appreciation and humility, commemorate His profound sacrifice, giving it the full weight it so rightly deserves. And let us resolve here and now that we will, from this point onward, yield our wills to His and by His power walk worthy of the vocation (**full-time job!!**) to which we have so mercifully been called and chosen. May the grace of our great God be with us all.

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