

Riding the Death Train

A Message of Hope

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“Greater love has no one than this,
that one lay down his life for his friends.”
(John 15:13)

Imagine yourself on a train destined for a death camp. All the passengers, including yourself, are condemned and on the way to be executed.

When the train is nearly at its destination, a young man is sighted on the tracks ahead. He’s waving a red flag, determined to stop the train. The conductor barely manages to bring the train to a screeching halt. Officials race from the train to interrogate the man and learn of his remarkable request – to die on behalf of everyone inside the train! “I am here to stop the execution,” the young man bravely declares. The amazed officers quickly get word of this most unusual encounter to the judge who issued the orders.

After grilling the young man at length, the judge agrees to let him be a substitute for the ill-fated passengers, because his record was clear of any crimes. He was totally innocent according to all the reports; and yet, he is freely volunteering to take their judgment upon himself.

His Love For The Guilty People Unfolds

While you and all the others watch, he is led out to be executed. He is tortured and abused on behalf of all who have come so close to death. I want you to take a moment and really think about such a gesture. How unfathomable that someone should offer himself so unreservedly for the condemned.

While this innocent young man was nailed to a tree in the death camp, he screams in agony yelling loudly for help, but it never comes. He eventually takes his

last breath. Why? That those inside the train could be spared and live. The judge issues a ruling about what the people on the train must do to be acquitted by the man's sacrificial death.

The Reality

This is not just a story; it is an analogy. The Bible clearly states:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory [standard] of God (Romans 3:23).

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a).

These verdicts from the Supreme Court of Heaven imply that everyone is guilty of sin and that all must be sentenced to Hell, separated from God forever. Everyone without exception is under God's judgment—on a death train to an eternal doom.

Human Efforts

The Bible has provided a refutation to man's attempts at justifying himself before God. One may say, "Well, I am trying to be good." The Bible says:

There is none who does good, there is not even one (Romans 3:12b).

Where does that leave this individual? Yet another person may argue, "I have been trying to keep God's commandments." Again the Bible has an answer:

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all (James 2:10).

The question is: How many of God's commandments must one keep to earn God's acceptance into heaven? Every one of them! A single mistake with one commandment means a disqualification in all of the commandments (James 2:10). Who can be perfect in all? Who can go an entire day or week or year without disobeying God's commandments? The truth is that:

None is righteous, not even one (Romans 3:10b).

One may further argue that he or she is trying to live

a righteous life. Again, the Bible says:

For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment (Isaiah 64:6a).

This is obviously not good news for anyone. All human efforts to earn the approval of God have been abolished. What do we have left?

Nothing!

Does this refutation from God mean that no human being can go to heaven? Not at all. It only means that every human effort is futile. The only hope, the only solution is God's grace.

Mankind In His Helpless Situation

The Lord God as the creator is holy. He is absolutely righteous and a God of perfect justice. In His holiness, He cannot associate with sin or sinners (1John 1:5). As a just God, he cannot and will not allow sin to go unpunished. There is no way an imperfect man can have a relationship with a perfect God. It is absolutely impossible with man's effort.

With people this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26b).

Hence, mankind in all his struggles cannot and will not measure up to God in His Holiness. One thinks that he is good but God says, "no one does good" (Romans 3:12b). Another person thinks he is living a good life. God replies, "none is righteous" (Romans 3:10). Another individual thinks he could be justified by keeping God's law. God answers:

A man is not justified by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16a).

Indeed, man has run out of options in an attempt to escape God's divine judgment levied on all (Romans 3:23). There is no escape from His judgment. All stand judged, condemned, and sentenced to eternal Hell. No matter how hard one tries on his own, escaping this fate is impossible. Does this mean that we are hopelessly unable to escape God's judgment? Absolutely not. God has only one plan for escape. A plan of grace. Follow this grace plan and be free, or reject it and face God's eternal wrath (John 3:36).

The Good News

While man was trying to escape from God's judgment by his own efforts, someone came to his rescue. This man is Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God. He offered Himself as the blameless Son who is qualified to take man's death sentence on Himself. Concerning this unique man, Jesus Christ, John the Baptist speaks concerning this unique man, Jesus Christ.⁴

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29b).

He took the punishment for our sins. The Apostle Peter adds:

He [Jesus Christ)] Himself bore our sins in His own body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24).

The Apostle Paul declares:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died [as a substitute] for us (Romans 5:8).

The penalty of sin has been paid in full once and for all (Hebrews 9:12).

How Good Can This Good News Be?

The price of the death penalty has been paid in full. The obstacle between a holy God and unrighteous man has been removed. Sin made a separation between man and God (Isaiah 59:2). Jesus Christ removed this barrier by His substitutionary death on the Cross. The curse placed on man because of his inability to keep the law was taken care of by this same substitutionary death. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written:

Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree (Galatians 3:13b).

Jesus Christ alone, apart from any other human contribution, made peace with God (1 Timothy 2:5). The problem of the huge and impassible wall, man's failure to follow God's commandments and man's inadequate efforts, was solved at the Cross by Jesus Christ.

Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which

was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (Colossians 2:14).

For He [Jesus Christ] is our peace, who made both groups into one, and broke down the dividing wall, [of hostility] by abolishing in His flesh the enmity which is the law of commandments (Ephesians 2:14, 15a).

While we were yet sinners, [God's enemies] Christ died [as a substitute] for us (Romans 5:8).

Memorable Exit

Think back to the analogy of the train heading for the death camp. After the innocent man offered his life, the condition issued by the Judge was that those wanting to leave the train had to exit through a designated door. This exit honors the death of the innocent man who died as a substitute for them. What a memorable exit!

In analogy, God has issued an order from His courtroom in Heaven. The only ruling acceptable to His perfect justice is to enter through ONE entrance. There is no compromise about this entrance. God's mandates are exact. The passengers had to exit through one door. Anyone who desires to enter heaven must go through God's designated entrance.

The Entrance To Heaven

Concerning God's ruling, Jesus Christ himself speaks:

I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes to the Father [in heaven] except through Me (John 14:6).

Luke adds:

And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

This emphatically means that apart from Jesus Christ, no human being can be saved nor ever go to Heaven. Jesus Christ himself makes that claim certain. No shortcut will suffice. God means what He says. Seek the door and enter, or be shut out of Heaven forever.

How To Be Saved

There is only one way to Heaven and that is through Jesus Christ who says:

I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he will be saved (John 10:9a).

How can one enter a door he cannot see? Since Jesus Christ is the door; the only way one can enter is by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. One door, one entrance, one faith in Christ alone. How much faith? Very little “as a grain of mustard seed” (Matthew 17:20).

Illustration of Faith: In the Old Testament, the people of Israel disobeyed God. God in His justice sent fiery serpents among the people (Numbers 21:6). The serpents bit and killed many people. The suffering Israelites confessed their sins to God. He could have allowed the serpents to wipe out these disobedient Israelites, but He did not. What did God do instead? In His matchless grace, He said to Moses:

‘Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard [pole]; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live’ (Numbers 21:8).

So Moses did as God had commanded him. You see, Moses followed God’s order precisely. Then it was the Israelites’ turn to follow God’s instructions precisely as well, through Moses. They had the choice: simply do what God said or die.

Indeed, all who were bitten, who did not question the grace of God or His wisdom or complain about the simplicity of God’s instruction, but merely looked at the serpent that Moses made, lived (Numbers 21:9). How fabulous, how awesome, how simple was the grace of God to all the Israelites, so simple that both the old and the young could just look at the serpent and live.

There was no work of any kind added to His grace instruction. No promises required by God, no commitment, no congregational dedication or rededication needed, no baptism and no tithing required. What a gracious solution from the courtroom of a loving God. The same God who gave instruction to Moses a few thousand years ago, has issued another simple solution to man’s helpless situation.

The Son Of God Lifted Up

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

Jesus Christ was lifted up on the Cross when He was crucified. Just like the Israelites looked at the serpent Moses lifted up, you can look at the Cross and by faith alone in Jesus Christ you can be assured, by God Himself, that you have eternal life.

In the wilderness, they were to look at the serpent. What is the merit in looking? There is none. At the Cross, it is simply believe. Again, is there any merit in believing? No. Merit belongs to Jesus Christ. How simple was God's offer of deliverance in the wilderness then; how simple is God's offer of salvation now? God makes things simple while Satan and his associates complicate the offer of salvation which God offers in grace. Salvation is a simple matter. It is as simple as: "believe in Him;" not "believe and be baptized;" not "believe and join the church;" not "believe and keep on believing;" not "believe and repent and believe again;" not "believe and make Jesus Christ Lord." He is already Lord. There is no commitment added to faith. God's instruction for salvation is clearly stated:

He [including you] who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey [the command to believe] the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life (John 3:16).

But these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:31).

The Faithfulness Of God

Is it possible for God to lie? Absolutely not!

God is not a man, that He should lie (Numbers 23:19).

If God says, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” (and He did: John 3:36), He meant just that. If He says, “whoever believes in Him [Jesus Christ] shall not perish” (and He did: John 3:16), He meant that the individual who puts his trust in Christ will not go to Hell. It’s that simple. On the other hand, if God says, “he who believes in Jesus Christ, and makes him Lord, and is baptized and is committed to him shall never perish,” you better do all those things if you ever hope to have eternal life. What a relief because He never says such things! One thing is clear from His word:

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, [Christ] and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31).

This is God’s grace in action.

Your Greatest Decision

Right at this moment, you can make the greatest decision that will change the course of your life forever. How? By simply telling God the Father audibly or inaudibly that right now you are believing in His Son who was lifted up on the Cross to die on your behalf. The moment you personally put your trust entirely in Christ, and only in Him, you have obeyed God’s word. That very moment the miracle of salvation begins. What a great moment in your life! A life miraculously redeemed by God’s grace forever.

For by grace you have been saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8a).

What is this miracle? God, in exchange for your weak faith and rotten righteousness, gives you His own perfect righteousness (Romans 3:22), which is the basis for your justification. Among other things, He gives you His eternal life (John 3:36). At that instant, you possess God’s own righteousness. You also have His very life in you. These grace gifts from God for the first time in your life qualify you to live with God in Heaven forever.

What did you do to receive any of these? Nothing! Therefore, you can unequivocally conclude that you never earned, worked or deserved to be saved. Instead, it is because of God’s grace. It boils down to this: you cannot improve upon what God did. God’s work is final and irrevocable (Romans 11:29).

This is the Good News. The opportunity has

arrived. The decision is yours to make. Salvation is by faith in Christ, and in Jesus Christ alone. This is God's only solution for escape. Accept His grace offer and be transformed or reject His unique grace offer and face the consequences of eternal condemnation. God's verdict remains:

He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey [the command to believe] the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36).

The choice is yours alone; therefore:

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your gift of grace; Your Son who was offered on the Cross. We thank You for making salvation so simple and obtainable by everyone. We pray for those who have read this Gospel message and have not yet made the greatest decision of their life. We pray that they would come to the point of fully understanding exactly what it means to accept or to reject Your eternal offer of salvation. Please Father, challenge those who have not personally believed in Christ to keep on meditating on this message. In Christ's name, Amen.

For Those Who Have Believed

God demands that you grow in grace (2 Peter 3:18). He desires that you continue to hunger for sound teaching (1 Peter 2:2). If you wish to receive this tract and other basic books that will help you in your spiritual living at no cost whatsoever, see our publications.

Prayer Request (For believers only)

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2).

The effective prayer of a righteous man [righteous by faith in Christ] can accomplish much (James 5:16b).

Praying at the same time for us as well, [including Moses and Grace Evangelistic Ministries] that God will open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth ... of Christ (Colossians 4:3).