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## The Cross – the One True Glorification of God

by Joseph Ratzinger  
(Pope Benedict XVI)

An excerpt from *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week –  
From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*,  
March, 2011



According to the account of the evangelists, Jesus died, praying, at the ninth hour, that is to say, around 3:00 P.M. Luke gives his final prayer as a line from Psalm 31: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46; Ps 31:5). In John’s account, Jesus’ last words are: “It is finished!” (John 19:30). In the Greek text, this word (*tetélestai*) points back to the very beginning of the Passion narrative, to the episode of the washing of the feet, which the evangelist introduces by observing that Jesus loved his own “to the end (*télos*)” (John 13:1). This “end,” this *ne plus ultra* of loving, is now attained in the moment of death. He has truly gone right to the end, to the very limit and even beyond that limit. He has accomplished the utter fullness of love – he has given himself.

In our reflection on Jesus’ prayer on the Mount of Olives in chapter 6, we encountered a further meaning of this same word (*teleioun*) in connection with Hebrews 5:9: in the Torah it means consecration, bestowal of priestly dignity, in other words, total dedication to God. I think we may detect this same meaning here, on the basis of Jesus’ high-priestly prayer. Jesus has accomplished the act of consecration – the priestly handing-over of himself and the world to God – right to the end (cf. John 17:19). So in this final word, the great mystery of the Cross shines forth. The new cosmic liturgy is accomplished. The Cross of Jesus replaces all other acts of worship as the one true glorification of God, in which God glorifies himself through him in whom he grants us his love, thereby drawing us to himself.

The Synoptic Gospels explicitly portray Jesus’ death on the Cross as a cosmic and liturgical event: the sun is darkened, the veil of the Temple is torn in two, the earth quakes, the dead rise again.

Even more important than the cosmic sign is an act of faith: the Roman centurion – the commander of the execution squad – in his consternation over all that he sees taking place, acknowledges Jesus as God’s Son: “Truly, this man

was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39). At the foot of the Cross, the Church of the Gentiles comes into being. Through the Cross, the Lord gathers people together to form the new community of the worldwide Church. Through the suffering Son, they recognize the true God.

While the Romans, as a deterrent, deliberately left victims of crucifixion hanging on the cross after they had died, Jewish law required them to be taken down on the same day (cf. Deuteronomy 21:22-23). Hence the execution squad had to hasten the victims’ death by breaking their legs. This applied also in the case of the crucifixion on Golgotha. The legs of the two “thieves” are broken. But then the soldiers see that Jesus is already dead. So they do not break his legs. Instead, one of them pierces Jesus’ right side – his heart– and “at once there came out blood and water” (John 19:34). It is the hour when the paschal lambs are being slaughtered. It was laid down that no bone of these lambs was to be broken (cf. Exodus 12:46). Jesus appears here as the true Paschal Lamb, pure and whole.

So in this passage we may detect a tacit reference to the very beginning of Jesus’ story – to the hour when John the Baptist said: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Those words, which were inevitably obscure at the time as a mysterious prophecy of things to come, are now a reality. Jesus is the Lamb chosen by God himself. On the Cross he takes upon himself the sins of the world, and he wipes them away.

Yet at the same time, there are echoes of Psalm 34, which says: “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken” (Psalm 34:19-20). The Lord, the just man, has suffered much, he has suffered everything, and yet God has kept guard over him: no bone of his has been broken.

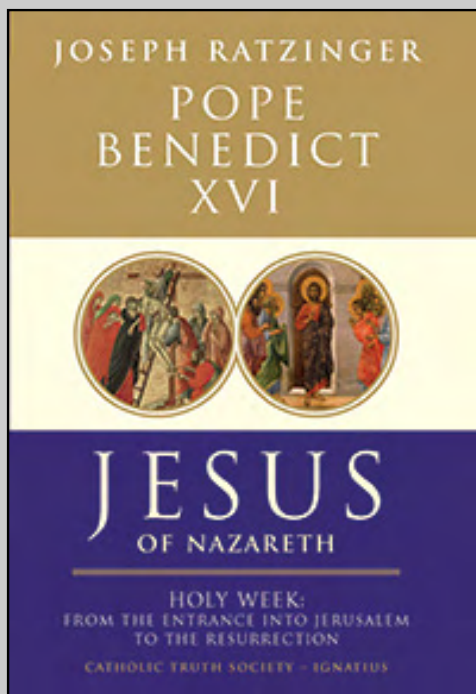
Blood and water flowed from the pierced heart of Jesus. True to Zechariah’s prophecy, the Church in every century has looked upon this pierced heart and recognized therein the source of the blessings that are symbolized in blood and water. The prophecy prompts a search for a deeper understanding of what really happened there.

An initial step toward this understanding can be found in the First Letter of Saint John, which emphatically takes up the theme of the blood and water flowing from Jesus’ side: “This is he who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth. There are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree” (1 John 5:6-8).

What does the author mean by this insistence that Jesus came not with water only but also with blood? We may assume that he is alluding to a tendency to place all the emphasis on Jesus’ baptism while setting the Cross aside. And this probably also meant that only the word, the doctrine, the message was held to be important, but not “the flesh”, the living body of Christ that bled on the Cross; it probably meant an attempt to create a Christianity of thoughts and ideas, divorced from the reality of the flesh – sacrifice and sacrament.

In this double outpouring of blood and water, the Fathers saw an image of the two fundamental sacraments – Eucharist and Baptism – which spring forth from the Lord’s pierced side, from his heart. This is the new outpouring that creates the Church and renews mankind. Moreover, the opened side of the Lord asleep on the Cross prompted the Fathers to point to the creation of Eve from the side of the sleeping Adam, and so in this outpouring of the sacraments they also recognized the birth of the Church: the creation of the new woman from the side of the new Adam.

[Excerpt from [Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection](#), by Pope Benedict XVI, Chapter 8, © 2011 [Ignatius Press](#) (US), [CTS](#) (UK). Used with permission.]



“I hope that I have been granted an insight into the figure of our Lord that can be helpful to all readers who seek to encounter Jesus and to believe in him.”

- from the *Forward to Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two*

Joseph Ratzinger, for many years a renowned theologian, scripture scholar, and university professor, before becoming an archbishop, cardinal, and now pope of the Roman Catholic Church, was born in Bavaria, Germany in 1927. He was ordained priest in 1951. He became Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977.

When he was elected pope on April 19, 2005, he took the name Benedict XVI, in honor of St. Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Western monasticism. The pope said that “with his life and work St Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture” and helped Europe to emerge from the “dark night of history” that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.

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## Worship At the Cross

It's more than a symbol – it's our salvation

By Charles Simpson

The primary Christian symbol for nearly 2,000 years has been the cross. It has been the central statement of our theology and our faith. But it is more than our symbol; it is our salvation.

It is at the cross that religions divide. Some ignore it, others seek to explain that Jesus “didn’t really die” and still others, while acknowledging it, fail to preach its power. Can there be authentic Christianity without the cross? Can there be real salvation apart from it? The answer is no.

I grew up singing about the cross. As a Southern Baptist, I learned the great classic hymns: “At the Cross,” “The Old Rugged Cross,” “Jesus Keep Me Near the Cross,” and my favorite, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” It was in the ugliness of that event that the beauty of Christ was revealed.

The apostolic Gospel was, and is, cross-centered. Whether Peter was preaching at Pentecost or Paul was writing to Corinth, the cross was central (see Acts 2:2, 1 Corinthians 15). Peter saw and proclaimed the cross as the center of God’s plan. And Paul warned against any human cleverness that might obscure the power of the cross. The fact that millions of lives are still being transformed is a vivid indicator that the cross has lost none of its power.

If the cross is central to our salvation, and it is, then it certainly is the primary motive for our worship. It was at the cross that mankind beheld the true nature of God’s goodness and mercy. And though wicked mankind railed at the cross, and arrogant mankind scoffed at the cross as foolish, redeemed mankind worships there.

[The prophesied cross](#)

The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not merely a random event planned by evil man. Jesus was ordained to the cross before the world began (see Revelation 13:8). A thousand years before the nails pierced his righteous hands, David wrote words not understood by him or others, until Jesus suffered on the cross (see Psalm 22). Approximately 700 years before the spikes pierced the Servant's feet, Isaiah described his passion (see Isaiah 50 and 53).

### The prayerful cross

The crucifixion was bathed in prayer. No doubt Jesus prayed over the coming event on numerous occasions. But John 17 gives us an account of one such prayer on the eve of his cross. And the Gospels tell us that on the night of his trial, he prayed alone in the Garden of Gethsemane, and sweat great drops of blood.

The prayer of Jesus was that he would do not his own will, but the Father's will. That agonizing prayer continued until he finally prayed, "Into your hands I commend my spirit."

While the cross was for our salvation, he was continually focused on the Father; the cross was a living prayer. He went there and suffered there as unto the Father. His thoughts were vertical, even as he forgave his enemies. He lived and died to please the Father to whom he returned.

### The private cross

Other men died on crosses, but Jesus' experience was unique. What he died, no one else could do. He alone was virgin born, sinless in life, righteous concerning the law, and innocent in all regards. Yet he was the "scapegoat" for our sin. Sinners hung to the right and to the left of him that day, paying for their own crimes. But Jesus, who had no sins of his own, became sin for us. That overflowing "cup" had to be the hardest for the Holy One to drink.

The loneliness of complete obedience, the loneliness of private agonizing prayer, and the loneliness of his mission to die for our sins ...these all isolated him from everyone else who ever lived. Pain is best shared with those who have borne similar suffering. But in Jesus' case – no one – no one ever bore such grief. He could share his suffering with no one.

We may, in our mind's eye, imagine the cross. We may strive to find words to describe what happened, but there is no imagining his complete isolation even from the Father as the sun was hidden at noonday. Jesus stands for us a High Priest. We may all be priests, but Jesus' unique suffering makes him the unique High Priest.

### The cruel cross

The cross was not merely an execution; it was rejection, torture, and humiliation. It was physical, mental, and spiritual. He bore his burden privately, but he bore his shame publicly. The mockery of a crown of thorns and the purple robe, the terrible lashing of the whip, the nakedness of his bruised body, the nails and spikes represent the ultimate human rejection and torture.

It was all on public display, and so was man's depravity. The cross spoke of humanity's worst motives against heaven's best representative. So horrible was the cross that even the most hardened people ultimately turned their faces from him.

### The grace of the cross

The amazing fact is that man's worst efforts revealed heaven's best. All of us, in that we are sinners by nature, participated in the cruelty of the cross. Yet it was there that we found the grace of God. He took our worst thoughts and deeds and gave us his best gifts.

Isaiah 61 says it perfectly. He took the bad news and gave us the Good News. He took our grief and sorrows, and gave us his comfort and joy. He took our affliction and gave us his healing. He took our bondage and gave us his freedom. He took the ashes of our past and gave us his strength and a spirit of praise. He took our humanity and our sinfulness and gave us divine righteousness.

It is impossible to measure the magnitude of his grace with the benefits of his blessings. Concerning the very ones who did the awful deed to him, Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." What he received from mankind and what he gave back are infinitely apart. Is it any wonder that we worship at the cross?

### The believer's cross

Another classic hymn asks, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone and all the world go free? No there's a cross for everyone, and there's a cross for me." Jesus said that indeed there was a cross for anyone who would follow him (see Matthew 16:24-25). Yet another hymn prays, "Jesus, keep me near the cross." That prayer is still appropriate. So much is proclaimed from the Christian pulpits that is far from the Cross.

Growing up, I believed in the cross with all of my Baptist friends, but its shadow over me was not so real until his will crossed mine. I wanted to find a way around his will for my life. I thought about other good things that I might do to serve God. What he wanted was distasteful to me. That is when I finally realized that the cross purchased more than my salvation – it purchased me.

The cross is not only where Jesus died. If we receive his marvelous gifts, it is where we die. In a legal sense, we died with him. If we died with him, we arise from the dead with him, we arise from the dead with him to walk in his purpose (see Romans 6:1-11). Our ultimate choice is not just heaven or hell, it is self or Savior. Accepting his cross is accepting ours.

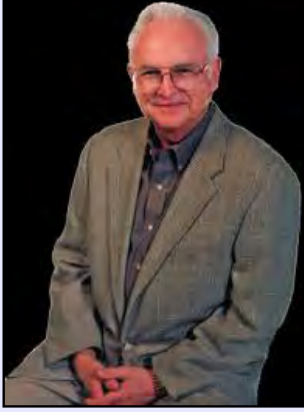
Is it too heavy? Is it morbid? No, it is freedom from our worst enemy – self. It is the joy and excitement of resurrection life. It is cause for thanksgiving, praise, worship, and obedience:

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died  
My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride  
Were the whole realm of nature mine  
That were a present far too small  
Love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

The Bible tells us that Jesus died for the sins of the world, to redeem the church, and to please the Father. As I weighed my personal sin and looked to the cross, I realized that I was included; he died for me. If he died for me, then I owe my life, hope, peace, and joy to him. It motivates me daily – not just in the worship service, but in the service of worship. That's the power of the cross.

If you have embraced the cross, his and yours (and I hope sincerely that you have), then you know his story. And, you have a personal story to tell. It is the greatest story ever told. It is told through all kinds of media and should be. It is told from a multitude of pulpits around the world. But it is best told when one person tells another – from personal experience, one-to-one. Go and tell!

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## **The Cross of Christ - the Measure of the World**

“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32)

by John Henry Newman

[Note: The following is excerpted from Newman's sermon [The Cross of Christ - the Measure of the World](#), first published in *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, Volume 6, London & New York: Longman, Green, and Company, 1891. Minor changes, including capitalization style, were made to allow the text to be more accessible to modern readers. Sub-headings were also added. - Editor]

A great number of people live and die without reflecting at all upon the state of things in which they find themselves. They take things as they come, and follow their inclinations as far as they have the opportunity. They are guided mainly by pleasure and pain, not by reason, principle, or conscience; and they do not attempt to interpret this world, to determine what it means, or to reduce what they see and feel to system. But when persons, either from thoughtfulness of mind, or from intellectual activity, begin to contemplate the visible state of things into which they are born, then they find it a maze and a perplexity. It is a riddle which they cannot solve. It seems full of contradictions and without a drift. Why it is, and what it is to issue in, and how it is what it is, and how we come to be introduced into it, and what is our destiny, are all mysteries.

In this difficulty, some have formed one philosophy of life, and others another. Men and women have thought they had found the key, by means of which they might read what is so obscure. Ten thousand things come before us one after another in the course of life, and what are we to think of them? What color are we to give them? Are we to look at all things in a happy and mirthful way? Or in a melancholy way? In a desponding or a hopeful way?

## The Christian interpretation of this world

Are we to make light of life altogether, or to treat the whole subject seriously? Are we to make greatest things of little consequence, or least things of great consequence? Are we to keep in mind what is past and gone, or are we to look on to the future, or are we to be absorbed in what is present?

How are we to look at things? This is the question which all persons of observation ask themselves, and answer each in his own way. They wish to think by rule; by something within them, which may harmonize and adjust what is without them. Such is the need felt by reflective minds.

Now, let me ask, what is the real key, what is the Christian interpretation of this world? What is given us by revelation to estimate and measure this world by? The event of this season – the crucifixion of the Son of God.

It is the death of the Eternal Word of God made flesh, which is our great lesson how to think and how to speak of this world. His cross has put its due value upon every thing which we see, upon all fortunes, all advantages, all ranks, all dignities, all pleasures – upon the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. It has set a price upon the excitements, the rivalries, the hopes, the fears, the desires, the efforts, the triumphs of mortal beings. It has given a meaning to the various, shifting course, the trials, the temptations, the sufferings, of his earthly state. It has brought together and made consistent all that seemed discordant and aimless. It has taught us how to live, how to use this world, what to expect, what to desire, what to hope. It is the tone into which all the strains of this world's music are ultimately to be resolved.

## Look at the cross of Christ

Look around, and see what the world presents of high and low. Go to the court of princes. See the treasure and skill of all nations brought together to honor a child of man. Observe the prostration of the many before the few. Consider the form and ceremonial, the pomp, the state, the circumstance, and the vainglory. Do you wish to know the worth of it all? Look at the cross of Christ.

Go to the political world. See nation jealous of nation, trade rivalling trade, armies and fleets matched against each other. Survey the various ranks of the community, its parties and their contests, the strivings of the ambitious, the intrigues of the crafty. What is the end of all this turmoil – the grave. What is the measure – the cross.

Go, again, to the world of intellect and science. Consider the wonderful discoveries which the human mind is making, the variety of arts to which its discoveries give rise, the all but miracles by which it shows its power. And next, the pride and confidence of reason, and the absorbing devotion of thought to transitory objects, which is the consequence. Would you form a right judgment of all this? Look at the cross.

Again, look at misery, look at poverty and destitution, look at oppression and captivity. Go where food is scanty, and lodging unhealthy. Consider pain and suffering, diseases long or violent, all that is frightful and revolting. Would you know how to rate all these? Gaze upon the cross.

Thus in the cross, and him who hung upon it, all things meet. All things subserve it, all things need it. It is their center and their interpretation. For he was lifted up upon it, that he might draw all peoples and all things to himself.

## Sweet to the lips – bitter to the taste

But it will be said that the view which the cross of Christ imparts to us of human life and of the world, is not that which we should take, if left to ourselves. That it is not an obvious view. If we look at things on their surface, they

are far more bright and sunny than they appear when viewed in the light which this season casts upon them.

The world seems made for the enjoyment of just such a being as humankind, and humankind is put into it. Humankind has the capacity of enjoyment, and the world supplies the means. How natural this, what a simple as well as pleasant philosophy, yet how different from that of the cross! The doctrine of the cross, it may be said, disarranges two parts of a system which seem made for each other. It severs the fruit from the eater, the enjoyment from the enjoyer. How does this solve a problem? Does it not rather itself create one?

I answer, first, that whatever force this objection may have, surely it is merely a repetition of that which Eve felt and Satan urged in Eden. Did not the woman see that the forbidden tree was "good for food," and "a tree to be desired"? Well, then, is it wonderful that we too, the descendants of the first pair, should still be in a world where there is a forbidden fruit, and that our trials should lie in being within reach of it, and our happiness in abstaining from it? The world, at first sight, appears made for pleasure, and the vision of Christ's cross is a solemn and sorrowful sight interfering with this appearance. Be it so. But why may it not be our duty to abstain from enjoyment notwithstanding, if it was a duty even in Eden?

But again, it is but a superficial view of things to say that this life is made for pleasure and happiness. To those who look under the surface, it tells a very different tale.

The doctrine of the cross does but teach, though infinitely more forcibly, still after all it does but teach the very same lesson which this world teaches to those who live long in it, who have much experience in it, who know it. The world is sweet to the lips, but bitter to the taste. It pleases at first, but not at last. It looks happy on the outside, but evil and misery lie concealed within.

When a person has passed a certain number of years in it, he or she cries out with the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes) Nay, if men and women do not have religion for their guide, they will be forced to go further, and say, "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." All is disappointment. All is sorrow. All is pain.

### [A world made miserable by sin](#)

The sore judgments of God upon sin are concealed within it, and force a people to grieve whether they will or not. Therefore the doctrine of the cross of Christ does but anticipate for us our experience of the world. It is true, it bids us grieve for our sins in the midst of all that smiles and glitters around us. But if we will not heed it, we shall at length be forced to grieve for them from undergoing their fearful punishment. If we will not acknowledge that this world has been made miserable by sin, from the sight of him on whom our sins were laid, we shall experience it to be miserable by the recoil of those sins upon ourselves.

It may be granted, then, that the doctrine of the cross is not on the surface of the world. The surface of things is bright only, and the cross is sorrowful. It is a hidden doctrine. It lies under a veil. It at first sight startles us, and we are tempted to revolt from it. Like St. Peter the Apostle, we cry out, "God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22). And yet it is a true doctrine – for truth is not on the surface of things, but in the depths.

And as the doctrine of the cross, though it be the true interpretation of this world, is not prominently manifested in it, upon its surface, but is concealed. So again, when received into the faithful heart, there it abides as a living principle, but deep, and hidden from observation. Religious men and women, in the words of Scripture, "live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved them and gave himself for them" (Galatians 2:20). But they do not tell this to all people, they leave others to find it out as they may.

Our Lord's own command to his disciples was, that when they fast, they should "anoint their head and wash their face" (Matthew 6:17). Thus they are bound not to make a display, but ever to be content to look outwardly different from what they are really inwardly. They are to carry a cheerful countenance with them, and to control and regulate their feelings, that those feelings, by not being expended on the surface, may retire deep into their hearts and there live. And thus "Jesus Christ and he crucified" is, as the Apostle tells us, "a hidden wisdom." Hidden in the world, which seems at first sight to speak a far other doctrine. And hidden in the faithful soul, which to persons at a distance, or to chance beholders, seems to be living but an ordinary life, while really it is in secret holding communion with him who was "manifested in the flesh," "crucified through weakness," "justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, and received up into glory."

### The heart of religion

This being the case, the great and awful doctrine of the cross of Christ, which we now commemorate, may fitly be called, in the language of figure, the heart of religion. The heart may be considered as the seat of life. It is the principle of motion, heat, and activity. From it the blood goes to and fro to the extreme parts of the body. It sustains the man in his powers and faculties. It enables the brain to think. And when it is touched, man dies.

And in like manner the sacred doctrine of Christ's atoning sacrifice is the vital principle on which the Christian lives, and without which Christianity is not. Without it no other doctrine is held profitably. To believe in Christ's divinity, or in his manhood, or in the Holy Trinity, or in a judgment to come, or in the resurrection of the dead, is an untrue belief, not Christian faith, unless we receive also the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice.

On the other hand, to receive it presupposes the reception of other high truths of the Gospel besides. It involves the belief in Christ's true divinity, in his true incarnation, and in man's sinful state by nature. And it prepares the way to belief in the sacred Eucharistic feast, in which he who was once crucified is ever given to our souls and bodies, verily and indeed, in his body and in his blood.

But again, the heart is hidden from view. It is carefully and securely guarded. It is not like the eye set in the forehead, commanding all, and seen of all. And so in like manner the sacred doctrine of the atoning sacrifice is not one to be talked of, but to be lived upon. Not to be put forth irreverently, but to be adored secretly. Not to be used as a necessary instrument in the conversion of the ungodly, or for the satisfaction of reasoners of this world, but to be unfolded to the docile and obedient. To young children, whom the world has not corrupted. To the sorrowful, who need comfort. To the sincere and earnest, who need a rule of life. To the innocent, who need warning. And to the established, who have earned the knowledge of it.

### Sow in tears – reap with joy

One more remark I shall make, and then conclude. It must not be supposed, because the doctrine of the Cross makes us sad, that therefore the Gospel is a sad religion. The Psalmist says, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy," and our Lord says, "They that mourn shall be comforted."

Let no one go away with the impression that the Gospel makes us take a gloomy view of the world and of life. It hinders us indeed from taking a superficial view, and finding a vain transitory joy in what we see. But it forbids our immediate enjoyment, only to grant enjoyment in truth and fullness afterwards. It only forbids us to begin with enjoyment. It only says, if you begin with pleasure, you will end with pain.

It bids us begin with the cross of Christ, and in that cross we shall at first find sorrow, but in a while peace and comfort will rise out of that sorrow. That cross will lead us to mourning, repentance, humiliation, prayer, fasting. We shall sorrow for our sins, we shall sorrow with Christ's sufferings. But all this sorrow will only issue, nay, will be undergone in a happiness far greater than the enjoyment which the world gives. Though careless worldly minds

indeed will not believe this, ridicule the notion of it, because they never have tasted it. And they consider it a mere matter of words, which religious persons think it decent and proper to use, and try to believe themselves, and to get others to believe, but which no one really feels. This is what they think. But our Savior said to his disciples, "You now have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man takes from you." ... "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you; not as the world gives, give I to you." (John 16:22; 14:27.)

And St. Paul says, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9,14). And thus the cross of Christ, as telling us of our redemption as well as of his sufferings, wounds us indeed, but so wounds as to heal also.

And thus, too, all that is bright and beautiful, even on the surface of this world, though it has no substance, and may not suitably be enjoyed for its own sake, yet is a figure and promise of that true joy which issues out of the Atonement. It is a promise beforehand of what is to be. It is a shadow, raising hope because the substance is to follow, but not to be rashly taken instead of the substance.

### Mercy and comfort

And it is God's usual mode of dealing with us, in mercy to send the shadow before the substance, that we may take comfort in what is to be, before it comes. Thus our Lord before his passion rode into Jerusalem in triumph, with the multitudes crying "hosanna," and strewing his road with palm branches and their garments.

This was but a vain and hollow pageant, nor did our Lord take pleasure in it. It was a shadow which stayed not, but flitted away. It could not be more than a shadow, for the passion had not been undergone by which his true triumph was wrought out. He could not enter into his glory before he had first suffered. He could not take pleasure in this semblance of it, knowing that it was unreal. Yet that first shadowy triumph was the omen and presage of the true victory to come, when he had overcome the sharpness of death. And we commemorate this figurative triumph on the last Sunday in Lent, to cheer us in the sorrow of the week that follows, and to remind us of the true joy which comes with Easter Day.

And so, too, as regards this world, with all its enjoyments, yet disappointments, let us not trust it. Let us not give our hearts to it. Let us not begin with it. Let us begin with faith. Let us begin with Christ. Let us begin with his cross and the humiliation to which it leads. Let us first be drawn to him who is lifted up, that so he may, with himself, freely give us all things. Let us "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and then all those things of this world "will be added to us."

They alone are able truly to enjoy this world, who begin with the world unseen. They alone enjoy it, who have first abstained from it. They alone can truly feast, who have first fasted. They alone are able to use the world, who have learned not to abuse it. They alone inherit it, who take it as a shadow of the world to come, and who for that world to come relinquish it.

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John Henry Newman, 1801-1890, was an influential writer and major figure from the Church of England in the Oxford Movement. In 1845 he became a Roman Catholic priest and was made a Cardinal late in life in 1879.

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## “Hosanna to the Son of David!”

By Jeanne Kun

Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on an ass.

- Zechariah 9:9

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem manifests the coming of the kingdom that the Messiah - King, welcomed into his city by children and the humble of heart, is going to accomplish by the Passover of his Death and Resurrection.

- *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 570*

Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead, and so he was a man with a price on his head: He went into temporary seclusion (John 11:53-57), where he was refreshed by a visit with his friends and anointed beforehand for his burial (12:1-8). Jesus was now ready to enter Jerusalem openly, knowing he would confront its hostile authorities. He was approaching the culmination of his mission.

“Although Jesus had always refused popular attempts to

## What Greeting for the King?

Jubilant *Hosannas*  
(alive with hope and expectation)  
resounded upon the fresh spring air  
to welcome the king who  
entered Jerusalem's walls that day  
astride a donkey.

But soon his bleeding feet  
will trip over the same rough paving stones  
that had echoed his praises,  
and hammer blows will rend the stagnant air  
thick with dust and the smell of sweat & blood.  
Only cries of mockery  
(and mourning)  
will greet Israel's king  
when he's hung high upon a cross  
outside the city walls,  
all *Hosannas* dying  
with this strange Messiah.

---

## The Scene

Matthew 21:1-17

1And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. 3If any one says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and he will send them immediately.” 4This took place to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 “Tell the daughter of Zion,  
Behold, your king is coming to  
you, humble, and mounted on an  
ass, and on a colt, the foal of an  
ass.”

6The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7they brought the ass and the colt, and put their garments on them, and he

make him king, he chooses the time and prepares the details for his messianic entry into the city of ‘his father David’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 559). His entrance into Jerusalem on the Sunday before Passover was deliberate and purposeful, for it was popularly believed that the Messiah would come at Passover time to announce the establishment of his kingdom. Moreover, Jesus made special arrangements to ride into the city rather than walk as pilgrims usually did. A donkey awaited him, “tied at the door out in the open street” for his disciples to fetch (Mark 11:4). Jesus’ choice of mount was symbolic as well as intentional, for his entrance into David’s city on a donkey enacted ancient prophecies about the coming of Israel’s Messiah-King:

Say to the daughter of Zion,  
“Behold, your salvation comes.”  
(Isaiah 62:11)

Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on an ass,  
on a colt the foal of an ass.  
(Zechariah 9:9)

In fulfilling these messianic prophecies, Jesus was publicly proclaiming his identity.

Jesus’ manner of entering the city would have also recalled to the crowds the occasion when Solomon, King David’s son, rode his father’s mule from the site of his anointing at the spring of Gihon into Jerusalem, where he was crowned as David’s successor to the throne (1 Kings 1:32-40). Now Jesus was greeted with a great crowd hailing him as “Son of David” and celebrating his kingship (Matthew 21:9).

Jesus rode a colt “on which no one has ever yet sat” (Luke 19:30). Animals that had not been yoked or broken for common use were ritually clean; since this colt filled the Old Testaments prescriptions (see Numbers 19:2 and 1 Samuel 6:7), it was suitable for sacred or royal use.

As the crowds cheered, they spread their cloaks on the ground in Jesus’ path, perhaps remembering how garments had been spread under Jehu’s feet when he was hailed as king after he had been anointed by Elisha (2 Kings 9:13). Reflecting on this Palm Sunday scene centuries later, St. Andrew of Crete wrote,

sat thereon. 8Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9And the crowds that went before him and that followed him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” 10And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” 11And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.”

12And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. 13He said to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer’; but you make it a den of robbers.”

14And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. 15But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant; 16and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read,

‘Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise’?”

17And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there.

*See also Mark 11:1-11, 15-19; Luke 19:29-40, 45-48; John 2:13-22*

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## Pondering the Word

1. How do Jesus’ preparations and entrance into Jerusalem add to your understanding of his messianic role? Why do you think it was important for him to make such an entrance?
2. What adjectives would you use to

Let us run to accompany him as he hastens toward his passion.... [L]et us spread before his feet, not garments.... but ourselves, clothed in his grace, or rather, clothed completely in him. We who have been baptized into Christ must ourselves be the garments that we spread before him.

“Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matthew 21:9) cried the crowds enthusiastically, lauding Jesus as subjects laud their king and praising him for the great works and miracles they had seen him perform (Luke 19:37). “Hosanna” is the Greek form of the Hebrew entreaty *hosa na*, meaning “Save (us), we beseech you” (see Psalm 118:25-26; 2 Samuel 14:4). Originally a cry for help, over time it became an invocation of blessing and even an acclamation of praise. In the Sanctus of the eucharistic liturgy, the church has taken up the crowd’s cry: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9). So we proclaim the kingship of Christ each time the memorial of Christ’s Passover is celebrated.

Jesus willingly accepted the crowd’s acclaim — but he still rejected the kind of kingship they envisioned. Fired with nationalism, many Jews looked for a warrior-king who would deliver them from Roman domination. But Jesus did not come on a warhorse to establish an independent Jewish state. He came on a mission of peace, astride a young ass. The crowds understood his kingship no better than the disciples did (John 12:16).

While Jesus made it clear that he did not come as a political king or liberator, he still claimed the honor and praise that belonged to him. He refused to quiet his followers when the Pharisees were scandalized by their messianic acclamations. “If these were silent,” Jesus told the infuriated Pharisees, “the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:39-40). “So obvious is his messiahship that if men refused to recognize it, nature would proclaim it. In fact, when his friends were cowed on the hill of Calvary the earth trembled and the rocks split [Matthew 27:51]” *The Navarre Bible: The Gospel of Saint Luke*.

Many biblical scholars believe that Psalm 118 depicts a celebration in the temple of a king’s victory. The crowds welcomed Jesus with a festal procession, palms branches, and the cry, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who come in the name

characterize the attitude and mood of the crowd as Jesus entered Jerusalem? What might this indicate about the crowd’s expectations of him?

3. What clues does Matthew give about how Jesus responded to the crowds’ acclamation? How do you think Jesus’ disciples might have felt as they watched their master?

4. What statement about himself and his mission was Jesus making by the cleansing of the temple? What does the presence of the blind and lame and children in the temple signify?

5. Why, in your opinion, were the chief priests and scribes so indignant toward Jesus (Matthew 21:15-16)? Is their reaction surprising to you? Why or why not?

6. Why did Jesus compare himself and his own body to the temple (Matthew 26:61; 27:40; Mark 14:58; John 2:20-22)? How has Jesus’ sacrificial death replaced the temple sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11-14; 10:11-14)?

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## Living the Word

1. The Pharisees were hard-hearted in their view of Jesus, refusing to consider that he might truly be the Messiah. Recall a time when your hard-heartedness caused you to miss God’s presence and action in your life. When did you recognize the need to repent?

2. What is your reaction to public expressions of devotion to the Lord? How free and open are you in expressing your love for Jesus and your commitment to him in front of others?

3. Is the description of Jesus’ actions in the temple surprising to you? Disturbing? Why or why not? Has this scene altered your conception or expectations of Jesus in any way? If so, how?

4. Zeal for his Father’s house consumed Jesus when he cleansed the temple (John 2:17; see

of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13; see also Psalm 118:25-27). So they may have expected that he would enter the temple with the words, “Open to me the gates of righteous” (Psalm 118:19) and declare his kingship at the altar.

In Matthew’s chronology, Jesus did proceed immediately to the temple when he had entered Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives. But there he behaved quite unexpectedly, driving out all who bought and sold sacrificial animals and overturning the tables of the money-changers (Matthew 21:12).

Selling animals and exchanging foreign currency were necessary services provided for Passover pilgrims who came to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice and pay the annual temple tax. In fact, there were already four marketplaces selling sacrificial animals that were approved by the Sanhedrin, which were conveniently located in the area near the Mount of Olives. But under the high priest Caiaphas, the court of the Gentiles, the outermost precinct of the temple, had also been turned into a trading place—an abuse that hindered Gentile worshippers from praying there.

By evicting the traders, Jesus was defending God’s intention that all people could worship at the temple, Gentiles as well as Jews. For God had said,

[T]he foreigners who join themselves  
to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the  
name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants, . . .  
these I will bring to my holy  
mountain,  
and make them joyful in my  
house of prayer . . .  
for my house shall be called a house  
of prayer  
for all peoples. (Isaiah 56:6-7)

It is likely that, in addition to wanting to preserve the temple as a place of prayer, Jesus was disturbed by the corruption and excessive desire for gain that had come to surround the commercial activities carried out in the temple precinct. Pilgrims were exploited by money-changers, who charged an inflated rate of exchange and by merchants who sold animals for exorbitant prices. Such practices, Jesus

also Psalm 69:9). To what do you zealously devote your energy, time, attention, and resources?

5. Why do you think Jesus wanted God’s “house of prayer” (Matthew 21:13; see also Isaiah 56:7) to be a place where people showed respect and reverence? What are some ways you can encourage respect and reverence in your church or worship space?

6. “Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,” wrote St. Paul (1 Corinthians 6:19). How have you experienced Jesus “cleansing” you to make you a more fitting temple for his Spirit to dwell in?

declared quoting Jeremiah 7:11, made the temple “into a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13). Perhaps he also intended his actions to be a reminder to the dealers that “You cannot serve God and mammon” (Luke 16:13).

The expulsion of the merchants from the temple is a fulfillment of the prophet Zechariah’s vision of the messianic age: “There shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day” (Zechariah 14:21). It also provided a hint that the sacrificial system, which was at the heart of Judaism, was about to become obsolete. An eternal sacrifice—Jesus’ death and resurrection—would supersede the burnt sacrifices that had been offered constantly in the temple for so long. In fact, when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70, the practice of sacrificing animals ended.

After Jesus had expelled the merchants and moneychangers, “the blind and lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them” (Matthew 21:14). This description of the messianic works Jesus performed is a familiar refrain heard throughout gospels: “[A]ll those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to him; and he laid hands on every one of them and healed them” (Luke 4:40). In it we also hear echoes of Isaiah 35:4-6, that “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and . . . then shall the lame man leap like a hart,” and Jesus’ reply to John the Baptist’s disciples, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk. . . . And blessed is he who takes no offense at me” (Matthew 11:4, 6).

But some did take offense at Jesus: The chief priests and scribes were indignant when they saw the wonders Jesus did and heard the praise the children gave him (Matthew 21:15). Jesus quoted Psalm 8:2 to them in reply: “Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise.” With this reference to infants glorifying the Lord, Jesus was giving another hint—this time of his divinity.

Those who controlled the temple commerce and profited from it—among them perhaps Caiaphas, his father-in-law, Annas, and their families—were angered by the disruption of business when Jesus cleansed the temple. Moreover, they feared Jesus, because the people listened attentively to him. After Jesus cleared out the temple, they sought a way to put him to death (Mark 11:17-18; Luke 19:45-47). Plans unfolded quickly:

Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered in the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiaphas, and took counsel together in order to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him. . . . Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him. (Matthew 26:3-4, 14-16)

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Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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*Christ cleansing the temple, painting by El Greco*

## Jesus: A Portrait of Zeal

by Jeanne Kun

Jesus, the servant-king foretold by Zechariah, rode humbly into Jerusalem on a donkey in a spirit of peace. But in cleansing the temple, he exhibited a bold and forceful zeal for his Father's house. Jesus was moved not by a fit of temper but by righteous indignation and godly fervor.

Zeal is more than burning ardor or emotion-based enthusiasm. Rather, true zeal consists of a determined, unflagging dedication to something or to someone; a zealous spirit seeks to advance a cause, defend the truth, or render service. Godly zeal is a characteristic of great men and women of faith. David slew the Philistine aggressor, Goliath (1 Samuel 17:45-49). Deborah roused the faltering Barak into action to defeat the enemies of Israel (Judges 4:4-10). Paul first zealously persecuted those who believed in Jesus and then even more zealously proclaimed the good news of the gospel when he had become a believer (Acts 22:1-5; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Just as Jesus and these heroes of the Bible spent themselves zealously for God and his service, we, too, are to be zealous for God himself, zealous for the gospel, zealous in good works, and zealous in defense of the faith.

*Read and prayerfully reflect* on these additional Scripture passages that describe zeal and how it is put to service for the Lord and his kingdom:

Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand. . . . And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. (1 Samuel 17:45-46, 49)

Never flag in zeal, be aglow with the Spirit, serve the Lord. (Romans 12:11)

[O]ur great God and Savior Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:13-14)

[W]ho is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? But even if you do suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence. (1 Peter 3:13-15)

[A]ccording to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. (2 Peter 3:13-14)



Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

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*Ecce Homo*, by [Michael O'Brien](#)

## Emptied for Our Sake

By Bernard of Clairvaux

Christ's self-emptying was neither a simple gesture nor a limited one. He emptied himself even to the assuming of human nature, even to accepting death, death on a cross (Philippians 2:7).

Who is there that can adequately gauge the greatness of the humility, gentleness, and self-surrender, revealed by the Lord of majesty in assuming human nature, in accepting the punishment of death, the shame of the cross?

But somebody will say: "Surely the Creator could have restored his original plan without all that hardship?" Yes, he could, but he chose the way of personal suffering so that man would never again have to reason to display that

## Redeemed by His Blood

by Bernard of Clairvaux

To redeem a servant, the Father spares not his own Son, and the Son delivers himself up most willingly. Both send the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit himself interceded for us with unspeakable groaning (Romans 8:26).

O hard, and hardened, and hard-hearted children of Adam! How can you remain unmoved by such great kindness, such blazing fire, so prodigious a flame of love, and so ardent a lover, who paid such an extravagant price for a worthless piece of goods!

"Not with perishable things like gold and silver" did Jesus redeem us, but with his own "precious blood" (1 Peter 1:18-19) which flowed out liberally from the five parts of Jesus' body.

What more should he have done that he did not do? He enlightened the blind, brought back the stragglers, reconciled the guilty, and justified the ungodly.

Thirty-three years he was seen on earth. He lived among humans, he died for humans, he spoke concerning the Cherubim and Seraphim and all the angelic powers and they came to be (Psalm 33:9). When he wills it, all power is there with him (Wisdom 12:18).

What then does he who sought you with such concern now seek from you, if not that you walk mindfully with your God (Micah 6:8)? No one but the Holy Spirit enables us to this.

It is he who probes the depth of our hearts (1 Corinthians 2:10), he who discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

He does not allow the slightest amount of

worst and most hateful of all vices, ingratitude.

Even if God made you out of nothing, you have not been redeemed out of nothing. In six days he created all things, and among them, you. On the other hand, for a period of thirty whole years he worked your salvation in the midst of the earth.

What he endured in those labors! To his bodily needs and the abuses from his enemies did he not add the mightier burden of the humiliation of the cross, and crown it all with the horror of his death? And this was indeed necessary. Man and beast you save, O Lord (Psalm 36:6). How you have multiplied your mercy, O God!

- [\*On the Song of Songs I, Sermon 11:7\*](#)

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[Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153) was born of noble parentage. He became a Cistercian monk at the age of 22 and took with him thirty young men, including his brothers and uncles, to Citeaux Abbey in France. Three years later he founded a new monastery at Clairvaux. This abbey became a center of the Cistercian order and a source of spiritual renewal throughout Europe.]

chaff to settle inside the dwelling of a heart which he possesses, but consumes it in an instant with a fire of the most minute scrutiny.

He is the sweet and gentle Spirit who bends our will, or rather straightens and directs it more fully toward his own so that we may be able to understand his will truly, love it fervently, and fulfill it effectively.

- *Sermon Two for Pentecost*

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The Celebration on Noah's Ark, by Tom DuBois

## Giving the One “Yes” We Have

By Lynne May

*Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God.  
- Genesis 6: 9*

Noah was righteous. He “walked” with God – that is, he had a personal relationship with the Lord and tried to live in the way the Lord wanted him to. Because of this, the Lord saved not only Noah, but his entire family. Because Noah walked with the Lord, and out of that personal relationship that consisted of worship, obedience, and love, he was able to hear and believe God’s word: that a flood was coming, and that Noah was to take his entire family inside the ark. I wonder if Noah’s family was also righteous. And I wonder if they thought, all of them or even one family member, that Noah was crazy for building the ark, for believing that a great flood was coming. As far as we know, only Noah heard this prophecy and instruction. Perhaps not even Noah’s wife heard what the Lord had said to Noah – but she and the rest of the family did end up trusting in him. Whatever they thought or felt, they did get into the ark and were saved, and were included in the covenant that God eventually made with Noah.

Jesus Christ is our true Noah. Because of his relationship with the Father, because of his obedience and righteousness, he has saved his entire family, us his brothers and sisters, the Father’s children from eternal death and pain, an eternity without him. Perhaps like a member of Noah’s family, we may sometimes be tempted to disbelieve when we first hear Jesus asking us to do something risky and costly. If I were Noah’s daughter, I do not know how I

would have felt, knowing that all the people outside of my family were going to be wiped off the face of the earth. I do not know if I would have had the faith to believe that I would be saved, and that my father was not just a little crazy for building that giant boat. I do not know if I would've fully trusted him at all. Today, Jesus encourages me – and all of us – to take him at his word, to get into the ark because he intends to save us and everyone around us who will listen, too.

But because of what Jesus has done for us, we can be like Noah, who is an example for us because of his righteousness, and we can also “walk” with the Lord. Thus it says in Hebrews: “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he . . . became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith” (Hebrews 11: 7). Peter the Apostle in his second letter says that the Lord “protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness” (2:5). There are people in my life, as there are for each of us, who have yet to come to the Lord, but Noah’s example gives me hope and clear direction for my own daily walk with the Lord; as long as I continue to walk with the Lord in faith, obedience, and love, those whom I desire to see converted to the Lord will be in a position, the best possible position, to being saved. Not that I can save them – only Jesus Christ’s blood can do that, has done that – but I allow God to work in their lives most fully when I continue to let him fully have his way in mine.

In addition to Noah, Scripture has many other testimonies of individuals whose yesses to God were acceptable to him, and thus he was pleased to save their relatives and bestow blessing on them: Moses, Esther, Nehemiah, Ruth, Job, Joseph, and Mary to name a few. The Lord, through all of these examples, and most especially Jesus, makes it clear that he is in the business of using even one righteous man’s “yes” to redeem others. Giving to the Lord the one “yes” we have is our handful of flour, our widow’s mite, our loaf to feed five thousand, our talent we invest. And because under the New Covenant, we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit and thus have been made brothers and sisters, each of our yesses allows the Lord to bless one another’s lives – people we know and people we may never meet.

Most especially right now, I am being convicted that first and foremost, I am called to love the Lord because he is worthy, because he is lovely, and because he first loved me, each and all of us, and we can do nothing without him. We love and worship him simply because he is. But our love for him, our yes, is part of his redeeming plan of salvation for those around us.



Lynne May is from Jackson, Michigan, USA. She graduated in 2008 from the University of Michigan with a B.A. in English and in Medieval & Early Modern Studies. Having participated in [University Christian Outreach](#) (UCO) in Ann Arbor, Michigan for the past few years, she has continued to serve in UCO as a Women's Mission Leader.

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*A time of worship and praise at the Kairos Europe Weekend*

## Where Are We Headed in Serving God?

A personal reflection on the Kairos Europe Weekend 2011

by Stephen Bick

On the 2nd of February this year, seven Londoners got off a train at Leuven, home of, we were told, chocolate and beer. While we did find these things, in various quantities, eventually, what we first discovered was a crack team of hand-selected brothers and sisters from the Jerusalem community waiting for us to help direct us to La Foresta where we were to spend the weekend. They said they had been there all day waiting for us, which I initially assumed was some kind of translation error but later found out was true, and their willingness to stand in the rain all day waiting for us really touched me.

After a brief bus ride and hike we came across La Foresta, a labyrinth of a place with a tremendous echo through the corridors, which we were to share with an orchestra, an African drumming group, and the cast of a production of Grease, not to mention some monks. After a simple but welcome dinner of cheese, ham and bread we proceeded to the main hall where Ravish, a Koinonia staff worker in London, UK and Marie-Sophie, a Pharos staff worker in Leuven, Belgium briefed us on the weekend: talks on the subject of vocation given by none other than Martin Steinbereithner, the Mission Director for the Sword of the Spirit region in Europe and the Middle East.

## The Kairos Mission by Paul Jordan

When asked to explain Kairos I often start by talking about a global net-work. The aspect of our work which seems to speak loudest to young people is our international call and nature.

More than three thousand young people in over 30 countries are networked through Kairos. In truth I think they are one of our best assets. Having set out, in some way, to attempt to build this network, in another it is merely the gift which the Lord gave us, it is our reality.

The mission is local but God's work is global. It is a blessing to be able to use our network to help young people grow in vision for God's kingdom and develop as young Christians through international connections.

Our Adelante conference this summer is one example. We are expecting 500 people from 20 nations to gather in Spain. The GAP programme is another, a year placed in a foreign country to learn what it means to be a servant while building our mission.

Though they have very different goals, Adelante and GAP both serve to help young people grow in their Christian faith and conviction. This conviction helps them give to local mission for the long haul.

[Paul Jordan is the Director for Kairos in Europe and the Middle East]



Martin is an excellent speaker who did not pull the punches when telling us how to actively respond to God's plan for our lives. In the first of these talks, "There's no lack of vocations," he told us how God had a plan for each of our lives, a plan that would take a lifetime to discover.

Come Saturday we were ready to find out more, and after morning prayers we met in the main hall for the second talk, entitled "...just a shortage of people responding to them," in which Martin showed us the things that block us from fulfilling God's plans for our lives. Plan-blocker number 1 is pusillanimity, meaning smallness of spirit, or in other words, "life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage." Other dangers were selfishness and fear of failure. Martin also used the analogy of a sculptor chipping away at a slab of granite: it may be scary to limit ourselves by making specific decisions for specific paths and not keep our options open, but this is how we reveal the form beneath the rock. Included with the talk was a sheet filled with inspiring quotations, which really inspired me during the weekend. My favorite quote was from Winston Churchill: "Never give in – never, never, never, never, in nothing great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honor and good sense."

After the second talk four workshops were on offer to choose from: one given by Jamie Treadwell (turning vision into reality), Tadgh Lynch (decisions), Martin (mission), Brian Shell (Gap years), and Dave Quintana and Mags Tierney (state of life). It was the last one that I went to and, while not being the best attended, was very helpful and insightful for me.

## Kairos Europe Weekend 2011

Kairos Weekend is always a very special and important time of year for us in Europe. It is the time when students from all across the continent (and some from even further) gather for three days. We come together for many reasons but three are paramount; to worship God, to grow in discipleship and to build relationship across barriers of language, culture and church tradition. Although a challenging and costly undertaking to gather 100 students from across Europe, Kairos Weekend bears fruit in many ways.

The theme of the weekend this year was vocation. Guest speaker Martin Steinbereithner (a full time missionary with the Sword of the Spirit) spoke to us of the need today to both seek a call and to respond to it. Exhorting us that there is no shortage of vocations in the world today – merely a lack of response, the message was challenging and inspiring. A blur of workshops, sports, meals, and the infamous soul food café where (among other things) Polish polkas, Belfast dramas and Scottish team games of dubious origin were on offer for a cut price deal – rounded out the weekend.

A highpoint for many is often the time of prayer on Saturday evening. This year proved to be no exception as the Lord exhorted, encouraged and stirred us to respond to him with joy. Hearing a call is one thing, finding a way to answer is another. We have found in Kairos that our times of worship together are often the place where we are most united, most challenged and



Afterwards: lunch and sports and recreation time, in which I gave the young men of Europe a lesson on football, although it took me 90 minutes to get up to peak form.

That night we had our big prayer meeting, led by my good friend John Robinson, an artist who is doing student evangelism in his native Belfast. It was a very special time for everyone, it seemed to me, and I felt closer to God than I ever had. After receiving prayer, my small group leader told me he had a word from the Lord for me, which was most welcome. Afterwards, we went down to the basement for some entertainment, including crowd games from Belgium and Glasgow UCO, dancing the Polonaise, an excellent sketch from the Belfast University Christian Outreach team, and, stealing the show, a mashup of songs from Koinonia, London's university outreach.

On Sunday, after going to our respective church services, we said goodbye to La Foresta and each other. It was a fantastic weekend, and we now eagerly await [Adelante 2011](#) – the international Kairos conference in Victoria, Spain August 10-15! Thanks to all who served, especially the main speaker, Martin Steinbereithner.



Stephen Bick is a high school student preparing for university in London, UK, and a member of the [Antioch Community](#). At 17, he is unfortunately too young to be in [Koinonia](#), the Kairos outreach to university students in London, but sometimes sneaks along anyway.

ultimately transformed gaining the courage to make decisions for ongoing discipleship as we return home. Through bringing this group of people together, the work of many individual Kairos outreaches throughout our region is built, while the vision of international student community is made a reality for a few short days.

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## Repentance After Confession: Filling the Emptiness

by Sam Williamson

I once felt betrayed by a friend; it was not a simple sense of betrayal but a deep visceral sense of treachery. I felt hurt and angry and I thought ill of my friend; I wanted justice. Of course I've read not to let a "root of bitterness grow" in my heart (Hebrews 12:15), but I continued to experience bad thoughts about my friend. I would repent for those bad thoughts; I'd resolve to stop thinking them; and I'd confess such thoughts to God and close friends. And yet they kept popping up, no matter how hard I tried to stop.

And I am not alone. I have friends who also have patterns of behavior they wish to change. They too confess and resolve to stop, but more often than not, the conduct rears its ugly head again (and again). No matter how hard the effort.

When most of us think of repentance, we think of a change in behavior, turning from bad things and resolving to live a good life. We tend to focus on external actions; we'll stop doing *this* and start doing *that*. Unfortunately, most of us find that our resolutions to repent, like short-lived fireworks, fade away after that brief flash of inspiration. In a few weeks or months – perhaps only a few days – our resolve has crumbled and our previous behavior is back. Sometimes with renewed vigor.

Our resolve to change seems powerless; we need an interior motivation. We need a change of heart and mind. In fact the Greek word for repentance (*metanoia*) can be translated as a "change of mind or heart." It means more than changed behavior; it means a change in motivations of the heart.

As I struggled with my friend's betrayal, God led me to Philippians 2:3, where Paul asks us to, "do nothing from

rivalry or conceit.” Paul pursues *why* we act. He is not only addressing *what* we do but *why* we do it. He is asking, “What *fuels* our behavior?”

We think of conceit as a pride or cockiness. But the English translation for Paul’s exhortation to “do nothing from conceit” falls short of the mark. The old King James translation was better when it said do nothing from “vain glory.” The Greek word (kenodoxia) actually means “empty glory.” Paul teaches that many of the actions we dislike in others (and ourselves!) arise from an emptiness of glory. He says, “do nothing fueled by that emptiness.”

Acting from our empty glory is the root of many of our harmful actions. When repentance merely consists of commitment to modify behavior, it misses our core motives. It’s like taking cough syrup for lung cancer; it may momentarily quiet the symptoms, but it doesn’t address the disease.

Our issues seem insurmountable because they involve our nature. In the first chapter of the Bible, God says we are made in his image, designed for glory and significance. In the fall through Adam and Eve’s disobedience, we lost that glory, but we never lost our need for glory and significance. Glory is core to our very essence. We’ll never get healing of our very person until we see how desperately we need it and how frantically we grasp for it.

When we feel empty of glory, something inside of us seeks to fill that emptiness. When I remembered my friend’s betrayal, another thought inevitably accompanied that sense; I said to myself, “I would never do that.” In saying, “I would never do that,” I was trying to fill my empty glory. I was saying, “I’m not that bad; in fact I’m pretty good.”

Whenever we try to self-satisfy our hunger for glory, we end up acting contrary to the new nature Christ has given us. And not only do we act wrongly, we also leave a wake of destruction caused by the sucking vacuum of our emptiness.

Take a moment and think of how others we know have created this vortex of destruction:

- A man you know falls back into pornography because of an inner dissatisfaction, and he is discovered, and trust is broken.
- Bosses you know who aren’t satisfied with their recent promotion; in addition they take credit for others’ ideas, they constantly promote themselves and they need to win at every office game. Their “management life” is about them and how great they are, not about their employees and how to care for colleagues.
- Ministry workers unceasingly express self-affirmation: “Didn’t I give a great talk, and wasn’t that a profound idea? And look how well I lead small groups!” People flee from them like the plague.

Now take a moment and reflect on how we each fill our own emptiness:

- Do we always have to be in control or in charge?
- Are we constantly seeking affirmation?
- Are we constantly expressing, “Woe is me, I am so hurt, poor me.”
- Do others consider us arrogant?
- How do we handle criticism, just or unjust?
- Do we frequently think of our own hard work or our relative goodness or smarts or success?

Can we see our own vain attempts to self-fill our inner emptiness, and can we see such attempts never satisfy? We keep trying to fill that void, but we are still devoid of glory. As in quicksand, the more we struggle within ourselves to fill this emptiness, the deeper we sink. We need something outside ourselves to fill us with glory.

This attempt to self-fill our own emptiness is just not possible. It's like trying to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps; motivational speakers love to teach it, but it's physically impossible. The more we try to pull our boots up, the more we pull ourselves – and others around us – down. We need outside help.

As I was praying, confessing my anger toward my friend, I felt God gently nudge me toward some self-reflection. Are there ways I betray Christ? The self-reflection convicted me in these ways: I take credit for my success in the computer industry; I take credit for working hard; I take credit for ideas God has given me. All of these self congratulations form a type of spiritual plagiarism. I'm stealing credit from God. If I had been born 100 years ago in Tibet to other parents, what are the chances of my computer success, or my hard office work, or my "profound" ideas? Everything I have is from God's grace. And I take credit ... simply to fill that void of empty glory.

And yet, despite my own betrayal of God by my plagiaristic ingratitude, he continues to love me. He loves me so much he sent his Son to die in order to give me a new heart and a new life. In the moment of my deepest betrayal, God was there deeply loving me.

This is the change of heart I need; his love in the midst of my failure.

True repentance transcends mere commitment to behavior change. It is a change of heart and mind. It is a movement from trying to fill myself toward a heart that is filled by the glory and love of Christ. It means going to God in our emptiness and allowing him to fill that void with his love and care. We stop acting out of our old hearts and begin operating from our new hearts.

Do you feel condemned by a sense that you have been trying to fill yourself up? Stop it! That is just one more attempt at self-filling ("Oh, I feel so bad, aren't I great for feeling so bad!"). Instead, bring those convictions of self filling (not condemnations) to Christ and pause in that confession. And sense his love, forgiving you and filling you with his love.

This is the deep repentance – the change of heart and mind – that we need for a rich life. It is seeing that the significance and importance we need in our hearts can only be satisfied by seeing what Christ paid *for us* in order to have us. It is hearing God say we are his beloved.

So, in the moment of confessing my betrayal of Christ; in the moment of emptying my self-glory – in that moment, Christ fills me with a sense of his incredible love. I see him loving me even in the midst of my betrayal, and now I care far less that someone betrayed me. All of a sudden, I no longer look for "justice." All of a sudden I begin to be filled with a sense of love for my friend. I begin to feel his emptiness and what he has to do to fill it, and I begin to care for him and feel the pain he must be feeling.

In that moment, I am filled.

The Philippians verse I quoted above ("do nothing from rivalry or conceit") is followed by an ancient song called *The Kenosis* or *The Emptying*. It goes like this:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.  
And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,  
even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

(Philippians 2:5-11 English Standard Version)

Most sermons on this song conclude with, “So live like Jesus did, be humble, and care for others.” But the passage does not begin with, “Have this *example* among yourselves.” Instead, it begins, “Have this *mind* among yourselves.” It is saying, “Change your heart and mind; *truly* repent.”

Even though Christ is one with God, he does not “grasp” onto that glory; he isn’t self-filling. Instead, he empties himself. What is he doing? He is *emptying himself* of his glory so that he can *fill* us with his glory. Christ emptied himself of glory so he could pour his glory into us. When we see him doing that for us, we are filled.

Deep repentance is not mere behavior change; deep repentance is the mind and heart which sees and senses – deeply knows – his love in our hearts in such a way that we are filled with his glory. Deep repentance is not merely clipping the dandelion flower of external actions; it is removing the tap root of self-filling behavior and coming to sense the deep filling love of the one who sees us as we are – and loves us.

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Christ - The Way, the Truth, and the Life, by El Greco

## The Truth Who Lives

by Patrick Henry Reardon

The teaching of Jesus was inseparable from his person. In the Gospel, we do not find our Lord appealing to universally available religious truths, truths that could stand on their own, truths accessible to man's mind apart from his teaching of them, truths that could outlive the person who spoke them. It is essential to grasp this fact, because it indicates an essential difference between Jesus and other "religious founders."

To illustrate this difference we may take the example of Siddartha Gautama some six centuries earlier. When Gautama gathered his disciples to listen to his Deer Park Sermon, he certainly appealed to his own experience of a "revelation." He referred to his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree and expounded to his followers the meaning of that experience. He defined Dependent Causation and explained how to be delivered from it.

Some historians of comparative religion are of the opinion that this is essentially what Jesus did. Although they recognize a difference in the objective content of the two efforts, they imagine that the Deer Park Sermon and the Sermon on the Mount have this in common: that both preachers were simply expounding their religious theories.

According to this view, the difference between a Christian and a Buddhist would result solely from the decision about which religious teacher was believed to have “gotten it right.”

The problem here is that neither Gautama nor Jesus would agree with this assessment of the matter.

With respect to Gautama, it is important to observe that he never thought of himself as essential to his own message. Indeed, he made a point of saying that his religious experience was available to anyone who followed in his footsteps. He asked no one to take his teaching on faith. He never claimed to have discovered truths otherwise unavailable for discovery. He asked no one to believe in him as the exclusive channel of his teaching.

On the contrary, Gautama was persuaded that the Four Noble Truths would be just as true if he had never discovered them. What he had to say about the Chain of Causation would be just as valid, he believed, if he had never mentioned it. He claimed to teach truths independent of himself and transcendent to his teaching of them. In short, Gautama never claimed to be the way, the truth, and the life.

When we look at Jesus, we are faced with something radically different. All who heard him recognized that he taught as “One having authority.” Jesus expounded no truths transcendent to himself. What he taught was otherwise unknowable and inaccessible.

Indeed, how would we know that we have a heavenly Father who loves and cares for us, except on the testimony of Jesus? Is that an obvious or otherwise available truth? Again, if Jesus had not mentioned the fact, how would we know that the very hairs of our head are all numbered? Is it really self-evident, after all, that God has even the slightest regard for every sparrow that falls? Or that a loving Father clothes in beauty the flowers of the field? We know these things for one reason only – that Jesus told us so.

Thus, the religious message of Jesus is inseparable from the authority of his own person, his own “I.” This “I” is central to his message and permeates the whole of it. The essential feature to note about Jesus’ teaching is that it is founded on the proclamation, “But *I* say to you.” This “I” is the foundational component of the message, because our Lord’s doctrine stands or falls with himself. Jesus not only taught us that we have a Father in heaven, but he also claimed to be, in his own person, the sole access to that Father. He alone, he said, actually knew the Father.

This inseparability of Jesus and his teaching was, I submit, a major part of the crisis of Good Friday and Holy Saturday. While his dead body lay in the tomb, none of what he said could stand on its own. The authority that Jesus had claimed, to all human appearance, died with him. If death were the last word about Jesus’ life, the Sermon on the Mount would be nothing but religious theory or plain old make-believe.

This was part of the crisis of the Cross. The teaching of Jesus, as well as the faith of those who believed that teaching, seemed radically discredited by the event of Calvary. The Apostle Paul perceived this clearly when he wrote that if Christ was not raised, we of all men are the most to be pitied.

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## Exciting Testimony?

By James Munk

Recently, our community invited one of our newer members to share his testimony at a prayer meeting. After the gathering, I was invited over to a community home for dinner. Initially, we talked about the testimony; his account of coming into community was very inspiring. The brother came from a nominally Catholic family, and – through a series of uncanny events and decisions to say “yes” to the Lord – found himself far from home, far from his intended career, and radically engaged in the mission of the Sword of the Spirit.

It’s helpful to hear that type of testimony. It’s sharp. It clearly divides life before, and after, and describes the good effects of an encounter with the Lord and his people. Seeing this distinction illustrated in the life of a brother or sister helps us to appreciate what we have together, especially its power to help others find God. These stories encourage, build up, and inspire – and tend to make people who grew up in community – “community kids” a little self-conscious.

It seems that the testimonies people are most drawn to are accounts of multiple bad choices remedied by a single good one – and the worse the previous choices, the better! Being part of a biker gang, having a drug addiction, living promiscuously, only to be saved in the eleventh hour by a personal encounter with the Lord – now that’s exciting! We can assume dodging bullets provide a similar type of exhilaration. Great testimonies have it, and other peoples stories, my own for instance, can sometimes seem inadequate. For this reason, I was initially uncomfortable when someone at the table asked me, “Do you every wish you had a more exciting testimony?”

I come for a well adjusted family – two parents, even. I got good grades at school, stayed out of trouble, and well

away from motorcycles and their gangs. I was a good member of our community's youth group, part of our university outreach, did a [GAP year](#) of Christian service in foreign parts, and am now part of our community: a fairly standard story for a community kid. But is it exciting?

Admittedly, it is not sharp. There is not obvious leap from darkness to light. There was never a singularly defining moment when I chose for the Lord over and against a lifestyle that utterly rejected him. And if we define an exciting story as narrowly escaping prison, then no; my testimony is not exciting.

But for its dullness, I cannot claim full responsibility. After all, my story does not start with me.

My parents must bear the brunt of this accusation. Using the above definition of excitement, their testimonies are more thrilling than mine; though I'll leave it to them to tell you the extent. Nonetheless, in the early 1970's, both became involved with a prayer group in Lansing, Michigan. This group changed their lives; reordered them from the inside out. As a result, they became some of the first members to make a formal commitment to the prayer group when it decided to become a community. They married, had children, and chose to raise them in this community.

The blame for the state of my story does not end there. I am surrounded by older brothers and sisters who lived the early days in overcrowded households, under radical pastoral accountability, and engaged in ubiquitous service, and in radical "high friction" community. They survived civil wars, natural disasters, and massive internal community struggles, all as part of building and being a Christian community in its early years... and a community of communities.

These are the same people and communities that made me the way I am. My story is a continuation of theirs. In the least, it is the second chapter in my parents' testimony; but it is also the net effect of brothers and sisters in Lansing, the wider United States, and around the word encountering the Lord, being transformed by him, and deciding to live their lives in a radically different way than the rest of the world.

Above exciting, this testimony is sublime.

If we compare testimonies to weapons, it seems we often favor the knife for its edge – but reject the battleship for its vastness. To begin a testimony with the phrase, "I'm a community kid, so my story's not very exciting," betrays the power and magnitude of our inheritance. If our story lacks "excitement," it is likely that we are unwilling to tell it in its entirety. After all, it is very large.

And this is my testimony: that I am the product of and heir to a way of life that stands against the spirit of this age. My story is that of thousands of lives given over to the Lord: lives transformed and dedicated to radical zeal, resolute commitment, and brotherly love. Community kids are the stewards of this account – the Lord's work in and through the Sword of the Spirit. Its testimony is ours. Its story is mine.

This custody mandates a challenge to us all. Our future must befit our past. We must continue to live righteously and radically. If we flag in zeal, or shy away from mission, we call in call into question the foundations of all our testimonies. What is reliable about a powerful past if its effect is not evident today?

And this challenge is especially important for those who are, who raise, or who work with community kids. Our lives – the lives of community kids – must be the obvious and upward continuation of our parents' stories. We must even outdo our forerunners – exceeding them in zeal, love, and mission.

This challenge is excitement enough – I don't wish for another story to which I could attach my life. Rather, I desire a life worthy of my testimony.

[James Munk graduated from the University of Michigan School of Architectural Design in May, 2007. He is a mission director for [Kairos North America](#) and a member of the [Work of Christ Community](#) in Lansing, Michigan.]

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## Countering the Vices with Virtues – Part III



### Attaining true greatness – humility versus pride

By Don Schwager

#### Seeking glory and greatness

Who doesn't want to be admired and honored? Nearly everyone has a favorite star or hero they admire. It may be an athlete who has surpassed everyone else in his or her field, a performer whose talent outshines all others, an explorer who risks all to open new frontiers. We glory with them in their achievements and we mourn their passing with monuments.

This appetite for glory is more fundamental than the appetite for pleasure. Nearly everyone cherishes the secret ambition to “be somebody” and shrinks more from being “a nobody,” than from suffering, pain, and material deprivation. God made the human race to be great and to have a share in his glory. He made each human being in his own image and likeness. He foreordained us to be his own adopted children, sharing the rights and privileges of his only begotten Son. The psalmist expresses this beautifully when describing God's creation of humankind:

You have made him little less than God, and you have crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:5,6).

Since we are called to glory and greatness, it is not wrong to thirst after it. Where the human race errs and defeats its own end is when we satisfy this thirst in a mistaken manner. Sin, which is rebellion from God, keeps us from attaining the true greatness God has promised us. When men and women seek greatness for selfish gain and apart from God's will we end up thwarting God's plan for our lives and we suffer deterioration and ultimate defeat. Any kind of greatness apart from him is ultimately doomed to failure.

The world of course measures greatness in terms of wealth and power, knowledge and achievement. The title of "great" is given to those who wield powerful influence over the lives of others – whose thought and speech impact the circles of world opinion. Powerful leaders can bend the will of others to their commands. They use their wealth and accumulated resources to expand their rule and control. Men and women who win the world's attention and applause get to wear the crown of fame and success – for a time at least. The world's view of greatness is measured by the degree of talent and genius one has to beat everyone else to the finishing line or to the top of the ladder of success. God, however, does not measure greatness by the sum of human knowledge and wisdom, the strength of human feats and talents, or the accumulation of scientific and technological achievements.

True greatness surpasses the total of human strength and ability because its origin and power come from the source of creation itself. There is only one who is truly great – God the Lord and Creator of the universe. The universe displays the vastness and beauty of God's handiwork. But, God most reveals his greatness in the unbounded love and merciful kindness which he displays in his dealings with a broken and sinful humanity. Human greatness apart from God is at least imperfect and incomplete, doomed to futility and emptiness. The Scriptures give ample warning to nations and individuals alike to seek the true greatness that comes from God alone rather than the empty glory that passes away. Here are only a few of the many passages that speak to us about this.

The nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales....All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness (Isaiah 40:15,17).

Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23,24).

Do you seek great things for yourself? Seek them not (Jeremiah 45:5).

How can you believe, who receive glory from one another, and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God (John 5:44)?

## The key to honor and glory

Scripture says the key to receiving true honor and glory, the honor and glory that come from God, is humility.

A man's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor (Proverbs 29:23).

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility goes before honor (Proverbs 18:12) (See also Proverbs 18:19).

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life (Proverbs 22:4).

Why is humility so important to God and so crucial for our relationship with him? Humility is rooted in truth. It inclines the mind to seek after wisdom and understanding. It seeks freedom from illusions, prejudices, vanities. Humility inclines us to God who has revealed himself as a God of truth and goodness. There is no lie in him – no falsehood or deception. Jesus assured his disciples that they could believe in him because he spoke what was true – words which came from his Father in heaven (John 7:16-18). “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32).

Jesus called his disciples to be inseparably joined with him in his way of lowliness and meekness.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle (meek) and lowly in heart (humble) (Matthew 11:29-30).

Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD) described humility as a foundation for all of the other virtues.

You wish to be great, begin from the least. You are thinking to construct some mighty structure in height; first think of the foundation of humility...the greater the building is to be, the deeper does [a man] dig his foundation. The building, in the course of its erection, rises up on high, but he who digs its foundation must first go down very low. So then you see even a building is low before it is high, and the top is raised only after humiliation.

How can we grow in humility? A first step is to understand what humility is and isn't – and how it differs from its counterfeit, false humility, and its opposite, pride.

[See helpful chart > [Distinguishing True Humility from Its Two Extremes: False Humility and Pride.](#)]

## False humility

Thinking poorly of oneself or feeling inferior to everyone else is not true humility. A self-defeating mindset results from evaluating oneself too negatively: I'm a failure, I'm worthless, I can't do anything right, no one is really interested in me. It may even mask itself as self-condemnation: I'm rotten, I'm the worst of offenders, nothing good can come of me, I can't forgive myself.

People with low self-esteem do often feel useless, unworthy, unwanted. They are prone to be preoccupied with anxious concern for themselves, and find it difficult to focus on the needs of others. There are a number of ills that flow from this self-focus about what others think of us. People pleasers will often do whatever others want regardless of whether it is the prudent or right thing to do. People who are overly dependent on what others think often fail to evaluate for themselves what might be the wise or sensible thing to do. And feeling timid or insecure can lead to a lack of confidence to act or to speak out when the situation calls for it. Timid people are often poor learners – they fear correction and feedback because of low self-worth or poor self-image.

## Pride

False-humility is the counterfeit of the virtue of humility. The opposite of humility is the vice pride. Pride can take many forms, such as self-conceit, having an exaggerated opinion of oneself, and vainglory, boasting in one's appearance, qualities, and achievements. The proud are arrogant and condescending towards anyone they consider to be inferior.

Pride is self-seeking, self-centered, and, well, selfish – being concerned chiefly with oneself and one's advantage to the exclusion of others. It can also manifest itself as selfish ambition, the drive to get ahead of others at their expense.

The proud are often opinionated, outspoken, and domineering. They treat others as unworthy of their concern or care. The proud are not easily teachable, and often resist correction or feedback about how they behave.

## True humility

The scriptures describe humility as a virtue of the heart and mind which is receptive to learning, and ready to serve. Humility is the opposite of boasting and arrogance.

A key characteristic of the humble is their self-forgetfulness. They are typically selfless, not self-centered. They are not fearful about what others might think of them, or pre-occupied with concern for themselves. The truly humble have a balanced, accurate view of themselves, and good understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses, and of their role and position in the wider community and society.

The humble are self-giving and self-sacrificing for the sake of others in order to encourage and serve them. They are other-focused, mindful of others' interests and concerns, and ready to put aside personal preferences to serve others.

The "lowly of heart," as Jesus describes himself, treat others with respect and concern, regardless of the others' status, low or high. They avoid playing favourites. They are servant-hearted – ready to serve others wholly for the others' good, without seeking personal gain.

The humble are receptive to learning and improving, and to receiving correction, training, and feedback.

Augustine of Hippo contrasts a lowly, humble person with the powerful, prestigious person who is vain and arrogant:

The good person, though a slave, is free; the wicked, though he reigns, is a slave, and not the slave of a single man, but – what is worse – the slave of as many masters as he has vices.

## Prudent, teachable, and meek

The companion virtues of humility are prudence (moral wisdom), docility (teachableness), and meekness (strength under control, not driven or blinded by anger).

Prudence is moral wisdom – the ability to handle the situations of life in a morally good way, understanding how to act based on moral truth. Docility is related to the words "doctor" and "doctrine." A doctor in an older sense meant someone who taught doctrine. We still use the term today as a title for qualified professors who teach law, science, philosophy, and other fields of learning. Humility is related to prudence because it allows us to acquire knowledge and practical wisdom from another. The mark of a docile person is his or her willingness to be taught. Docility is rooted in humility and meekness. "Receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

Docility is an attitude of the mind and heart that wants to learn, to receive correction and direction. The virtue of docility (teachableness) enables the mind to be teachable and receptive to the wisdom and direction of Christ's will for our lives.

Meekness is not weakness or timidity – it is moral strength under control. A meek person knows how to moderate anger – being angry at the right time, in the right measure, for the right cause, and restraining one's anger when exercising it would be wrong, hurtful, or unnecessary. Anger that is out of control and not ruled by what is just and prudence blinds us to good moral judgment and leads to rash and hurtful behavior. That is why meekness is linked

with humility, placing us in the right disposition to receive God's help and wisdom.

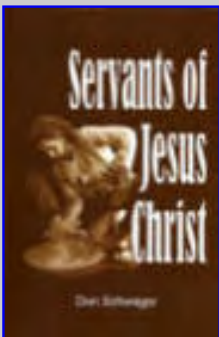
### Prepared to do great deeds

The virtue of humility enables us to view and judge ourselves correctly. Viewing ourselves truthfully, with sober judgment, means seeing ourselves the way God sees us (Psalm 139:1-4). A humble person makes a realistic assessment of himself or herself without the illusion or pretence of being something he or she is not. The humble regard themselves neither smaller nor larger than they truly are. True humility frees us to be our true selves. A humble person does not have to wear a mask or put on a facade in order to look good to others. The humble are not swayed by fame or fortune, failure or loss.

Humility leads to true self-knowledge, honesty, and realism, and it frees us to give ourselves to something greater than ourselves. Humility frees us to love and serve others for their sake, rather than our own. The Apostle Paul gives us the greatest example of humility in the person of Jesus Christ, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ...who humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8).

### Role of the Holy Spirit

The virtue of humility is a gift and working of the Holy Spirit within us – who changes our hearts and transforms our minds, forming in us the character of the Lord Jesus. If we hunger for God's word and submit to his training and discipline, we will grow not only in greater personal freedom from sin and hurtful desires, but in the strength of character we need to live as disciples of the Lord Jesus. Jesus not only shows us the way – he is also there with us every step of the way – directing, empowering, and encouraging us, and supplying every gift we need.



Don Schwager is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#) and author of the [Daily Scripture Readings and Meditations](#) website.

His recent book, *Servants of Jesus Christ: What can the New Testament teach us about the transforming power of Christ's love and the way servanthood?* is available from [Tabor House Books](#).

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## Distinguishing True Humility from Its Two Extremes: False Humility and Pride

False Humility [thinking poorly of oneself, low self-esteem, feeling inferior]	True Humility [lowly of heart – not arrogant or boastful, ready to serve, teachable]	Pride [vainglory, being conceited, feeling superior, arrogant]
Self-defeating mind-set and poor self-image, evaluating oneself too negatively – <i>I'm a failure, I'm worthless, I can't do anything right, no one likes me.</i>	Self-forgetfulness, selflessness, not self-centered, not fearful about what others think of you, or preoccupied with self concerns	Self-conceited – thinking too highly of oneself – an exaggerated opinion or exalted view of oneself
Tendency to be self-despising or to belittle oneself, to be self-deprecating around others, excessively modesty, due to feeling inferior, useless, or unworthy	Balanced view of self and good understanding of personal strengths and weaknesses, and one's role and position in the wider community and society	Vanity and vainglory – excessive display, and boasting in one's appearance, qualities, abilities, and achievements
Preoccupied with anxious concern for oneself, can't focus on others	Self-giving and self-sacrificing for the sake of others in order to help, encourage, serve, and care for others	Self-centered, self-seeking, and selfish, concerned chiefly or only with yourself and your advantage, to the exclusion of others

<p>People pleaser – does whatever others want regardless of what is the prudent or right thing to do</p>	<p>Lowly of heart – treats everyone with respect, care, and concern, regardless of their status, position, or worthiness, not playing favorites</p>	<p>Selfish ambition and the drive to get ahead of others at their expense</p>
<p>Timid or insecure – lacking in self-assurance, afraid to take initiative, afraid to speak up or be assertive when needed</p>	<p>Other-focused, mindful of others' interests and concerns, and ready to put aside personal preferences to serve others</p>	<p>Domineering and over-bearing, too demanding, too opinionated, too outspoken, too assertive</p>
<p>Overly dependent on what others think – lacks prudence to think and judge rightly</p>	<p>Servant-hearted, ready to serve others wholly for their good without seeking personal gain</p>	<p>Treats others as inferiors or unworthy of your care and concern</p>
<p>Fearful of correction and feedback because of low self-worth or poor self-image</p>	<p>Teachable, receptive to receiving correction, training, and feedback</p>	<p>Unteachable, refuses correction, resists feedback</p>

Chart by Don Schwager.

See helpful article: [Attaining True Greatness – Humility versus Pride](#).

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## On Not Being an Annoying Little Boy (or, 'The Calling of Moses')

By Paul Michael Graham

It's a safe assumption to make, that most of you reading this have at some point known a baby boy from when he was born until, say, he was six or seven. And you might remember that little boys are incredibly easy to love when they're born. And when they're learning to talk. And when they're learning to walk. And sometimes still by the time they go to primary school.

And then at some point, that stops.

They stop being funny, they stop being effortlessly loveable, they stop being able to get away with just about anything, and instead of it being easy to hug them, it becomes easy to shout at them. Every week the bubbles of snot popping out of their left nostril become less cute and more gross. It's just a difficult stage that young men enter into, aged 6 or 7. All of a sudden, their lip trembles as they ask themselves, "Why doesn't everyone adore me any more?"

There are stages like this in a man's life, that are hard to articulate, but they definitely exist. I recently turned 23, and I think I'm maybe leaving behind one of those stages and entering a new one. Let me explain: when you grow up in a Christian community, around a lot of older adult Christians, you get very good at speaking in front of that crowd, or indeed writing for that crowd.

Or, actually, you just think you're good at it.

In reality, you could be incredibly awkward, you could be talking rubbish, and really all the adults are just thinking, “Isn’t it great that he’s here? Isn’t it great that he’s talking about God?” and regardless of what you actually say, you’re assured of an encouraging slap on the back. They’re delighted with you, they’re just so relieved that this whole thing is working for the kids. So when Jerry Munk asked me to give a talk at the Work of Christ community men’s breakfast, I barely hesitated. Partly because he’s one of my bosses. And so is his son. And so is one of his daughters. Partly because of that. But partly because my mind is still at that stage where I kind of feel like I could say or blog anything, and get approving nods and smiley-face comments.

Except – I don’t actually think I am. I’m 23, I have a college degree, I’m spending a GAP year living in Lansing , Michigan with the Work of Christ community to serve, to grow in holiness, to get better at doing this sort of thing. I feel like I should be able to offer something that’s actually worthwhile, and not just rely on you, the reader, simply being happy that this is working for one of the kids. Because that’s not going to last forever.

The only thing is, I have pretty limited experience in life. Nothing that I can speak or write on particularly well would be definitely relevant to a wider demographic than the highschool and college students I normally work with. So I’m kind of just going to shoot this randomly out there, it’s something that’s been on my mind, it’s kind of a shot in the dark, but maybe you can relate.



There’s a story in Exodus 3 and 4 that I found striking at the start of my year here, funny but powerful. It’s a story most of you are probably familiar with, the calling of Moses. The people of Israel, God’s chosen people, are the slaves of the Egyptians. A whole nation, enslaved. What happens is God says, “Moses, I want you to lead my people out of slavery and into freedom, in a land I’m promising you.”

What happens next is that Moses basically tries to talk God down. He asks God some questions. “Who am I that you would ask me to do this?”

“Who are you that asks me to do this?!”

“What if they don’t believe me?”

The Lord answers these questions quite patiently. Surprisingly patiently. In fact, Moses kind of reminds me of that 6-year-old boy I was talking about. You know,

“Tie your shoes son.”

“Why?”

“Because if you don’t, you’ll trip and fall over and bang your head.”

“Why?”

“Because...of...gravity...”

“Why?”

“Um...it’s something to do with the earth spinning...”

“Why?”

“Son, just tie your shoes...”

My dad often skipped a couple of those steps, but you get the point.

So Moses is talking to the Lord, the Most High, the King and Creator of the Universe, and he’s going “but why...” and “but what if...”

Eventually, we start to get closer to the truth. After God’s answers to these questions don’t give Moses any room to argue, he tries a different strategy. “I’m not eloquent. You want a guy that can speak convincingly, it’s not me.” And I feel like we’re getting somewhere here. “Those questions – I was just buying time there. This is the real reason I’m not signing up for this straight away; it’s not God, it’s not the Egyptians and their armies, or the Israelites and their cynicism...it’s me. I can’t see past this weakness, God.” And when he uses this as a reason for not obeying, what he’s really saying is, “God...this is something that’s wrong with me that you can’t fix.” He doesn’t see how illogical he’s being. Why would God ask you to do something you can’t ever do? He knows you, he knows the future. He can do anything, he’s God, remember? And Moses is going, “No, you’re wrong, and you’re not able to do this in me.”

So God’s kind of at the gritted-teeth stage now. He’s like, “Moses, I’m the one that gave you the ability to talk – I think I can give you the right words to say.”

This makes so much sense that Moses panics, and kind of blurts out the real truth – “Please send someone else. I don’t want this hassle. I’m quite happy with my own little life here. I don’t need you shaking things up.” And surprise, surprise, this is the point that God gets to the angry father stage. “The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses.” Doesn’t sound like fun.



Paul Michael Graham (4th from left) with 11 Gappers serving in the US

I think I can mostly let this story speak for itself. As I mentioned, I was struck by this at the beginning of my GAP year, back in September. I feel like God spoke through it not so much to tell me about Himself, but to tell me more about myself, especially in the structure of Moses' argument. His attitude – an unwillingness to serve, reinforced by a self-absorbed preoccupation with his own petty shortcomings – was the same immature attitude that, coming into the GAP year, was holding me back from allowing God to really work through me. Once I realized this I did just say once and for all, “Yes Lord, now I can do anything!” It has demanded daily attention. Every morning I have to look at myself, recognize my flaws, but refuse to be incapacitated by them. Because where I am weak, I allow him to be strong. Let me boast of my weaknesses for a second.

I do good things to impress people, not to serve God. But God is changing the way my mind works and giving me the opportunities and grace to serve him in ways people won't notice.

I am weak against sin. But God has helped me resist temptation, and with a power I have never experienced before.

I use hurtful speech. But God gives me grace, and brothers and sisters are around me, to help me speak lovingly.

I am lazy. But God gives me energy and motivation.

I am fearful. But God gives me courage.

And that's how my GAP year is going. And that's how I expect it to continue. I've not been made perfect yet, and I'm not expecting it to happen any time soon. But I am going to continue to bring these things before the Lord in prayer, and instead of saying “Because of these, I can't,” I'm going to keep saying, “Because of these, you can, Lord.”

So what am I actually telling you, apart from just kind of rambling a bit about my year? Well, we're all human beings, we all have weaknesses. My weaknesses might be different from yours. I can't speak into those with any kind of authority. But what is true for all of us is that the God who created us is sick of our using these weaknesses as an excuse for not serving him, for not obeying him, for not doing the difficult and exciting things he calls us to. He insists that we step up to the plate, every day – let's not be that 6-year-old boy, who demands to see “why?” and “how?” before he obeys the father, but let's trust in the father's plan to be the best path, in his grace to be sufficient,

let's trust in his power to be made perfect in our weakness.

Amen?

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Paul Michael (PM) Graham, from the Community of the Risen Christ in Glasgow, Scotland, graduated from the University of Glasgow with a degree in English Literature in summer 2010, and sped off to serve on a GAP year in Lansing, Michigan, US. God knows what's next.

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Carnival balls into prizewinning pockets have  
Rarely the accuracy of His hand!]

The Lord is my trumpet!  
His is a fierce and a beautiful music,  
The rhythm of history sings it unsolemnly.  
Shoreline parabolas change over centuries  
Still His consistency never concedes.

[Remote Roman outposts are easy to come by,  
Moral authorities not in demand;  
The miracle is that it's me that this happens to,  
Moments there are when I know the same hand,  
That split chunks of water for Moses's feet's sake,  
That split in the middle, from nails, on a tree;  
One song that applies to our own generation,  
As Scotland, as Palestine, as the Red Sea...]

## Some thoughts on the identity of the Christian poet

In "Tradition and the Individual Talent", T.S. Eliot writes about how poetry should be accumulative;

[The] historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity.(1)

This idea is convincingly sensible. What intrigued me was applying it to devotional or religious (or religiously concerned) poetry. If a Christian is to believe, as Wordsworth does, that poetry is the first and last of all knowledge and that it is as immortal as the heart of man, then it exists coincidentally with that thing in Man, which is expressed as being made "in the image of God"(2) - an essence we share with Him, and the accompanying struggle to realise this essence as matter-spirit hybrids, and ultimately be made like Him. Poetry is consistent and is written the same through history, like Brighton on a stick of rock.

In the Old Testament, the first real hymn or poem that glorifies and attempts somehow to describe God is Moses' canticle in Exodus 15, known as the Song of the Sea, that follows escape from the Egyptians by the miraculous parting of the Red Sea. The story of Exodus is traditionally read within the Church as a "type" of Christian salvation, prefiguratively symbolising humanity's slavery to sin and the liberation offered through Christ; in Lent the Catholic liturgy follows the story of the Israelites being led out of Egypt and at the climactic Easter Vigil mass the Exodus 15 canticle is sung. It is the first hymn in the Eastern Orthodox canon and is recited daily in Jewish morning shacharit services. In some sense, at least theoretically, according to Eliot, all Abramic devotional poetry - poetry of and to the One God, Yahweh, Allah - springs from the Song of the Sea.

This is what Exodus Fifteen is about. I tried to use language and images that bridged the contemporary and the ancient, trying not to alienate the two from each other; jackknifing is usually used in reference to motor accidents involving articulated lorries, but there is no reason not to apply the same term to a chariot accident. Just as the poem is reinvented, made new in the Poundian sense, while still maintaining its essence, the same God-to-man relationship is in some way experienced today as three and a half thousand years ago, even while it is a deeply unique and individual phenomenon.

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1. Eliot, T.S. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in Abrams, M.H. ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 2 (London: W. W. Norton, 2000) (p. 2396)

2. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Genesis 1.27

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