

In Search Of A Hero

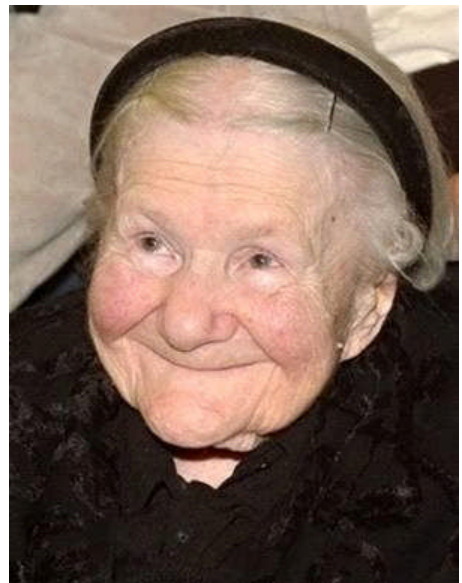
Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

July 25, 2009

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The world is looking for a hero; someone to look up to and admire. It seems that when someone dies, perhaps a public figure, oftentimes they are thrust into the spotlight and sometimes held up as role models, heroes or persons to be emulated. We've seen this in the last couple of weeks with the passing of Michael Jackson and Walter Cronkite. Immediately there are hours of media attention, with interviews and stories recounting their exploits and accomplishments. For a period of time the news is saturated with their images and they are elevated to the status of hero.

One whose name was not given the same attention was Ed Freeman who, during the Viet Nam conflict, on November 14, 1965, in the midst of an intense battle, flew his unarmed Huey helicopter 13 times to rescue about 30 trapped infantrymen. All Medi-Vac helicopters had been ordered not to go in because of the heavy machine gun fire. But this didn't stop Ed. Though it wasn't his job, he couldn't withhold himself from flying those dangerous missions and saving those soldiers. With not nearly as much news coverage as some others, Medal of Honor recipient Ed Freeman passed away March 25, 2009 at the age of 80.



Recently Irena Sendler passed away at age 98. During World War II she worked as a plumbing and sewer specialist and managed to smuggle 2500 infants out of danger in the bottom of her tool box. Larger kids she hid under a burlap sack in the back of her truck. When caught, the Nazis broke both her legs and arms and beat her severely. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize but was not chosen.

As unworthy or worthy as some of these might be, I hold up to your vision today a genuine Hero, Someone truly worthy of our complete admiration, our total emulation and our devoted worship. I offer to you as the greatest Hero of all Jesus Christ.

His qualifications for being a hero are impeccable. He is God. The Scriptures reveal to us that Jesus Christ is eternal and lived before His birth in that humble stable of Bethlehem. This is the substance of the argument in the first chapter of Hebrews. While the angels of heaven occupy a lofty station in their existence, Jesus is much higher than they. “When He again brings the first-born into the world, He says: ‘Let all the angels of God worship Him.’ And of the angels He says: ‘Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.’ But to the Son He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.’” Hebrews 1:6-9.

The writer continues his study of what the Scriptures say about Jesus. “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hand; they will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.” Hebrews 1:10-12.

This description of Christ’s pre-existence agrees with the testimony of John who wrote concerning Jesus, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” John 1:1, 2. Jesus is the eternal God, part of the divine Trio. Any religion that seeks to demote His eternal and divine stature is contrary to the express teaching of the Holy Bible.

A careful study of the Scriptures reveals that Jesus is the Jehovah or Yahweh of the Old Testament. Because the Hebrew language originally had no vowels, we’re not precisely sure how to pronounce the name expressed by the four consonants “YHWH,” which composed the unique name of God in the Old Testament. Other names of God, such as Elohim (“powerful ones”) and Adonai (“lord”) were

sometimes used in reference to humans. Earthly judges were called “elohim” in Psalm 82:1 and 6, quoted by Jesus. Sarah called Abraham her “lord” (adonai) meaning “husband.” We use the term “landlord” in a way that is not blasphemous. But YHWH was never used to refer to anyone else but God. It was His unique name.) Thus you will hear it sometimes pronounced as “Jehovah,” though a hard “j” sound was absent from their language. It is more probable that it was pronounced as Yahweh.

When in the Old Testament the name LORD or the name GOD appears in all capital letters, the translators and printers have done so to inform you that they are translating the Hebrew name Yahweh. It comes from the verb in Hebrew “to be,” and expresses the concept “The One Who is, or exists.” It speaks to the eternal nature of the deity, as denoted in the title the “I Am,” Who spoke with Moses at the burning bush, and the “Alpha and Omega,” “the First and the Last,” the “One Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty” (compare Revelation 1:8 and Revelation 22:13), Who spoke with John.

There are a host of Scriptures which identify Jesus as the Yahweh of the Old Testament. David sang, “The LORD is my shepherd.” Psalm 23:1. Who is the good Shepherd, according to John 10:11? It is Jesus, isn’t it. Who is the Chief Shepherd, according to I Peter 5:4? It is Jesus, isn’t it. Here’s a homework assignment for you. The next time you read through the Old Testament, take particular notice of the times the name Yahweh or Jehovah appears (about 4,000 times), indicated by either LORD or GOD, and notice how many times direct application is made in the New Testament to the One we know as Jesus. I made a list of about a dozen such references just in the latter part of the book of Isaiah.

Notice this passage in Isaiah which reads, ‘You are My witnesses,’ says the LORD,’ and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me. I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I will send to Babylon, and bring them all down as fugitives--the Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.” Isaiah 43:10, 11, 14, 15. We are called to bear witness that the very God of the universe, Christ Jesus, is our Lord and Savior.

Who is the Savior, Who is the Redeemer, Who is our King? It is Jesus, isn’t it. In this text, and many others (see for example Isaiah 40:3, 10; 43:3; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 51:13; 54:8; 60:16; 63:16) He is presented as LORD or Yahweh.

Jesus is, and claimed to be, the great “I Am,” the Yahweh of Scripture. After speaking with Moses at the bush, the LORD told him, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Exodus 3:14. There was no question in the minds of Jewish listeners as to what He meant when Jesus spoke the words, “Before Abraham was, I am.” John 8:58. There was no question of His claim to equality with God when He said, “I and My Father are One.” John 10:30. He was claiming to be the “I AM” of Scripture. He was claiming to be the I AM who spoke with Moses. He was claiming to be the Yahweh of the Old Testament.

On both occasions when Jesus said this, the reaction of the unbelieving Jews gave evidence that they understood clearly what He had said. They immediately picked up stones to kill Jesus, because He made Himself equal with God. To their limited vision He was an imposter, a blasphemer. According to the law, such a one deserved the death penalty. They were correct in understanding His claim to divinity; but they were incorrect in not accepting Him as being divine. It was too hard for them to grasp that the humble Nazarene Teacher was the God of the universe, the Great I AM. This was and is still a great mystery. Paul wrote, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifested in the flesh.” I Timothy 3:16.

He is also, as the passage in Isaiah brings out, our Creator God. Another way of understanding the title of Yahweh, coming from the Hebrew verb “to be” is to understand it as “The One Who causes to be.” God is the First Cause of creation. Yahweh stakes His claim to our worship upon His life-giving creative work. Jeremiah testified, “The LORD (Yahweh in Hebrew) is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King. Thus you shall say to them: ‘The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens.’ He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and has stretched out the heavens at His discretion. Jeremiah 10:10-12.

Speaking of Jesus the Word, John wrote, “He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” John 1:2, 3. Paul stated, “By Him (Christ) all things were created, that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (hold together).” Colossians 1:16, 17. When the Psalmist says, “By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of His mouth” (Psalm 33: 6), we

understand the term “Word” to refer to the same “Word” identified by John as Jesus.

Jesus is the self-existent, eternal Creator God, and is therefore worthy of our admiration and worship. But that’s not all; He is a Hero in the truest and highest sense in that while being the eternal God, He chose to lay aside His crown, step off His throne and relinquish His divine attributes, to which He was justly entitled, and come to this earth to save a lost world. He didn’t have to. He could have shrugged off the dying planet like you would flick an ant off your arm. But He didn’t. Because of His great love toward us, He refused to abide in the “ivory palaces” of heaven. If we can see a parallel in Hebrews 11, as the writer tells of the faith of Moses, we might say, By love, Jesus, refused to retain the attributes of deity, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, esteeming the reproach of man greater riches than the treasures in heaven, for He looked to the reward.

Jesus was willing to let it all go for our sake. The throne of God was put at risk when Jesus wore the garment of humanity. Paul writes, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-11.

Jesus, as the eternal God; Jesus as the Creator God; Jesus as the Redeemer God qualifies as the truest Hero. Let Him be the One Who occupies our attention. Let His exploits fill our minds and thoughts. Let His sacrifice and love fill our conversations. He is One who justly deserves our admiration and worship. Around the throne above the elders cry out, “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.” Revelation 4:11. In the next chapter they add, in a seven-fold tribute, “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” Revelation 5:12.

To understand Who Jesus is requires divine revelation. When Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you,

Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood (human wisdom) has not revealed this to you, but My Father Who is in heaven.” Matthew 16:16, 17.

This week someone sent a photo to me by email, but when I attempted to open it, all I saw was a jumbled mass of numbers, letters and characters! Something must have been missing in the transmission for my computer to be able to receive it properly. Here is what the entire page looked like on my computer screen.

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I could make no sense of it at all. Needless to say, I was disappointed to not be able to see the picture. In a similar way, the “picture,” the message of Who Jesus is and what He has accomplished is just so much gobblygook to the unbelieving mind. It requires special translation, through the Spirit, to receive the correct and accurate picture of Jesus. “Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” The world does not see this. Jesus is no more than a myth or cuss word to the world. The reality of His person, mission and accomplishments are far from the human mind. And we once were in that frame of mind also.

But when, through the ministry of the Spirit, the true likeness of Jesus begins to take shape in our minds, and we see Him as He truly is, we know that He is worthy, as our Creator and Redeemer to be worshiped and to be emulated. Our calling and our privilege is be like Him. He is the Pattern; He is the role model. “He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk, just as He walked.” I John 2:6.

During my days in construction and home building, I always enjoyed framing. It was exciting to watch things take shape, constructing and erecting walls. There’s something therapeutic about swinging a framing hammer. When it came time to work on the roof, there were two basic choices available. You could order trusses, a webbed assembly that forms the roof structure, or you could construct the roof by cutting rafters on site. Trusses saved time, but rafters saved money. Trusses went up quick and easy and were uniform and straight, but there was something I enjoyed about cutting rafters and installing them.

Mathematics were called into service. One had to determine the pitch (roof angle) and determine the correct angle to cut the top part of the rafter so it would meet the ridge board or ridge beam. Using a handy device called a tri-square, the proper angle could be drawn on your rafter. Then you had to measure the correct distance to the place where the rafter would rest on the outer wall. Essentially, the rafter is the hypotenuse of the right triangle formed by the ceiling joist and a load-bearing center wall, or an imaginary wall if your rafters are supported by a load-bearing beam. To obtain the distance of the rafter on a 4/12 pitch roof, for example, you multiply the distance from the outer wall to the center wall (the “span”) by the factor of 1:054 to obtain the length of the rafter (the “run”). Thus if your distance between the outside wall to the center is 12 feet, you will need a rafter 12 feet 7 ¾ inches to accomplish the distance. The greater the pitch, the greater the multiplier.

Then the “tail” of the rafter would be properly trimmed, which would project beyond the building, and your rafter would be ready for testing. Ideally, two would be cut, so that they could be placed one opposite the other to confirm that your measurements and cuts were accurate. Then what do you do? In big, bold letters, with your carpenter’s pencil or red crayon you would right a word on that rafter. It was the word, “pattern.” Rather than going through the measurements time and time again, and for the sake of uniformity, that first rafter would become the “template” for all other rafters. Carefully you would lay that “pattern” rafter on each succeeding board, and trace out the design, so that it would be correct. When finished, I found it very satisfying to look at a stack of a couple dozen or more cut rafters, with their profiles lining up precisely one on top of another. What would happen if you took the second rafter and used it to mark the third, the third to mark the fourth, and so on? Likely the measurements would drift farther and farther away from the correct ones, and the precision of your roof timbers would suffer.

Jesus is our Pattern. It is He Whom we must copy in our living. Just as Noah built the ark in accordance with the plans showed to him from above; just as Moses constructed the tabernacle in accordance with the pattern he was shown from heaven; so likewise, we are to copy the design and template from heaven, given to us in the life of Jesus.

Originally mankind was made like God; we were made in the image and likeness of our Creator. But sin entered and marred the image. It is God’s design through the Gospel that we be recreated into His likeness. That is the purpose and goal of all true education; to be like Jesus in thought and deed.

Our very minds are to be transformed and renewed so that our thoughts will be in conformity with Him. That's where the Gospel process begins; with our thinking. "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:5. "Bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." II Corinthians 10:5. "We have known that the Son of God is come, and hath given us a mind." I John 5:20, Young's Literal Translation. Through the miracle of the indwelling Spirit, the very same thoughts and defenses against temptation can flow through our minds as did the mind of Christ.

If our minds are converted, our acts and behaviors will follow. What is the testimony of Christ's life? He went about "doing good." He never retaliated when reviled. His life was a self-sacrificing offering for the benefit of others. He didn't just give His life on the cross; He gave His life every day in selfless ministry. He is the Pattern. He is the Template. He is the One Who rightfully deserves our attention and worship.

"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called the children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like, Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself just as He is pure." I John 3:1-3.