

God's Glorious Good News

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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Delivered On: April 4, 2009

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Last Sunday evening Robert Lemire was talking on his cell phone outside a pizza shop in Lawrence, Massachusetts, about 25 miles north of Boston, when he noticed a toddler dangling from a third story window 40 feet above the ground across the street. The 45-year old father of two dashed across the street, where he gained the attention of Alex Day, who had just come out from a home Bible study. Together they caught 18-month old Caliah Clark before she hit the ground, saving her from serious injury or death. As amazing as that was, it's nothing compared to what God did for us! We want to take a look at His glorious good news, the Gospel today.

Rescued Toddler Caliah Clark and Her Home

We need some good news! It's getting so bad that you don't want to turn the news on the television or radio. Floods in Fargo, economic instability, job insecurity, violence, murders, kidnappings and shootings. Thank God our joy and peace are not dependent on these external circumstances! Our hope rests on the sure footing of God's plan, Christ's victorious mission in dying for our sins, and the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:16.

Christ the world's Redeemer has paid an infinite price for our salvation and having invested so much in it, will spare nothing to see that every opportunity for salvation is provided us. "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Romans 5:10. "He Who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Romans 8:32.

God's great mercy is bestowed upon us freely. The word "mercy" suggests kindness toward the erring and presupposes need. Mercy was not needed in the perfection of heaven. It was not extended to unfallen angels before sin entered the picture, because there was no need. But mercy has always been a part of God's character. It wasn't evidenced and made manifest until the need arose, but that doesn't mean it wasn't part of His divine attributes before sin.

"The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting." Psalm 103:17. We can't conceive of eternity in the past, but God's mercy was there. It is "from everlasting." Mercy has always been

within God's great heart of love. Jesus was the Lamb slain "from the foundation of the world." Revelation 13:8. The plan of salvation was not an after-thought, but was there in God's mind from the very beginning. It was always there, but when the dark night of sin came upon the earth, the shining star of God's mercy became visible.

This mercy has been extended to us in the life, death and ministry of Jesus Christ, the Sin-bearer of Calvary. His blood is sufficient to cover all our faults and defects. How do we receive it? How is it that His righteousness can be imputed to us? It is by exercising what the Bible calls faith, which is the capacity to believe. (In the Bible, "to have faith" is the same thing as "to believe.") Faith itself is a gift from God. "He has given to all a measure of faith." Romans 12:3. A "mustard seed" of faith is given to everyone, for Christ is the true light that lights every man and woman coming into the world. John 1:9.

But it is up to us to exercise that gift of faith: to choose to rest in the confidence of believing what He says. Faith is not "blind," but takes its stand based on the evidence provided in the fulfilled prophecies of God's Word, the testimony of God's love and power seen in nature and the witness of God's presence and providence operating in our lives. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1.

Bible faith is active and takes steps forward, though "proof" is not yet visible, for now we "see through a glass dimly." Before entering Canaan, the command of the Lord through Joshua was that the vast company of Israel cross the Jordan River, which at that time was in flood stage. From all natural appearances, that seemed impossible and apart from the word of the Lord, there was no physical reason to believe that they could cross over. Yet there was an abundance of evidence that the Word would be accompanied by His power that would somehow open a safe passage. Had Israel not walked through the Red Sea? Did they not breakfast that very morning on manna, the miracle bread which had sustained them during their wanderings? Had not the cloud, which had provided shade from the stifling desert heat, led them to this point? Had not God given them remarkable victories over Sihon and Og, monarchs of mighty kingdoms east of Jordan? Yes, there was plenty of evidence, if you chose to focus on it. But it wasn't until the priests, bearing the ark, entered by faith into the swirling waters that God "separated the waters from the waters and created dry land," if you want to draw an analogy between this miracle and the Creation story of Genesis 1. That's Bible faith.

Exercising that gift, the measure of faith given to all, means putting obedience into action even when "proof" is absent, resting securely on the evidence that has been abundantly provided. By continuous growth in this faith experience, one becomes "full of faith," which leads to becoming faithful. Obedience is returned to God for the right reason: not to earn salvation (that has been given as His free gift); not to impress others (what does it matter what others think?); but to bring joy to the heart of the Creator God. Does He not deserve our loyalty and allegiance?

Being full of faith (being faithful) leads one to obey all His commandments and to keep holy His Sabbath day, though it might jeopardize job or livelihood. Bible faith leads one to return a faithful

tithe and give generous offerings, though the budget numbers might not seem to add up. Bible faith leads to little acts of kindness, little deeds of generosity given in love and appreciation for God's great gift of salvation. This faith leads to kind words in the home and gentle relationships within the family.

I heard a story recently about a climber who set out to scale a certain peak. While ascending the mountain, a sudden storm came up which caused visibility to shrink, temperatures to drop and rocky surfaces to become slippery with moisture. The climber was careful to fasten his rope, tied around his waist, securely with his trusty pitons into the cracks in the rocks for safety.

Well, it happened, according to the story, that he lost his grip and began a precipitous fall, only to be suspended in mid-air as his rope reached its end. He could see nothing about him and prayed, "Lord, help me." The Lord answered him and asked, "Do you trust Me?" "Oh, yes," the suspended climber said, "I trust You!" God replied, "Cut the rope."

Two or three days later he was found by a search party, his frozen body dangling from his rope, two feet above the ground. Are you willing to "cut the rope" and trust God? Are you willing to place your confidence in Him completely and obey Him in all things? That's faith!

When we exercise faith and let Jesus come into our lives, He begins a work of restoration and change. According to the grand purpose of the Gospel He works within us, to restore our character to be like His. We can't do that on our own; it's impossible. But He can. In fact, it's His specialty. When we allow Him to change our way of thinking, overcoming becomes easy, natural. We become new creatures or a new creation when He writes His laws within our minds.

This week our house will be 22 years old and time has taken its toll on a few things. The sliding glass door that leads to the backyard was becoming increasingly difficult to open. Being a four-foot panel of dual glass, the door is very heavy, probably weighing 75 pounds or more. Grit and grim, wear and tear had caused the track and rollers to deteriorate and remove all semblance of smoothness. Great effort was required to open it and your only reward was loud and unpleasant sounds as the door ground its way across the pitted track. At the very worst times the rollers would jump off the track, meaning you would have to get a pry bar and lift it back in place.

Since our dogs needed the door opened and closed several times a day, this was becoming more and more a source of frustration. I finally went on-line and ordered new rollers and something that is called a "snap-cap" which is a stainless steel horse-shoe shaped piece of metal that snaps over the old track, effectively making it brand new. What a difference! The first time I tried it, I almost lost my balance, my body being used to exerting such a great effort to slide the door open. Now one finger is sufficient to operate it.

This is what Jesus does in our lives. He makes us brand new. Things go more smoothly with Christ at the helm. This doesn't mean there won't be trials; it means that there's nothing that can come into your life for which He hasn't made provision. Most important of all, He has the capability of

restructuring our priorities and goals so that we want to do what is pleasing to Him. The psalmist prayed, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law; indeed, I shall observe it with my whole heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way." Psalm 119:33-37.

What is the "testimony" of which David speaks? A careful study of the Old Testament will bear out the fact that it is God's Ten Commandments. You probably already know that this entire chapter, the longest of the whole Bible, features God's law and each verse (except one) of the 176 verses uses one of the many synonyms for God's law.

Let's think about this matter of inclination for a moment. Go back to your high school physics class for a moment. You know what an incline is; it's a slope. It's something that is on an angle. When something is on an incline, it is easier for it to travel in the direction of the slope because of the force of gravity. We use this concept of physics as a metaphor in other areas of life. We might say, "I'm inclined to choose potatoes instead of carrots," or something to that effect. If you think of how we use this term and apply it in a literal way it doesn't make much sense. You don't picture yourself on a slope when you say, "I'm inclined..." because everyone understands this term to mean "I'm predisposed to make this choice," or "this is the preference toward which I'm leaning."

Think of this principle as promised in the Bible. This is the glorious news of the Gospel, clearly taught by both Old and New Testaments. When we invite Jesus into our lives, He brings His power, His will, His faith and His victory. With Jesus in our hearts, He puts us in a posture so that we have different inclinations; we "incline" toward righteousness; we want to do what is right. Like David we say, "I delight to walk in the path of Your commandments." Sin becomes something loathsome, something undesirable. To do something that would disappoint our dear Savior becomes unthinkable. With Jesus in Joseph's heart, when confronted with temptation he exclaimed, "How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" His heart was inclined toward God's testimonies.

The grace of Christ places us in an advantageous position. When sin entered, our predisposition, our inclination became to do evil. That was the lost heritage of Eden. If God had left us in that situation there would have been no hope for you or me. We were conceived in sin, that is, from our very birth we were selfish. But when Christ comes into our life and we are re-born, a new nature is born within us. When we become "born of God," in a new and special way we partake of His nature. That's a principle of life; that children share the nature of their parents. When we become God's children by being born again, His nature is given to us. "As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him Who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." II Peter 1:4.

God creates a new heart within us. New desires, new attitudes are born and take shape in our minds. An inclination to do right and please God is planted inside us. "As many as received Him (we have to consent for this to happen), to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name; who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12, 13. Through regenerative power God changes our wills, our thinking, our behaviors, our habits, our characters and our destiny. He inclines our hearts toward right thinking and right doing.

The table portion of the lectern that holds my Bible and sermon notes while I preach is set at an angle. If I hold a ball at the top and let it go, what's going to happen? It's going to roll in the direction of the inclination, isn't it? We were born with an inclination to do evil. But when we are re-born, according to the promise of the Word, God changes the direction of our inclinations so that through Christ's grace we think and do what is right. He inclines our hearts toward His principles, His law. Along with His inclining our hearts toward His principles, He counteracts the force of our old nature. David prayed, "Do not incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice wicked works with men who work iniquity." Psalm 141:4.

This week while driving I came up behind a Nissan Murano that had the license plate TNT NRG. I interpreted it as meaning "dynamite energy." I don't know why the driver chose those letters for his license plate, but I can tell you that it correctly represents the power contained in the Gospel. Paul testified, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the *power* of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek." Romans 1:16. The word Paul used that is translated "power" is the Greek word *dynamis*, which is the source of our word dynamite, as well as many other words. A new, active purpose becomes *dynamic* in the Christian's life, as each day God leads us further into the freedom of His will. That walk with Him becomes closer and closer until one day it will blend into the immortal life God has always wanted for His children.

I came upon a verse a few days ago that has something in it I hadn't seen before. In Isaiah 21, the end of the second verse reads, "all its sighing I have made to cease." When I saw the word "cease," I was curious and looked it up. It is the Hebrew *Shabbat*, which means literally "to cease, to keep a Sabbath." (The primary meaning of the word "Sabbath" means "to stop, or cease.") In heaven there will be complete rest. Sorrow and sighing will be on permanent sabbatical. Has a trial or difficult experience brought forth from you a sigh lately? Today we live in a world that is filled with those things that bring tears and sorrow, crying and sighing. But one day soon that will all end. All tears and sighing will be gone. The sighing will be made to cease.

Can you imagine such a life; to be free from all physical pain and emotional stress? It's hard for our minds to grasp such a perfect existence, because all we've ever known is pain, suffering and death. But the day is coming soon when, living in His kingdom made new, in the glory of His gracious presence, we will struggle to call to mind the trials and tribulations of this life. You'll try to remember what wrinkles were; what arthritis felt like. We'll try ever so hard to recall our

greatest hardship, our worst trial, but will give up and with a shout of “glory!” we’ll praise God for His mercy for lost sinners.

I received by email this week a link that reported a dream by a certain SDA pastor some twenty years ago. This is the report, as relayed by Pastor Steve Wohlberg. (www.whitehorsemedia.com)

“The book of Acts predicts, quoting Joel 2:28, that in “the last days... young men shall see visions... old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). A few days ago White Horse Media learned about a pastor in the 1980’s who had a dream informing him that Jesus Christ would return *during the time that America had a black president*. Here are a few excerpts from the email we received:

“Back in the 1980s, Elder Jack Darnall... who ran an end-time training center to prepare people for end-time events, held a prayer meeting in his house. As the people were leaving, he called aside another man and said to him that he felt impressed to tell him an impressive dream that he had. “In the dream, he dreamed that it was the time when Jesus returned to Earth in power and great glory. America had an African-American president (something unthinkable in the 1980s) when Jesus returned. He was tall and thin, with close-cropped hair and large ears. When elected, at first he was greatly beloved by the people, but then he became a terrible dictator.

“The dream was not widely discussed, because at that time they could not see a black man being voted in as president with so much prejudice in the country still.

“It was just a dream, but an unlikely one at the time... We are not saying Pastor Jack Darnall was a prophet. We are simply saying that he had a dream. It may have been from the Lord, after all, the Lord said that at the end-times ‘your old men shall dream dreams.’ Joel 2:28. Time will tell whether this dream fits into that category. File it away in the back of your brain for future reference.”

Apparently, the story was verified to be true. In other words, Elder Darnall really did have this dream. There was another point in the dream worth mentioning: there would be one more pope after John Paul II. As the above quote states, ‘Time will tell.’ At White Horse Media, we are not prophets. Neither do we jump at every dream we hear about. Nevertheless, we felt that this one was worth sharing for you to think about.”

I agree that “time will tell.” But what if it’s true! What if soon, within our lifetime, Jesus will return and take us home! What glorious, great news!