

Oskar's Pin

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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He was born in the early part of the 20th Century into the home of a well-to-do family. Oskar enjoyed a good life in what today is called the Czech Republic. Among his neighborhood friends were two boys who were sons of a local Jewish rabbi. Then came financial reverses, and the affluent life-style of his family was changed. Oskar vowed that when he grew up, he would become rich; he would become filthy rich, and never have to scrounge for a meal.

When the political landscape of Europe changed dramatically in the 1930's, Oskar moved to Krakow, Poland and sought a way to make money out of the conflict. He had become a part of the new Nazi Party, not because of any appreciation for the political views it promoted, but because it put him in contact with the "important people" and smoothed the way for business transactions. He became friends with key officers in the German army and SS, offering them bribes of illegal cigars or cognac to get what he wanted. His plan to get rich was coming into focus.

Oskar purchased a bankrupt factory that made kitchen utensils and going along with the advice of his Jewish friend and accountant, Itzhak Stern, he employed many of the Jewish community as his workers. It made sense; because they were a people who didn't enjoy political favor at the time, he didn't have to pay them as much and he could keep more money. He was making progress along the road he had planned all along; to become filthy rich. He enjoyed rubbing shoulders with all the influential people. The money he spent in giving bribes to get lucrative government contracts was only an investment to make more money for himself. Life was great!

Then in January of 1940 things began to change again. Oskar was ordered to pay the salaries of his workers directly to the SS, and there was initiated an effort to distinguish which were the Jews who were "essential workers," and those who were not. By June of 1942, many of Oskar's factory workers were ordered to leave town, not being "essential workers." Among them was the office manager, Itzhak Stern. Oskar rushed to the train station and argued with the SS officer about how essential his workers were to the war effort. His persuasive words, plus a large gift, changed the mind of the SS officer and Oskar was able to escort his workers back to the factory.

Early in 1944, Hitler ordered that all ghettos, camps and factories in their area be closed and that all Jews fit to work be moved; the others would be sent to death camps. Oskar proposed that his workers be moved to Czechoslovakia and make vital war supplies and munitions. After another large "gift," his suggestion was accepted. He was compelled to come up with a list of names of

those who would be in this move, whose lives would be saved. The list he compiled included all his workers plus some others, making about 1,100.

In the fall of '44, he made all the necessary arrangements and paid all the necessary bribes to move his factory and his workers to the new location, Brunnlitz, Czechoslovakia. The liquidation of the Plaszow camp, where they had been, began in October of that year. About that time, of the 1,100 people on his list, 800 men were being shipped in boxcars to go to Brunnlitz. But 300 women and children who were supposed to join them had been mistakenly routed to Auschwitz! Edith Wertheim, then Etki Liebgold, recalls, "one night they took us to the gas chamber. We were waiting the whole night. In the morning we found out: Schindler is here!" He had come to rescue them, bribing the Nazis to retrieve the women on his list and bring them back.

The factory that Oskar now directed, being relocated to Brunnlitz, was supposed to produce casings or shells for bullets, but he made sure that in the following seven months the factory never produced a single useful shell. When his products failed quality control, he attributed it to start-up problems.

The war in Germany finally ended in May of 1945. Oskar and his wife gathered his workers together, before he fled to the arms of the Americans, and counseled them to not seek revenge. Then they paused for a moment of silent reflection in memory of those who had died. In March of this year, 2010, what is purported to be (one of several--the Nazis were fanatics about having many copies made) an original (carbon copy) list of the Schindler workers, which had been held by the survivors of Itzhak Stern, went up for sale for \$2.2 million.

What a change for Oskar! The man whose goal it had been to become filthy rich ended up with nothing, or almost next to nothing. Or, did he end up with nothing? He had amassed a fortune, only to see it spent on securing the lives of his workers, the Jews who suffered the malignity of Nazism. He saved them from certain death, from the furnaces of Auschwitz. Many thousands of the remaining survivors and their descendants gather each year to celebrate the sacrifice of the now late Oskar Schindler.

What could have brought about such a radical change in the heart of one who had been such a selfish materialist? It is evident that his outlook was changed when he realized that he could be instrumental in saving lives. When the chain of circumstance was drawn clearly in his mind; when the dots were connected from the deportations to the cattle-car trains, to the smoke that arose from the chimneys of the concentrations camps, he knew he had to do something. He could not help himself.

When he began to see his employees as people, not as instruments to make money for him, his perspective changed. When he saw that the money he had collected meant less to him as he viewed the prospect of his workers dying in the death camps, his heart and his wallet began to open. Life was more important than money. He spent unstintingly to save those on his list, and even regretted at the end that there were a few things that could also have been mortgaged to

bring salvation to perhaps one or two more. His gold Nazi pin which he had worn through the years to ingratiate himself into better business deals; why had he not sold it and secured the safety of one more soul?

Oskar was not perfect; far from it. But he saw the certainty of death awaiting those under the scourge of tyranny, and he caught a vision of the value of saving lives. It led him to look at the material goods placed within his reach in a different way. They lost their glitter in the face of lives saved.

We recognize a bigger lesson in the life of Oskar Schindler. God saw value in the lost humanity of Planet Earth. He could not hold Himself back. To purchase the freedom of a race doomed to be lost, Heaven spent everything. The vaults of Heaven's bank were emptied in the Gift of Jesus Christ to redeem humanity. There is a parable that Jesus told, one of the shorter of His parables, that can be read in two ways. "The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it." Matthew 13:45, 46. This follows one that reads, "The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Matthew 13:44.

We've usually read these parables from the point of view that they reveal our reaction to finding the treasure of the Gospel of Jesus. He is the Treasure; He is the Pearl of great price. When we find Him, we willingly give up everything to obtain His salvation. That is absolutely true. But, from another point of view, might these stories also reveal God's great heart of love in seeking us? He saw value in lost humanity. To Him, we were the "treasure" in the field, hidden from the view of everyone else. We were the pearl for which He spent all. We speak often of the saints' inheritance; the city of gold, the tree whose fruit gives life everlasting. Yes, the saints' inheritance is awesome. And, to be more accurate, He is our inheritance. Heaven isn't about things; it's about a relationship with the eternal God. "You, O LORD, are the portion of my inheritance and my cup." Psalm 16:5.

Did you know that the Bible speaks also of God's inheritance? What might that be? "For the Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance." Deuteronomy 32:9. "Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, and the people whom He has chosen as His own inheritance." Psalm 33:12. "The LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem." Zechariah 2:12. God's "inheritance" is us! To Him, we are the hidden treasure, the pearl of great price, for which He spent all. Nothing was held back. Heaven was emptied.

We are invited, since we now take part of His nature through the miracle of the Gospel, to participate in the ministry of sharing the Good News with others. When God's message penetrates our hearts and takes root, we begin to experience what the Bible calls "faith." It means that we see things differently than we used to. We think in a completely different way. It means that we understand God's plan and can make sense out of the nonsense in our world.

Through faith we understand that this world is in its present situation because of a great fall; a fall which began in heaven and then affected this earth. Through Adam's fall, this earth's inhabitants were put in jeopardy. They were destined for the "death camps" as were the workers in Schindler's factory, only in a far greater sense. The death that mankind deserved is an eternal death.

God in His great mercy designed a plan whereby mankind could be saved. The law could not be set aside; that was impossible. But He would Himself accept the transgression and its consequences in order to purchase our salvation. The salvation He obtained brings life that is eternal. Sadly, the lives purchased by Schindler's kindness would eventually perish. As magnanimous and generous as it was; as worthy of praise and admiration as it was, it was only a temporary salvation. The ones purchased by Oskar all died or will eventually die. The ones Jesus purchased will live forever.

And we can participate in this process. God could have designed it so that the Gospel would be proclaimed by Himself or His angels, and once in a while there are instances of the divine that occur in evangelism. But for the most part, He has assigned this task to us. It is for our blessing; even for our own salvation that we can participate in this work. It is a test of our faith, to ascertain whether we appreciate the eternal stakes involved in this conflict; whether we have "faith."

There was a time when Oskar thought only of how much money he could make and accumulate. But there came a time when his goals and priorities changed. That came about when he began to "connect the dots" and realize that death was in the air, but that he could do something to change destinies. The question for us is, Do we have that vision today? Do we appreciate the value of one soul saved for eternity? Do we realize that we can have an impact, through our influence and our means, of making a difference in a person's salvation? "Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins." James 5:19, 20. The furnaces of Auschwitz were terrible, no question about it, but the destruction of the wicked at the last judgment is far worse.

You've seen things like this on the news; a crisis develops when a child falls into an abandoned well. The attention of the whole community is riveted on the spectacle; heroic efforts are made to devise a rescue. Others risk their lives in order to save the child. Then, the cheers that puncture the sky when the rescue is completed! Even the rescue of animals is given the same attention and applause. I saw recently how they airlifted a horse, trapped by rising flood waters. A helicopter hovered above while rescuers applied a sling and the horse was hoisted to safety. Wonderful! A baby calf was caught in a storm drain and workers struggled mightily until it was lifted to safety. Marvelous! These are all great, and they came about because it was seen that danger existed; that serious injury or death would result if something wasn't done.

If we could only see as Heaven sees! If we could see souls perishing because of a want of the Good News of Jesus! While it requires faith to see this picture, the outcome has an impact that exceeds

Schindler's actions a million-fold. If our eyes were opened and we could see things today as we will see them then, how different we'd live! How different we'd look at the way we spent our money and our time!

The day will come in awesome reality when "The Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand but the goats on the left.

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand (the side of favor), 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

"Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothed You?' And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'" Matthew 25:31-40.

Notice that the "sheep," the saints, are apparently not aware of their good deeds, which have been faithfully chronicled by Heaven. They did not do them "to be seen of men." Because they have been partakers of the divine nature, they have done these things "naturally." It was their "nature," that is, their new nature, birthed by the Holy Spirit, which prompted them to act in a kindly and generous way.

Notice also that in this account, it is not correct theology on which the Lord places emphasis. In this story, we're not told that the candidates are quizzed about their knowledge of prophecy. That is not to say that knowing what the Bible teaches is unimportant. It is, and is stressed in other places of the Scripture. We need both "truth" and "love." We need both to know what the Bible teaches, and these truths will then be translated into behavior that mirrors that of our Savior.

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand (the side of disfavor), 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment (not "everlasting punishing"), but the righteous into eternal life.'" Matthew 25:41-46.

In this revelation, it is not the devious deeds of the wicked which disqualify them from the inheritance; it is what they did not do. It is the sin of omission rather than the sin of commission. And what is the reason they didn't do what they could have done? It's because their vision was limited. Their own confession is, "when did we see?" They were blinded. They didn't see "Jesus" in His children. They didn't appreciate the value of the opportunity in ministry and sharing.

The day will come, and is fast approaching, when our vision will be opened. On that day the issues of life will become crystal clear and unavoidable. Every opportunity for good that we neglected will stand out in bold definition. Every useless expenditure on our own extravagance or pleasure will blaze as the sun. We each will have our own "Oskar moment," as he did with his Nazi pin, and wonder, Why didn't we have better vision than we did? Why did we hold onto "that" when it might have been the salvation of someone?

On that last day, Heaven's accounting will be revealed, that is true. On that last day, Satan will stand ready to accuse us of our misdeeds, that is correct. But it won't be the heavenly judgment, nor the accusations of Satan so much as our own minds will punish us as we are then confronted with the reality that souls could have been saved had we lived in selfless ministry. Don't think this a harsh statement: it only reveals what we ourselves will feel on that day.

The good news today is that our eyes can be opened now. We can have the enlarged vision of faith. When that happens, like the hardened and selfish heart of Oskar Schindler, our priorities and goals will change. It cannot be helped, any more than Oskar could stop himself from rescuing his workers. We will realize that eternal destinies are at stake, and that we can have the privilege of sharing in the outreach for the salvation of souls.

Today there are limitless opportunities to share in Gospel ministry. Beside the benefit of giving to our local church, which is much appreciated, you can stretch your philanthropic dollar by sending funds to ADRA, the organization of our church which feeds and clothes the needy. ADRA may not receive top billing in the headlines, but it is well known among the leaders of nations and the charitable organizations of the world. Currently through ADRA, there are programs to match your funds so that every dollar you give becomes seven dollars!

There are Christian schools in India that need support. Consider sponsoring a child in a life-changing experience for \$30.00 a month in an Adventist school. Consider a gift to Adventist World Radio which beams God's last day message to the world. Ask God where your means can be used most effectively; He will direct you. On that Day, you won't be disappointed.

Today we pray the prayer of Elisha, "Lord, open our eyes. Give us greater vision, even the vision of faith. Help us to see the true realities of life, and the wonderful opportunity You have placed within our reach to help someone else find You and Your salvation."