

God's Amazing Love (Part 2)

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church

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A few days ago Jennifer, who does a wonderful job in leading out in our children's Sabbath School, was showing me this inflatable plastic world globe. All the air had been let out and it was deflated and collapsed. We shared together how accurately it represents our current world situation, and our country. Now, don't get me wrong; I love our country, but we're in bad shape! Just think of the precarious situation of our economy! A "super committee" was appointed with the task of trimming 1.2 trillion dollars from our budget. It's true that 1.2 trillion dollars is a lot of money; it's 1,200 billion; it's over a million millions. This amount is planned to be cut over a period of 10 years.

That sounds ambitious, but there's something wrong with that picture! The problem is that we overspend by about that amount every year! Last Monday, in an announcement strategically timed, given after the stock markets had closed, they revealed that they could not find a way to reach an agreement to trim this "tithe" from our gluttonous spending problems. So what does that say about the future of our credit worthiness and financial condition? Our country isn't alone in struggling with financial challenges. Some are far worse. Yes, our country and our world are in sad shape, not just in financial matters but in many other ways. However, there is hope in Jesus! Not in Buddha, not in eastern mysticism and not in materialism. Only in and through Jesus. We've come together today to worship Him!

Two weeks ago we began a study in which I asked this question: What does this collared shirt have to do with the Gospel and God's love? This is the question we will continue to explore in our study today. To provide a solution for the sin problem, Jesus, the immortal God, came to this earth and was born in the likeness of sinful flesh, fallen human flesh, to become our Redeemer and Example. He had to be completely divine to be our Sacrifice; He had to be completely human to be our Example. Last time we looked at the way in which Jesus was and was not like us. There's a Gospel promise found in studying this topic. There's encouraging news in the study of Christ's nature as He lived here as a Man. Do you remember the veil in the sanctuary that served as the partition between compartments? Paul makes this statement with regard to the veil. When he refers to it he says, "the veil, that is, His flesh." Hebrews 10:20.

What function did the veil serve? It was the opening, the door. This is very meaningful! Jesus is the Door to the kingdom. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. There is something vital about knowing that He came in human form that is like a doorway, a passageway to the Gospel. When we come to realize that Jesus became One of us and shared a nature like ours, it is like an

“opening” that will encourage us in our Christian walk. Jesus knew what temptation was. He was tempted in ways that we will never be. As He overcame, so can we. The Bible promises that God will implant Christ's faith in us if we will ask. That's the secret to victory in Christian living—it is having the “mind of Christ.” Philippians 2:5.

We began with the question, How could God, the One Who is the very essence of life, give up life and die for sin? After all, divinity, by definition, can't die. We found that the answer is that according to His wonderful plan, God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, would be born into the human family and become a member of the human race. For that reason, one of His names is “Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.” Though He was completely God, while on this earth His divinity would be “hidden” and not used for His own purposes. If He had, He couldn't be our example, since we can't turn rocks to bread, as Jesus was tempted to do in the wilderness. He would still be fully God, for a divine Sacrifice was required, but this divinity wouldn't be seen or used for His own needs. Jesus died for our sins on the cross. Beyond that, He showed that the devil's charges, that God was not fit to rule and that His law was not capable of being kept, were without foundation. He would come and live as a Man and demonstrate that sin was not inevitable; that obedience was possible even in fallen human nature! What condescension! What risk! What love!

So it was that about 2,000 years ago Jesus Christ was born of Mary by the Holy Spirit. “Then Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I do not know a man?’ And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One Who is to be born will be called the Son of God.’” Luke 1:34, 35. He was completely human in that Mary was His mother; He was completely divine in that the Holy Spirit was His “Father.” He had a “dual nature.”

We saw that Christ came in “fallen human nature,” but it was not the nature of unregenerate fallen man. It was not the nature of someone who is unconverted and obeys without question or hesitation the desires and lusts of his flesh. No, Jesus would come in the nature of regenerated, converted man. It would still be “fallen human nature,” for when we have become converted, we're still in “fallen human nature.” In other words, Jesus was born, “born again.” When we're converted, we still live in “fallen human nature,” but with a new Power that works within.

What do we mean when we speak of Christ having a “fallen human nature”? It is a nature that is afflicted and beset by the physical liabilities of 4,000 years of degeneration. Jesus became hungry and He knew fatigue. It is a nature that is incapable of obedience on its own. It is a nature that has difficulties and challenges through trials and temptations. Christ had no “propensities” or “leanings” toward sin; He had no backlog of built habit patterns of personally sinning. But He did have difficulties and challenges that sprang from trials and temptations, of an intensity that we'll never be asked to experience. In the Garden of Gethsemane He struggled with temptation to the point that He sweat drops of blood. In His “fallen human nature” there was the possibility of sinning, but also the capability of resisting through divine strength. It was this “fallen human nature” that Jesus had when He lived here; the “fallen human nature” of the one converted and reborn.

To review quickly, we found four evidences of this from Hebrews 2:11-17. First, it tells us that Jesus was made like the ones “being sanctified.” “For both He Who sanctifies (it's speaking of Jesus here) and those who are being sanctified (ones who are converted or born again) are all of one,” that is, one Parentage; the Holy Spirit living in combination with human flesh. This happens when the miracle of Bethlehem becomes reality in your life and in mine. We are “born of the Spirit,” Who gives us a new direction and new inclinations in life.

Secondly, it tells us that He was “made like His brethren,” that is, those who are converted and are born “of the Spirit.” “He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: ‘I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You.’” Jesus said that His “brethren” are those who do the will of My Father in heaven.” Mathew 12:50.

Thirdly, Paul quotes again stating, “I will put My trust in Him.” This is of huge importance! It tells us that Jesus lived here by faith and didn't use His divine attributes in His conflict with sin. Fourthly, Paul states, “For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. Therefore in all things He had to be made like His brethren that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God.” Hebrews 2:11-17. Ishmael could rightly claim that Abraham was his father, and Esau could claim that Abraham was his grandfather, but they were not, in the spiritual sense, of the “seed of Abraham.” This title is reserved to the children of faith.

These are four critical clues to tell us about Jesus' human nature while here on earth. What encouraging news to think that the eternal God stepped off His throne and lived here as a Man, completely human, not using His superhuman powers to defeat the devil. He came with our weaknesses, trials and temptations. Yet He was without sin because he was completely dependent upon His Father. He used tools in overcoming available to us; The Holy Scriptures, the Holy Spirit and the ministry of holy angels. The question for us is, Should we not be making use of these tools today?

We looked at passages in Ephesians and Romans in which the “children of wrath,” the “ungodly” are described, having a nature that follows the lusts of the flesh and is not capable of appreciating the things of God or obeying His law. This is the way we were born, but not the way Christ was born. He was born “holy.” He was born, “born again.” We can become “holy” and “children of God” when we allow the Holy Spirit to bring us into the new birth experience. Then God elevates us “to heavenly places” and gives a different mind, a different way of thinking, new desires, new impulses and new leanings. Those things that used to appeal to us don't anymore.

Remember that God loves the entire world, but there is a tremendous difference between the one whose mind is closed to His Spirit, who is “in the flesh,” “carnally minded,” and the born-again Christian who is walking in His light, in whose life the Spirit is actively working. It is when we receive Him that we become His sons and daughters. John 1:12. When the angel Gabriel came to Mary to inform her of the miraculous birth she would experience, he described the infant Jesus as “that holy One” and the “Son of God.” Luke 1:35. We can become “holy” and we can become “children of God,” but only after receiving Christ, after being born again. We were not born with

that new nature. Christ was. God does not blame us that we were born evil minded. But He offers a solution. Through His “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 1:3, 4. This changes everything! We are then put in an advantageous position. In this sense we are partakers of the divine nature. In this sense we can overcome as Christ overcame. Through Christ I can do all things, testified Paul. Philippians 4:13.

The Bible gives us a picture of this at which we will look, a visual “show and tell” that can help us see what this means. The sanctuary was God’s teaching tool of salvation. In it, every part spoke of Christ and His glory. Notice this passage near the end of the book of Exodus. There’s a beautiful illustration in it. “He made the robe of the ephod of woven work, all of blue. And there was an opening in the middle of the robe, like the opening in a coat of mail, with a woven binding all around the opening, so that it would not tear.” Exodus 39:22.

The high priest’s robe was stitched around neck with special reinforcement to avoid its being torn or ripped. If you look at a typical t-shirt, you will see that there is a border around the neck, strategically placed so that through this additional strength it won’t be ripped or torn. It's under stress when you pull it over your head, so the binding is there to keep it from tearing. When you find yourself using certain pages that are punched to go into a three-ring binder, you might place a reinforcing sticker over the hole, to avoid it tearing. The neckline of the priest’s ephod was given extra reinforcement, like a coat of chain mail, to make it difficult to tear. We must see this picture! The Gospel is in this verse! The Good News of God’s salvation is woven into that extra stitching around the neck of the ephod! Let’s briefly go through the components of this verse and see the beautiful message God wants us to learn. The Bible will help us understand every part of this portrayal.

There are two applications of this. Firstly, this applies to Jesus, our High Priest. But secondarily, it applies to us, because as Christians, as ones who have surrendered our will to Him, we have become part of the “priesthood of all believers.” But the first application is of Christ. The priest represented Jesus, our High Priest. Paul wrote, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected.” Hebrews 8:1, 2. That Priest, of course, is Jesus.

In a secondary sense, we as members of the priesthood of all believers, are also called to wear the ephod by faith. What does the robe, the blue ephod represent? Let's take a look at 4 things in this picture. First, let's think about the robe. In the Bible, clothing represents moral condition. Pure and clean robes represent a condition of righteousness; filthy rags or nakedness represent moral corruption. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were clothed with a beautiful robe of light, made in the image of their Creator. Psalm 104:2. But through sin they realized their nakedness and attempted to construct clothing of fig leaves. Clothing symbolizes moral condition. In the ephod we see the perfect righteousness of Jesus, which becomes ours by faith.

Secondly, we notice that it says the robe was blue.

Why was the robe *blue*? Because in the Bible *blue is symbolic of God's law*. How do we know that? Look at these few texts. At the time when the Ten Commandments, God's holy law, were given, we read, "Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was *under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire* stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity." Exodus 24:9, 10. What color is sapphire? It's blue, isn't it. Where did they see this blue sapphire? It was under His feet. What's the message of this picture? When the law was given, Moses and his companions saw the pavement, the "foundation" as it were a beautiful blue sapphire, like the blue of the sky. That's because *His holy law is the foundation of His government*.

We also learn that the people of Israel were instructed to put a tassel or hem on their clothing. What color was it to be? It was to be blue. Why? To remind them to obey His law. "Speak to the children of Israel: Tell them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put a *blue* thread in the tassels of the corners. And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the *commandments* of the LORD and do them." Numbers 15:38, 39. Blue is the royal color of God's holy law. The ephod or robe that the priest wore was blue, showing perfect conformity with God's holy law. Christ wore that ephod, figuratively speaking. His moral conduct was in complete conformity with God's law. We are also to walk as He walked. We are called to be obedient children of our heavenly Father, heeding His holy commandments.

Thirdly: the blue robe that the priest wore was not to be torn. Why was it not to be torn? This was a way of saying that the law of God was *not to be broken* by Christ (the primary application of the High Priest) or His followers (being part of the priesthood of all believers). Tearing the robe would demonstrate ripping God's principles, His law, the same as "breaking" the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was the devil's purpose to get Christ to break God's law, to tear the robe of righteousness. In that attempt the devil completely failed. It has been the devil's intent to remove from God's people the clothing of His righteousness through disobedience. We see this in the story of Eden after sin, when the robe of light was lost. We're told of certain sons of Sceva who attempted to cast out demons. "And the evil spirit answered and said, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?' Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house *naked* and wounded." Acts 19:16. In the story of the healed demoniac of Gadara we find that he "wore no clothes." Luke 8:27. The True Witness tells the church of Laodicea that she is "wretched, blind and *naked*." Revelation 3:17.

Here's the point: for the priest to rip or tear that blue robe would symbolize Christ breaking the law. If Jesus had sinned, that would have been the end of the God's miraculous plan of salvation. There was no "savior" for the Savior. That's why special instruction was given that the high priest should not tear his clothes. "And he who is the high priest among his brethren, on whose head the anointing oil was poured and who is consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor *tear his clothes*." Leviticus 21:10.

That's why what happened at Christ's trial was so incongruous, so ironic, such a misrepresentation of what was true. Do you remember what happened? Arrogantly the priest said, I adjure you to tell us if You are the Christ. After Jesus responded to their question by saying He was the Christ, what did the high priest do? In direct violation of God's Word "then the high priest tore his clothes saying, 'He has spoken blasphemy!'" Matthew 26:65. Do you see how "backwards" this was? The high priest was wrong. Jesus did not commit blasphemy by affirming He was the Messiah! The high priest committed blasphemy by tearing his garments! Keeping the symbolism and typology intact, Christ's own seamless garment was not torn. John 19:24.

Here's where this becomes meaningful to us. When we were born, we had a disposition to sin. When we are re-born, we become in a limited sense "priests," and we "put on" the blue ephod. What is the specific feature of this robe? It has stitched reinforcement, making it not easy to tear or rip. By the new birth process, we share in Christ's holy nature. What David wrote in the 40th Psalm becomes true for us also, as it was true of Christ. "I delight to do Thy will, O my God, and Your law is within My heart." Psalm 40:8. When we are converted, the Holy Spirit begins the stitching process, reinforcing the robe of His righteousness so it won't be torn by disobedience. It becomes our delight to obey; it becomes abhorrent to sin. We echo the reply of Joseph when he was tempted, saying, "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God." Genesis 39:9. For the converted Christian to sin would go "against nature;" that is the re-born nature. It would be like trying to tear the reinforced binding of the neck opening of the high priest's robe. Do you have the robe with the stitched reinforcement on today?

We have a dear friend who shared this story with us recently. It seems that she and another friend had shared an interest in a certain television show, "Dancing With the Stars." It was their habit, though they were separated by a great distance, to watch the program "together," that is, they would call each other frequently during the show to discuss what was happening. So it was that a couple of weeks ago our friend's telephone rang, with her friend on the other end of the line. "Did you see that?" she asked. Caught somewhat off-guard, at first she didn't know what her friend was talking about. It took a few seconds for her to process both the question and its profound significance. Her friend was referring to something that had happened during the TV show, going on right then. But she had been undergoing a change in interests, especially in the area of television watching. As it happened, the time for that show came and went, and she didn't even think about it. When her friend called, it jolted her to the reality that she hadn't even missed the show at all. A new principle was at work in her life, with new interests and desires. The principle of leaning toward righteousness and away from sin was at work in her life. Has this happened in your life?

To put it in the context of our passage from Exodus, the Holy Spirit was stitching reinforcement around the neck of her robe. The Holy Spirit was making obedience easier, and transgression harder. The "world" was becoming less interesting to her. It would have required a conscious decision to go against the new set of principles in her life to watch that show. Christ's divine nature was taking root in her life. He will do this for all of us. He knows our trials, our temptations. He came here and lived a very real life in fallen human nature; not the nature we were born with, but the same nature as you and me when we receive the Gospel and are born of the Spirit. At that

point we become His “brethren,” and are of one Parentage. We become the “seed of Abraham” and children of the “promise.” What promise? To save us from our sins; to write His law in our hearts. The very same tools available to Him are available to us to use in overcoming the devil; the Holy Spirit, the Word of God and the ministration of holy angels.

God’s love for us cannot be measured. He has provided all that we need to receive and experience salvation. He has promised that if we will but surrender our will to Him and allow Him access to our lives, He will bring about a work of transformation that will disappoint the devil, amaze the angels and shock ourselves. He will perform and complete this work until the day of Jesus Christ. Then throughout eternity new vistas of God’s grace, new revelations of His love will be unfolding before our wondering minds as we continue to grow and appreciate His great heart of devotion.