

Jesus the Servant: A picture from prophecy

A family was vacationing at the lake one summer. Dad had been puttering out by the boathouse. Two of his sons, a 12-year old and a 3-year old were down playing along the dock. The 12 year old was supposed to be watching his little brother, but he got distracted. The 3 year old, little Billy, thought that would be a good time to check out the shiny aluminum fishing boat tied up at the end of the dock. So he went to the dock and put one foot on the boat, and one foot on the dock. He lost his balance and fell into the water, which was about 5 or 6 feet deep.

The splash alerted the 12-yr old who let out a piercing scream. Dad came running from the boat house, jumped into the water, swam down, but unable to see anything, came up for air. Sick with panic, he went right back down into this murky water, and began to feel everywhere around the bottom. He couldn't feel anything. Finally, on his way up, he felt little Billy's arms locked in a death grip on one of the posts of the dock, about 4 feet under water. Prying the boy's fingers loose, they burst up together thru the surface to fill their lungs with life giving air.

Finally when the adrenaline had stopped surging, and nerves had calmed down a little bit, the father asked his son, "What on earth were you doing down there hanging onto the post so far under the water? And little Billy's answer was a classic, laced with the wisdom only a toddler could give. He said, "I was just waiting for you dad. Just waiting for you."

Our God, The God of the universe left the glory and the splendor of heaven, a place where there was no pain and no sickness, no accidents, no hurt, and no death.

And he plunged into this dark, murky world on a rescue mission, a rescue mission for all of us who are drowning, a rescue mission for all of us who are barely hanging on, a rescue mission for all of us who are lost in the darkness.

To understand the heart of Christianity we must know the whole story. The story of Jesus Christ doesn't start in Bethlehem or in the New Testament. The story of Easter didn't start on the cross or on resurrection Sunday.

Crucifixion was the most terrible form of the death penalty which the Roman Empire could devise. It was the supreme torture. At the very threat of it tough men trembled. The cross was the symbol of Rome's stern domination and the ultimate degradation to which a human being could be condemned.

From the very earliest of church history, it has been the custom of Christian people to contemplate the road to the cross, especially during the forty days preceding Good Friday. There are some that shun this practice known now as Lent because they want to avoid any Romanism. (Catholic) There is however value in setting aside a period of time for reflection and contemplation. Many of you practice this to one degree or the other.

The road to the cross didn't start at the birth or baptism of Jesus. It didn't even start in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve first sinned thus providing the need for salvation. We are going to take an overview look at Jesus, the Servant.

1. Jesus the Servant: Responding to the fall of man

One might be tempted to think that God's response to man's fall in the Garden of Eden was the beginning of the need for Jesus to come to serve mankind. But look at these words in 1 Peter 1:18-20 NLT

*For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom He paid was not mere gold or silver.¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.²⁰ **God chose Him as your ransom long before the world began, but He has now revealed Him to you in these last days.***

The cross was not a rescue operation devised to fix the disastrous fall of Adam and Eve. Adam's sin did not take God by surprise. Creation was not an experiment. God did not take a tremendous risk, hoping that man made in His image and likeness, gifted with free will, would choose to love and obey Him, instead of responding to the seduction of Satan in the garden.

God knew before He created Adam that man would use his free will and all the evil consequences that would follow. It is a mystery. To understand God even a little bit in His sovereignty one must accept the following: God, worshipped and adored as He was by the heavenly host, could be satisfied – in His desire for true fellowship – only in the love and willing obedience of being created in His own image and likeness.

God gave the man He created the powers of choice to love and serve Him but He also gave man the ability and free will to reject Him, rebel and sin. Before He created man God knew what He would choose. And so in heaven was devised a "plan of redemption" that would triumph over the tempters power in our lives. The effects of sin and death would be conquered in this plan. Man would again have the choice of being restored into communion with his Maker!

Every baby born since Adam and Eve were created has been born a sinner in need of restoration. The question is will man make the right choice?

It is amazing love that we can hardly comprehend to believe that Jesus the Son of God would be willing to respond and rescue the human race before it was even created but that is the teaching of the Bible.

Paul wrote these classic words in Philippians 2:

*Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.
⁷ Instead, He gave up His divine privileges He took the humble position of a slave and was born*

as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

He was willing to come to this earth before we were ever created. He came because He loved us more than His position in heaven. He longs for the fellowship that can only come through obedience and being made holy by the indwelling presence of God in our lives.

The Son of God responded to the fall of man by becoming a servant and being willing to die in the process. I don't know if you can take it in but it ought to move you at the deepest part of your soul. That thought should motivate us to be better people and more in love with Jesus every day of our lives.

2. Jesus the Servant: Recognizing the failure of man

For thousands of years mankind developed both culture and civilization. Sin was rampant so God stepped in knowing that the ultimate redemption would come later in history in the form of His Son. He provided ways for man to overcome his failures. You can find Jesus and redemption in the stories as well as the system of sacrifice that was set up.

Noah: Genesis 6-8

One of the greatest stories of redemption in the Old Testament is the story of Noah. God warned of a coming judgment. This was going to be a world-wide punishment. Those who would repent of their sins and believe in the warnings of Noah were welcome to board the ark before the flood waters began to fall. After 120 years of preaching the only people who stepped onto the ark were Noah and his family. Though there was room for many more people in the ark, only eight were saved.

Redemption was offered to all who were willing to repent and believe. However, few accepted the offer.

Abraham: Genesis 22

God asked Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. Throughout the whole process of going to the mountain to sacrifice, Isaac was obedient and Abraham was hopeful. Abraham fully expected to sacrifice his child on the altar, but he was also confident in the fact that God could raise his child from the dead.

What Abraham did not expect was that God had a completely different plan in mind. Moments before Abraham thrust the knife into his child, God provided a sacrificial ram to take the place of Isaac. God redeemed Isaac with this ram. It is an example of how that God redeems us with the sacrifice of His Son.

Passover lamb

Ruth: Ruth 1-4

The book of Ruth teaches many lessons. But the overall story is one of redemption.

A Hebrew family moved to a foreign land. Ruth married into this family; but, tragically, all the men died. Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, move back to the land of Israel. Ruth then became the foreigner in a strange land.

In an effort to provide for her mother-in-law, Ruth went to gather grain in the fields. She met the wealthy land owner where she had been working. This man, Boaz, happened to be a near kinsman to Naomi. But, there was another family member who was an even closer relative.

As a close relative, the second man had the responsibility to care for Naomi and Ruth. He even possessed the right to marry the beautiful young lady. But he neither wanted the responsibility nor the right. Boaz approached the closer kinsman with the willingness to assume the responsibility for the family and the right to marry Ruth. The man accepted and Ruth joined Boaz in marriage.

The Bible calls Boaz the kinsman redeemer. He bought the responsibility to care for the ladies and the right to marry Ruth. Even as a foreigner, this redemption into the family of Israel put Ruth into the lineage of King David and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We celebrate together the hopefulness of those in the Old Testament who longed to see the salvation of the Lord.

3. Jesus the Servant: Responsible for the future of man

It was shortly after His resurrection that Jesus encountered two men walking on a road. He began listening to their conversation and they were talking about the sadness of His crucifixion. Luke says that Jesus entered the conversation this way:

⁵ Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. ²⁶ Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering His glory?" ²⁷ Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.
Luke 24:25-27 NLT

I know this may not be a feel good message that touches the outer edges of our emotions but I wonder if down deep in your heart the message of our salvation as told by prophets and prophesies can stir something in you.

What might Jesus have said to them as they walked along?

The Paschal lamb (Exodus 12.); the scapegoat (Leviticus 16:1-34); the brazen serpent (Numbers 21:9); the greater Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15); the star and scepter (Numbers 24:17); the smitten rock (Numbers 20:11; 1 Corinthians 10:4), etc.; Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14); "Unto us a Child is born," etc. (Isaiah 9:6, 7); the good Shepherd (Isaiah 40:10, 11); the meek Sufferer

(Isaiah 50:6); he who bore our grief (Isaiah 53:4, 5); the Branch (Jeremiah 23:5; Jeremiah 33:14, 15); the Heir of David (Ezekiel 34:23); the Ruler from Bethlehem (Micah 5:2); the Branch (Zechariah 6:12); the lowly King (Zechariah 9:9); the pierced Victim (Zechariah 12:10); the smitten Shepherd (Zechariah 13:7); the messenger of the covenant (Malachi 3:1); the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2); and no doubt many other passages.

The prophecies run through the Old Testament like a cord of hope all looking for a Messiah that would come to save the people from their sins.

In the New Testament after Jesus birth there were some significant words to some spoken:

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him²⁶ and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah.²⁷ That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required,²⁸ Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations and He is the glory of your people Israel!" Luke 2:25-32 NLT

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. ³⁷ Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. ³⁸ She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem. Luke 2:36-38 NLT

The lame walked, the blind saw, the deaf heard and the mute spoke. The disciples were changed from the inside out. The world was turned upside down by an unassuming Messiah who came as a servant but with the power of His Heavenly Father.

It is this same Jesus who stands daily waiting for men and women just like you to respond and accept this redemption that He brought to this earth.

Hymn writers throughout the ages can't write enough about it.

O for a Thousand Tongues

He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood availed for me.

There is a fountain. . .

The dying thief rejoiced to see that fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.
Washed all my sins away, washed all my sins away;
And there have I, though vile as he, washed all my sins away.

There was a pastor from a small rural congregation who visited an old farmer from time to time in an attempt to share the gospel with him. Each time the farmer would tell the pastor, "I believe in God. It is impossible not to when you look around at the beauty of this earth and the way in which life is created. It's just Jesus I don't understand. Why would a perfect and all powerful God have to come down as a man, and then die, just to make things right." The pastor was never able to come up with an answer that the pastor found satisfactory.

Then one night, as the farmer was sitting in his living room, he heard a thump on his window. He went to see what it was and outside he saw a group of birds floundering in the snow. They were trying to get into the warmth but they couldn't figure out how, and so they were dying in the snow. So the farmer went outside and opened his barn doors, and turned on the lights, and tried to herd the birds into the warmth of the barn, because he realized it was their only hope for salvation. But the more he tried to direct them the more they scattered. At that point the farmer thought, if only I could become one of them then I could lead them into the warmth. At that moment, he had an epiphany, and he fell to his knees and accepted Christ as his savior.

What about you? Do you believe that Jesus Christ came to take away the sin of the world? Do you believe He came to take away your sin? If so how can you not serve Him with your whole heart? Don't you think it's about time for you to let Him change your life?

Let's worship Him today. Maybe you have never accepted Christ as your Savior or maybe you've drifted away. He loves you today beyond what you can imagine.