



Christ Our Sacrifice!

by Mark Brunner

### *The Freedom That Enslaves!* (Galatians 5:1-15)

Many years ago I witnessed a game of give and take that has stayed with me. My daughter Hannah kept her pet rats in a cage in the hallway going to our kitchen. When I shuffled into the kitchen around 4:30 each morning there they were, clinging to their cage bars hoping that, perhaps, I might shove a carrot or, even better, a piece of dog food through the bars. Mixing up my morning omelet, I carved up some celery and carrots, apportioning a small ration for each clinging beggar. (Unless you have an understanding of rat dynamics, you probably won't appreciate the balance of the tale. You see, where two rats are gathered, one is usually the Alpha rat and the other not. In other words, one is the dominant rat.) As I opened the cage to give the more passive little fella his carrot I no sooner had released the chunk than the Alpha male simply snatched it from its mouth. I tried again and witnessed the same act of theft again and again. Finally, not to be outwitted by a mere rodent, I decided to distract the Alpha male with a nice juicy carrot top. He took it greedily and then just dropped it as quickly as he had grabbed it. I swear he was anticipating my next move. You guessed it! The moment I returned to his passive mate he went right back to thieving. Needless to say, the liberties he took with my generosity led me to ignore their squeaks in the future. In the end his liberty to take had resulted in slavery to his want.

How similar is the relationship we often have with each other let alone our relationship with our Heavenly Father. We want the liberty to get many things without the willingness to acknowledge the sacrifice of the one doing the giving.

Here's a story: An impetuous kite was forever questioning its master's refusal to allow it to fly still higher and farther. There was always the tugging at the end of the rope, the anchor that held it high but not as high as it wanted to go. Each time they flew together, the kite would soar heavenward and then, snap; it was held in place just beyond where it longed to go. Then one day it happened. The string broke just as the kite was reaching its usual height. Wavering for a moment, it began to plummet out of control down, down, down to the ground. Finally it struck a high wire and became impaled, fluttering helplessly at the mercy of the wind. It's eagerness to be free resulted in its own slavery.

As we were once slaves to sin, we are now set free through the sacrifice of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Yet, if we abuse that freedom, disregard the sacrifice or take advantage of it, we are walking perilously close to spiritual famine and, perhaps, everlasting separation from the source for that freedom. The sacrifice of our Savior for us must never be taken for granted for it is only in our obedience to it are we truly free to enjoy the freedom of the sacrifice.

*"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)*

## *It's Easier That Way!* (Hebrews 9:23-28)

Recently I watched a man trying to unload a box from the back of his truck. It was just the right size; the size that you can wrap your arms around easily. It was a box that was just, meant to be carried by one person. I was stopped at a traffic light as I watched the man easily begin to slide the package out across the tailgate and into his waiting grip. Then, just as he was about to raise the box out of the bed, the man's son, appeared from the other side of the truck. He rushed to his father's side motioning that he would give him a hand. The man hesitated and then released a spare corner to his son's grip. As I pulled away I watched them grapple with the package; walking as if tied together at the

ankles. I looked up one last time into the rear view mirror in time to see the pair tumble onto the grass as the young man had tripped over something on the sidewalk. What should have been an easy carry had become a comedy; a clearcut case of help that hurt.

Judging which burdens we should carry and which carried by others, especially Christ, isn't always that easy.

Author Bruce Larson writes: "For many years I worked in New York City and counseled at my office any number of people who were wrestling with yes-or-no decisions. Often I would suggest they walk with me from my office down to the RCA Building. In the entrance is a gigantic statue of Atlas, holding the world on his shoulders. There he is, the most powerfully built man in the world, and he can barely stand up under the burden. 'Now that's one way to live,' I would point out, 'trying to carry the world on your shoulders. But now come across the street.' On the other side of the street is Saint Patrick's Cathedral, and there behind the high altar is a little shrine of the boy Jesus, and with no effort he is holding the world in one hand. My point was illustrated graphically. We have a choice. We can carry the world on our shoulders, or we can say, 'I give up, Lord; here's my life. I give you my world, the whole world.'" (Bruce Larson, Semoncentra.com)

Perhaps one of the most foolish decisions we can make in this life is to calculate that we can carry loads that were truly, never meant to be carried. When it comes to the sacrifice that Jesus made to carry the burden of our sin, God designed that package to be carried by one man and only one man. His name is Jesus Christ. There is but one way to carry this package; it must be securely tucked into Christ's bosom or it's not to be carried at all. Fact of the matter is, if you are trying to carry any part of the sin burden, don't bother. That package wasn't meant for your hands. You can only end up tripping and losing it altogether. Let go of the burden and don't worry. This is one sacrifice that was custom designed for Jesus and He was gladly willing to bear it all the way to the cross.

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## *His Flesh For Ours!* (Psalm 22:1-8)

What is the true nature of sacrifice? Is it giving your all even when you have no more to give? Or, is it more than that? I remember reading as a boy a story about a small troop of Swiss soldiers centuries ago protecting a narrow mountain pass. Outnumbered ten to one, they fought valiantly. As the enemy advanced through the pass, when all hope seemed lost, their leader dropped his sword, stretched his arms and walked bravely toward the enemy. Dozens of spears pierced him as he fell dead before his men. Yet, because of his sacrifice, a breach had been created in the enemy wall and the small band of survivors rushed through it and thoroughly routed the enemy. More than just an act of bravery, this act of sacrifice was calculated to cause a victory. Personal loss was assured, while hope was given room to advance. I guess if I had to give a definition of sacrifice that would be it.

Here's a thought from author Glenna Filbert: "My mother and I were sitting on the porch one warm day. My dad had fought in the Civil War and several months earlier we had gotten word that he had been killed in battle. But that day, we saw someone coming down the road in front of our small house. My mother said, 'Oh, there's a man coming down the road.' A moment later she said to me, 'Sweetheart, I declare that man kind of favors your father.' After another moment, she said, 'Darling, I do think that's your Father.' At that she burst from the porch and down the road toward the open arms of my father. I was right behind my mother and jumped for his arm. However, all I found was an empty coat sleeve. I saw the scars of battle on my Daddy's face and I saw that his body was bruised from the war. I knew that he was missing an arm because of the warfare. But it didn't matter. As my mother said, 'Little girl this is the greatest day of my life.'" (James O. Davis, Co-Founder/President Global Pastors Network)

The greatest day of our lives will be when our Commander in Chief, the Lord Jesus, comes back for us. We'll look into His face and see the scars of the battle He fought to save us from our sins when, with His arms outstretched, He faced the enemy and Satan in his wrath crashed spear after spear of temptation and doubt into His body. As He hung upon that cross, Satan assaulted Him without

mercy. He threw everything at Him until His body wrenched with the piercing pain of hell. He was unarmed, a willing target. He did this with a purpose for it was His plan to create a breach in Satan's lines that would forever seal the enemy's fate. There was no doubt now; picking up our swords we can now step through the breach and route the enemy. Jesus was crushed that we might have the victory! This will be our greatest day!

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## *The Only Sinner On Earth!* (Romans 5:1-11)

Have you ever felt that you were the only one left; the only one who knew, who felt, who understood? Most of us have probably felt that way at one time or another especially when we find ourselves in situations that require great sacrifice. If you lose a job and don't know where the next one can be found, you are likely to feel very alone, isolated in your "unique" suffering. When things go bad we seem more drawn to ourselves than we do to others.

But, what about our faith; are we ever singular in the eyes of our God as we struggle to conform to the image of His Son? Is our particular faith walk unique in any way? Was the sacrifice that our Savior made done personally for us?

In Mel Gibson's Movie, "The Passion of Christ" there is an obscure detail in the crucifixion scene that probably goes unnoticed by most people, but it is a detail that says so much. When Jesus is being placed on the cross, the camera comes close to watch as a large spike is positioned in the middle of Jesus' hand. Then, a mallet comes into focus, and a rugged hand swings it to drive the spike. You never see the face of the one who drives that nail. You never get a glimpse into the eyes, or heart of the one who pounds away until the spike had passed through Jesus' flesh. You might be interested to know that the person who plays that role in the movie is the director himself, Mel Gibson. But why does he never show the face of the one who put Jesus on the cross? He didn't show us that face because that face was his. It was ours. We are the ones who put Jesus

to death. It wasn't the Romans or the Jews. It was our sin that nailed Jesus to the cross. (Mel Gibson at Saddleback Community Church, January 2003.)

What Mel Gibson was demonstrating by using his own hand to position that nail was very significant. When it comes to the sacrifice for our sins, it was our sins personally that put Jesus on the cross. Our dirty lives and disgusting behavior drove those nails into his hands. Sure, it was a group effort. But, our hand held that hammer. But, there is something else that must be noted here. As personally responsible we are for that sacrifice, there was really only one that was truly singular in the outcome. We brought our unique sins to the cross; He alone became the bearer. Christ became the only sinner on earth for six hours on Calvary. He and He alone truly knew what it means to feel unique, singular, and totally alone. For only Christ ever suffered alone. As often as we feel alone in our suffering, alone in our cause, we can never know what it really feels like to be the only one. That distinction was saved for Christ. The sacrifice, ordained from eternity, could be done no other way.

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## *Shivers and Shakes!* (Hebrews 5:1-9)

Skepticism: where are forefathers were content to dwell in trust and faith most people today prefer skepticism. In a sense, skepticism has become a sort of national religion. I read recently in a poll that less than 23% of all Americans trust those in authority over them whether that be their supervisors, church leaders, or public leaders. We have become a nation of cynics, content to scold those in authority over us about their lack of trustworthiness without the least inclination on our part to correct it. In some odd way, we almost revel in each new detail that cements our opinion of distrust. "See there! What did I tell you. He isn't telling the truth!" Unfortunately, we are quick to discover the lie and very slow to cover it with what we know to be the truth; which leads one to wonder what is the more dubious fault—telling the lie or avoiding the truth? Staring truth squarely in the face is sometimes not enough to know who or what it really is.

Here's a thought from James Russell Lowell: "It's no wonder that so many pursue the lie but retreat from the truth. It was Pontius Pilate's bent. He vigorously interrogated both the Jews and Jesus. Then, when he was convinced that former was bearing a lie and the latter the truth, he gave up and walked the other way. What is truth? He cynically responded to Jesus' statement of who He was and what He was about. Truth wore a different face to Pontius Pilate. It often wears a different face to most men, and it would be too difficult to wait till all the world were agreed on it. Truth is said to lie at the bottom of a well, for the very reason, perhaps, that whoever looks down in search of her sees himself at the bottom, and is persuaded not only that he has seen the truth but that the truth is relative to the moment. (The Complete Speakers Sourcebook)

When it comes to our salvation, how can we really trust that God placed our sins squarely on Jesus' shoulders? Where is the evidence that this was so? Perhaps the truth is as elusive as Pilate wished it to be. How can we be sure that Christ really bore the burden as the Bible tells us? Being the skeptics that we are, a little evidence that we could actually see with our own eyes would be very helpful. Look no further than the suffering Savior in the garden. Here comfort awaits anyone who believes in the truth of the Promise and the truth wears the face of a man who prays so fervently that his very sweat has become bloody. This picture leaves no room for skepticism or speculation. It is so compelling that His shivers and shakes cause us to not only know that He is suffering beyond that which no man has ever suffered, but that this evident suffering can only be caused by a burden only the Son of God could bear. Make no mistake, only my sin and your sin could provoke such a picture. The evidence is compelling. We are staring truth squarely in the face.

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