

The Sacrificial Harley

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Have you ever wondered why Jesus lived thirty years on Earth before He was crucified? He could have descended from the sky on Thursday, been captured and put to death on Friday, and resurrected and taken to Heaven on Sunday, but the Father had a much bigger plan!

He willed that Jesus should come to Earth as a baby and live among human beings as one of us so that we might study His life and examine how God would live if He had to walk in our shoes. The Father also predetermined that Jesus should be His servant. The Father Himself would speak to mankind through the lips of Jesus (John 14:10,24) so we could learn about God and His ways.

To some people, the following concept will seem strange at first. When Jesus was born, He was like any other baby. He did not know anything. He had to be fed, bathed, and diapered. I am sure His mental, physical, and spiritual development was quite ordinary at first.

The Bible says that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. (Luke 2:52) This means that Jesus developed as children do. I am sure that Mary told Jesus about His miraculous birth. I am also sure she told Jesus about the promised Messiah, and by age twelve (Luke 2:42-50), Jesus was well on His way to figuring out who He was. This discovery must have been bittersweet. By faith, Jesus concluded that He was Son of God and by faith, He also concluded that He was the Lamb of God. He could not be one without being the other.

Jesus was the Son of God *by faith* for most of His life. Until Jesus was transfigured on the mountain (Matthew 17:1-9), Jesus had no proof that He was, in fact, the Son of God. Prior to coming to Earth, Jesus put aside every divine prerogative. He came to Earth as a subject of the Father, to do His will. (John 6:38) This is why Jesus is called the Son (the subject) of God. The Hebrew word for son is *ben* and it means subject or subjected. While Jesus heard the Father's voice at His baptism and He saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Him in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:16,17), the two signs were *affirmations* of His identity, but they were not proof.

After Jesus was baptized, the Holy Spirit led Him into the desert. (Matthew 4:1) After forty days of fasting, the devil pounced on Jesus because He was weak and vulnerable. (The devil always preys on us when we are at our weakest or lowest point.) The devil's first temptation was carefully designed and highly focused. Lucifer wanted to dupe Jesus with a nagging question. The devil gently questioned the identity of Jesus! Notice the devil's carefully chosen words: **"After fasting forty days and forty nights, he [Jesus] was hungry.**

The tempter came to him and said, 'If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.' " (Matthew 4:2,3, insertion and italics mine) The devil had been closely watching and studying Jesus for thirty years before this temptation occurred. The devil understood that up to that point, Jesus understood that He was the Son of God *by faith alone*.

The devil knew that Jesus had zero proof that He was the Son of God. The devil reasoned that if he could get Jesus to presume that He was the Son of God by producing a miracle, Jesus would violate the Father's will and the Father's efforts to redeem mankind would have to end right there. If Jesus sinned, He could not be the flawless lamb required for the atonement of mankind.

Jesus answered the devil with words that many people do not appreciate. **"Jesus answered, 'It is written: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." ' "** (Matthew 4:4) Jesus understood that the devil's temptation was not about food.

The devil preyed on Jesus' hunger so that the sin of presumption could be hidden from sight. (Presumption occurs when a person justifies wrong doing.) If Jesus had presumed to perform the miracle to prove His identity, the devil would have succeeded and the redemption of mankind would have ended.

For most of us, the sin of presumption is tiny and common. In fact, it is largely ignored. Jesus saw through the devil's sophistry and He replied (I'm paraphrasing), "The Scriptures say in Deuteronomy 8:3 that God allowed Israel to go hungry in the desert before giving them manna so that He could teach them that faith in God is of greater value than food.

God can speak and food will fall from the sky. He can speak and stones can become bread. I have been fasting in the desert because this is the Father's will for me. His Spirit led me into this deserted place. I must remain here without food until the Father directs otherwise. It would be a sin for me to violate the will of my Father." What faith. Such was Jesus' faith!

During His final days on Earth, Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane one evening. For eighteen years, Jesus had anticipated His death and knowing that the time had arrived, He went into the garden to receive strength from the Father for the ordeal that lay before Him. Jesus did not want to die on the cross, but He was willing to submit to the Father's higher will.

We should never forget His words, ". . . **My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.**" (Matthew 26:39) Again, what faith! Living by faith is the most difficult thing a person can do, whereas living in presumption is easy. The difference between living by faith and living in presumption is easy to define, but difficult to admit. Faith yields obedience, presumption excuses transgression.

The biblical definition of faith is embarrassingly simple, but it is a killer. Faith means "Go-Be-Do." When we become willing to go wherever God directs, to become all that God asks, and to do all that God requires, faith in God mirrors the faith of Jesus. Otherwise, we deceive ourselves.

Living in presumption is easy when faith is dead. Consider these words: **"During the days of Jesus' life on Earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of *his reverent submission*. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and,**

once made perfect [e.g., He was faith-full to the end of His life], **he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.**" (Hebrews 5:7-9, italics and insertion mine)

Clearest in the Desert

Communion with God is clearest in the desert and that's why the Holy Spirit took Jesus there at the beginning of His ministry. The desert is a scary, harsh, and unforgiving place. A person cannot survive there for very long. No one wants to be trapped in a desert that is hot by day, cold by night, isolated from friends and family, and full of cactus spines, rattlesnakes, and scorpions. Without shade, food, or water, the desert is a deadly place.

Metaphorically, there are many routes into the deserts of life. Sometimes we can make foolish decisions (like drinking and driving) and end up in a self-inflicted desert that takes f-o-r-e-v-e-r to exit. Sometimes, we can end up in a financial desert (through unemployment) even though we thought we were doing well when everything fell apart.

Sometimes, a whole nation can find itself in a desert experience through war, economic mismanagement, famines, etc. I mention these things because a growing number of people are finding themselves in some kind of a desert, and the rest of mankind is fearful they will end up in similar circumstances. But, the good news is that God is in every desert!

The Sacrificial Harley

". . . Without faith, it is impossible to please God." (Hebrews 11:6) A few years ago, Bill and Sue (names have been changed to protect the identity of the faithful) found themselves in a deep financial desert. Bill is self-employed and his data acquisition business tanked when the financial crisis occurred in 2007.

Sue's income could not meet their monthly obligations and they soon found themselves facing many financial problems, including foreclosure. The one bright spot on the horizon was that Bill had obtained a small contract with a large corporation and he desperately hoped that the small contract would mature into a much larger contract.

One night, some batteries used in Bill's equipment caught fire. The fire not only destroyed Bill's equipment, but it also destroyed a lot of equipment that belonged to the corporation. For three months, Bill and Sue lived on pins and needles. Bill lost a great deal of equipment in the fire that he could not afford to replace, and due to the fire and the lost business, they faced foreclosure on their home. To top it off, Bill's client threatened to sue him for hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.

Bill and Sue owned one toy. It was a Harley Davidson motorcycle. Because their financial situation was dismal, Bill felt the Lord impressing him to sell their Harley Davidson motorcycle, but Sue resisted. Sue did not want to let the Harley go. In her heart, she knew Bill was right, but she resisted the Spirit's prompting.

She argued that the proceeds from the sale would not stop the foreclosure or the pending lawsuit. Besides that, the motorcycle was the only thing they had for fun – it was their way of temporarily escaping some of the "desert heat." Most of all, Sue knew they could never replace the Harley if they sold it. The motorcycle had been with them for many years and to her, it was an important part of their life. She could not bring herself to let it go. A few weeks later, Bill and Sue were sitting in their usual place at church.

The pastor presented plans to expand the church and he asked for a financial commitment from each family in the church to help with church expansion. Bill and Sue sat there, feeling uncomfortable. They wanted to help, but they had nothing to give. During the church service, they avoided eye contact – their desert experience was too painful.

During the service, Sue sensed the Holy Spirit moving within her heart. She was convicted that she should step out in faith and give the Harley to the Lord. After the service was over, while walking toward "the Harley," (they had ridden it to church) she blurted out to Bill, "Let's sell the Harley and give the proceeds to the building program!"

Bill looked at his wife and smiled. He had felt the same conviction during the service. "That's a great idea. Let's do it," he said. And with that, a sacrificial Harley roared to life and they rode home – happy as they could be that they could do something for the Lord. Bill and Sue did not give the Harley to the Lord in order to get something from the Lord. Their gift was a one-way street. It was their joy to make a sacrifice to the Lord and both had perfect peace about doing so!

Two days later, Bill received notice from his client's attorneys that the corporation was not suing them. Not only that, but the corporate executives had decided to pay for everything that had been destroyed and were anxious to purchase additional equipment from Bill as well. In the twinkling of an eye, Bill and Sue saw manna fall from Heaven. They were still in a financial desert, but they had hope.

I have shared their story of the sacrificial Harley because many people are hopeless and frustrated. When we are forced by circumstances to walk on, day after day, in the heat of the desert, the journey can appear endless. We can become very discouraged and fall into the temptation of becoming angry with God.

Of course, God sees our weeping and He understands our doubts and tantrums. *God does not forsake His children.* He wants to teach us the essence of faith because faith in God produces inner peace. It is hard to let go of our dreams, goals, and ambitions so that God's goals and purposes for our lives can be fulfilled. It can be very hard to see others exit their desert when you have to remain in yours. Therefore, keep your eyes on the Lord. His purpose for you and His goals for you are unique.

Allow Him to refine and purify your faith because ". . . **Man does not live on bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.**" When God sees that our faith has matured to the level that He wants, when He sees that we thirst for the peace and joy that He offers, He will speak on our behalf. He may send grace (strength to endure) or manna from

Heaven, or if necessary, He will change stones to bread!

This is my last newsletter for 2010 and I wanted to end this year by saying that the eyes of the Lord range throughout Earth. He sees each person, both those who are in a desert and those who need a desert experience. He knows the desert is not a comfortable place to live, but from His point of view, the desert can be a place where faith is born and divine peace nurtured.

Before the Father performed a single miracle through Jesus, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the desert to have His faith tested. By faith, Jesus overcame the devil's temptations and look how the Father was able to use Jesus! There is no need to be afraid of a desert experience. Instead of fearing whatever the outcome may be, surrender the outcome to God's higher will and you will receive peace. (John 14:27) Jesus said, " . . . **And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.**" (Matthew 28:20)

Larry Wilson