

# *Jesus Is Our Only King*

IT WAS A WARM OCTOBER AFTERNOON in Hong Kong. I sat with 11 other men around a table. All of us were wiping tears from our eyes. Some of us had our heads buried in our hands and were sobbing. The reason for our tears was because of a song being sung to us by a Chinese Christian named George Chen. Friends from The Bible League<sup>1</sup> had encouraged this stopover on the way to Beijing so that we could meet with George and hear his story.

George began to preach immediately when he became a Christian. Over the next few years, he was arrested numerous times for preaching. As the Cultural Revolution in China intensified, houses were searched and Bibles were seized and burned. Many pastors died and the lives of the rest were in constant jeopardy. However, this didn't stop George from proclaiming the gospel.

He continued to preach until the day came when he was arrested and put into prison. After the iron gate slammed shut behind him, 18 years would pass before he would know freedom again. His notoriety as a pastor didn't serve George well in prison. To make Pastor Chen an example, the communist guards assigned him to work in the prison sewer. Pots filled with human waste from all the prison barracks were emptied into this giant cesspool.

George's job was to spend every day in the cesspool, shoveling the human waste onto wagons, on which it was taken to fields and used as fertilizer. Yet by the divine enablement of the life of Jesus Christ within George, he didn't mind. In fact, he came to enjoy his time in the cesspool. George explained to us:

In prison, you're never alone. You work beside other prisoners all day, sleep close to them at night and the guards are always watching. This is why I came to enjoy my assignment in the prison cesspool. There I could be alone. The stench of the filth on my clothing and body kept everyone away from me. Nobody wanted to come near me. Not the prisoners, not the guards. Nobody! They all kept their distance.

George continued:

Since working in the cesspool allowed me to be alone, I was able to pray, lifting up my voice loudly to the Lord. I was able to recite the Scripture verses I had memorized before they took away my Bible. Oh, I would sing! I would sing boldly to the Lord. God's grace sustained me. The living presence and power of the Holy Spirit encouraged and blessed me.

As we sat listening to George's story, one of the men seated at the table asked, "George, what did you sing?"

He answered, "I'll sing it for you now." He closed his eyes, tilted his head toward heaven, opened his hands with palms facing upward, and with a smile on his face, began to sing in Chinese a hymn we all recognized by the melody:

I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses. And He walks with me, and He talks with

me, and He tells me I am His own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.<sup>2</sup>

As George sang, God's presence in the room became evident and grown men began to weep. It wasn't difficult to imagine George in that cesspool, singing praises to God as he shoveled human excrement. The presence of the indwelling Christ had turned a cesspool into a garden. George had come to know that when one has Jesus Christ, he has *everything* he needs.<sup>3</sup>

### Christ Is Our Inheritance

After Israel took possession of Canaan, it was time to divide the property among the people. One by one the tribes of Israel received the acreage they would have for their new home. Joshua notified each one about which parcel would be theirs, just as they had been told by Moses years earlier. "But to the tribe of Levi, Moses did not give an inheritance; the LORD, the God of Israel, is their inheritance, as He had promised to them" (Joshua 13:33).

Unlike the other tribes, the Levites were to experience God as their only inheritance. God had announced His specific purpose for the tribe of Levi while they were in the wilderness:

*At that time the LORD set apart the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of the covenant of the LORD, to stand before the LORD to serve Him and to bless in His name until this day. Therefore, Levi does not have a portion or inheritance with his brothers; the LORD is his inheritance, just as the LORD your God spoke to him (Deuteronomy 10:8-9).*

The Levites were given *God* as their inheritance. They were to spend their days ministering in the temple in the very presence of God, then leave there and go back to their homes in 48 different cities where they had been instructed to live (see Numbers 35:2-3).

In those cities, the resplendent glory of God would be seen resting upon them as a result of having served continually in His presence. Their lives would be a testament of His goodness and love.

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All through this book, we have followed the journey of Israel from the time they crossed the Jordan River until they settled in the land of Canaan. This land of grace is a picture of the inheritance every Christian has in Jesus Christ. What the land was to Israel, Jesus is to the believer. After Israel defeated her enemies, the land of Canaan rested from war. Jesus has sat down at the right hand of God because the final victory has been won. He has taken the whole territory, and there is nothing left in the dominion of hell that the cross hasn't overthrown.<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ is the King of all kings!

Contemporary residents of God's grace-land are those who, by His grace and through faith, have come to know Jesus Christ and who are living out of their identity in Him. We, too, have received *Him* as our inheritance. Paul wrote, "We have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:11-12). Like the Levites, our lives have been set apart to the praise of His glory. Our inheritance is Jesus Christ, and in Him we have everything we need.

Bible teacher Charles Trumbull wrote that he was once confronted with a rather uncomfortable question asked by a speaker at a convention he attended. The man asked, "Is your kind of Christianity worth sending to the non-Christian world?" He didn't ask, "Is Christianity worth sending?" There is no question about that. But what about *your* kind? Is *that* what the non-Christian world is waiting for, what is needed to revolutionize their lives?<sup>5</sup>

The entirety of authentic Christian living really can be distilled into two main elements. Until these characteristics mark our lives, we will never know the joy of living in grace-land. When these two *do* characterize our lives, we will experience the quality of life that Jesus came to give (see John 10:10).

### Experiencing His Life

Our inheritance as believers is Jesus Christ (see Ephesians 1:11,16,18; Colossians 1:12; 3:24). We have the thrilling privilege of resting in the union we have with Him. We are blessed with the opportunity to increasingly explore the depths of His love throughout eternity. Are you *reveling* in the love of Jesus Christ? That's what Christianity is all about—enjoying constant intimacy with Him. Religion shifts our focus off Jesus Christ and places it on ourselves and how well we are or aren't performing. However, that is all unnecessary for the believer.

The Gospel of grace is the end of *religion*, the final posting of the CLOSED sign on the sweatshop of the human race's perpetual struggle to think well of itself. For that, at bottom, is what religion is: the human species' well-meant but dimwitted attempt to gain approval of its unapprovable condition by doing odd jobs it thinks some important Something will thank it for....Religion,

therefore, is a loser, a strictly fallen activity. It has a failed past and a bankrupt future. There was no religion in Eden, and there won't be any in the New Jerusalem; and in the meantime, Jesus has died and risen to persuade us to knock it off right now. He has said that as far as God is concerned, we're all home free already, and there's not a single religious thing you or I have to do about it. We are, as I said a long while ago, simply invited to believe it, and to cry a little or giggle a lot (or vice versa) as seems appropriate.<sup>6</sup>

Christians don't have to worry about being religious. God has already made us righteous and we can't improve on that. Christianity is not a religion.

You won't learn anything positive about religion from Christianity; and if you look for Christianity in religion, you'll never find it. To be sure Christianity uses the *forms* of religion—and, to be dismally honest, too many of its adherents act as if it were a religion. But it isn't one, and that's that. The church is not in the religion business; it's in the Gospel-proclaiming business. And the Gospel is the Good News that all our fuss and feathers over our relationship with God are unnecessary because God, in the Mystery of the Word who is Jesus, has gone and fixed it up Himself.<sup>7</sup>

In no way is it my intent to cause you to think negatively about the church of Jesus Christ. However, I do hope you are shaken to your spiritual core to see the folly of the empty religious routine many Christians have settled for today. Knowing that they are now on their way to heaven, many have simply settled for dead religious activity from now until they get there. They are going to church every Sunday, giving their money, singing the

hymns, reading their Bibles, saying their prayers—doing all the “right” things, *yet they still have a gnawing sense that there must be more to Christianity than what they are experiencing.* They have lost the joy of their relationship to Christ and have settled in with religion for the duration. That is *not* the life that Jesus Christ died to give us!

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“It sounds like you are attacking the church with your barrage against religion,” Clarence said to me one day.

“No, I am *not* attacking the church. Why does it sound like that to you?” I asked him.

“Because the things you say sound like you are criticizing *my* church,” he answered.

“Clarence, I love the church,” I assured him. “I was a pastor in local churches for over 20 years. The majority of speaking opportunities I have now are in local churches. What I am attacking is the dead religion found in many local churches.”

As our conversation continued, I realized that the church Clarence attended stressed “religious responsibilities” so much more than their relationship to Jesus Christ that he no longer had the ability to know the difference between the two. For him, to do the right things is to be “a good Christian.” It saddened me to know that my friend was another casualty of religion. He seemed oblivious to the concept of intimacy with Christ.

"What you're teaching just sounds like mysticism to me," he said. I didn't know what else to say. If the belief that Christians are intended to *experience* personal intimacy with Christ seemed mystical to him, I knew I stood guilty.

### Expressing His Life

One by one they approached me, bowing their heads to be touched, to have me pray for them. One woman held out her young son to me, his head covered with oozing sores. I knew what she wanted. I reached out and laid my hand on the child's head and prayed for God to heal him.

It was the first time I had ever been in a leper colony. Tears filled my eyes as I preached to them in Rajasthan, India. "Do you know how *much* Jesus loves you?" I asked the crowd. Heads everywhere bobbed in typical Indian fashion, indicating an affirmative response to my question. As I shared with them that God loves them so much that He left heaven so that they could know Him personally, tears filled the eyes of many. When the service ended I hugged them one at a time, while my wife, Melanie, sat in a chair singing "Jesus Loves Me" to a dozen children in the colony who were crawling all over her.

As we left the tent where we had met, the crowd of lepers there pushed in around us, still wanting to be touched, to be hugged, to receive prayer. For the first time in my life I understood what it must have been like for Jesus to be thronged by the multitudes. Melanie and I walked in silence, pondering what we had just seen. Finally I spoke: "If what we just experienced there isn't the ministry of Jesus, I don't know what is."

Loving people. That's what it's all about for the Christian. Whether it's a leper colony in India or an affluent neighborhood in American suburbia, people want to know one thing—that



they are loved. Sadly, the modern church often flounders in sharing the love of God with those around us for one simple reason: We don't fully understand how much *we* are loved by Him. It is only when we understand that our lovableness isn't because of our performance but because of Christ in us that we will *feel* the love of God for us. God doesn't love you *in spite of* you. He loves you *because of Jesus* and what He has done *in* you by making you a new creation. You are no longer unlovable! Christians will never be able to effectively express God's love to others until we have embraced His love for us. We must see ourselves as citizens of His grace-land, and that we are dearly loved by Him.

John Eagen said,

*Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. God's love for you and his choice of you constitute your worth. Accept that, and let it become the most important thing in your life.... The basis of my personal worth is not my possessions, my talents, not esteem of others, reputation...not kudos of appreciation from parents and kids, not applause, and everyone telling you how important you are to the place.... I stand anchored now in God before whom I stand naked, this God who tells me, "You are my son, my beloved one."<sup>8</sup>*

You can't give away what you don't know you have. Do you know how much Jesus loves *you*? There is nothing a Christian can do to cause God to love him any more or any less than He does at this moment. Your behavior wasn't the catalyst for His love to start with, and has nothing to do with His love for you now. He loved you before you ever believed in Him. He loves you now. He will love you forever. *He loves you*. Rest in that fact and then determine to spend the rest of your life sharing that love with

others. Some of the most thrilling moments of your life will be those when Jesus is loving other people through you.

### The End of the Journey

Once the land of Canaan had been divided among the tribes of Israel, the people hadn't really finished their journey. They had only begun. The land was all theirs, but they would continue to move forward through the land, driving out the enemy. Faith would be necessary to continue reaping the benefits of this paradise that flowed with milk and honey.

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Living in the land of God's grace involves understanding who we are in Christ and learning to depend upon Him to be our constant Life-Source. However, that isn't the end of our journey, it's only the beginning. We will spend eternity exploring the depth of our riches in Christ. The things that have had preeminence in our lives in the wilderness of religion will fade to black in this new land. No longer are we ruled by ritualistic efforts to gain God's favor. Rather, Jesus is our only King.

Appropriate your identity in Christ every day, allowing Him to be *through* you who He already is *in* you—Life. With the ears of faith, hear Jesus Christ. Listen as your King speaks to you at this very moment: "I have delivered you from the bondage of your sins."

And I have delivered you from the wilderness of your religious struggles. You are in My kingdom now. Rest. Bask in My love and My life. From now on, I will assume complete responsibility for every detail of your existence. You have no more worries now because you have Me and I am all you will ever need. I love you. This is My land; welcome home."



*Dear Father,*

*Thank You! My heart is filled with gratitude as I realize how much You love me. By faith I appropriate my identity in Christ at this moment. No longer will I struggle in the wilderness. I accept Your invitation to live with You forever in Your grace-land. Continually teach me how to live in my new home. You are my King. I love You, Jesus. Amen.*

### G.R.A.C.E. Group Questions

1. George Chen sang "In the Garden" as the hymn that best reflected his personal testimony while in the Chinese prison camp. What hymn or chorus would you choose to represent your testimony as a Christian? Why?
2. Read John 10:10. Describe the meaning of the abundant life that Jesus Christ said He came to give us. What does this abundant life look like? List three reasons some Christians aren't experiencing the abundant life.
3. Charles Trumbull was disturbed by the question, "Is your kind of Christianity worth sending to the non-Christian world?" Describe the kind of Christianity you were taught as you grew up. Describe the kind of Christianity emphasized in your church now. Describe *your* kind of Christianity.
4. Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Discuss verse five. Explain this statement: "Christianity uses the *forms* of religion, but it is not a religion."
5. Identify two ways that you regularly express the life of Jesus in your home, your work, and your church.