

**It's Personal: Our Savior – Our Story – Our Friends  
Our God Is Personal**

**Have you ever been criticized or disagreed with ... and it hurt your feelings? Maybe you took it personally. Or perhaps you made a comment to someone who then responded with anger and hurt feelings ... they took it personally.**

**I like the story of the arrogant lion who wanted to remind other animals how great he was. He went to the gazelle and roared, "Who is the king of the wild?" Trembling, the gazelle answered, "Why, you are, mighty lion." He went next to the giraffe and roared, "Who is the king of the wild?" Fearful, the giraffe answered, "Why, you are, mighty lion." Next, he went to the monkey and roared, "Who is the king of the wild?" Startled, the monkey answered, "Why, you are mighty lion." Finally, he went to the elephant and roared, "Who is the king of the wild?" The elephant reached out and grabbed the lion with his trunk, slammed the lion to the ground several times, and flung him at last into a large boulder. As the lion lay there he said to the elephant, "Just because you didn't know the answer, you didn't have to take it personally."**

**There are times when it is wise not to take some disagreements or criticisms personally. It's hard, but wise. Yet there are other things in this life that make all the difference in the world when we do take them personally: relationships for one. And relationship with God is number one. It must be personal since we are persons.**

**Whenever we say that a man or a woman is a person, we mean that he/she is more than a mere piece of matter, more than an element of nature, an atom, a blade of grass, a fly, or even an elephant for that matter. Humans are unlike any of the animals. Our existence is not merely physical, driven by instincts and survival. We are not just the result of chance or evolution. We were fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.**

**God Is Personal**

**God is personal in Himself: the Trinity teaches us that the three persons of God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) have eternally loved one another with a selfless love. God has always been relational, always loving. His mercy and justice are not contingent upon his creation, because they are the expression of his eternal love toward humans. That love was never contingent upon mankind's experience.<sup>i</sup>**

**Since humans are made in the image of God, love and personal relationship is woven into our very nature. The Trinity gives us the most consistent, most powerful basis for being self-sacrificial and altruistic.<sup>ii</sup> Qualities and values such**

**as love, justice, and mercy are always personal: given and received person to person, just as God gives to each of us personally.**

**It was out of this selfless love that God created humans. In other words we were made in the image of a selfless and loving God, so in our very nature we are designed to be selfless and loving. When we are selfish instead of selfless, we act against our God-designed nature.<sup>iii</sup>**

**The human tragedy is that long ago we chose to separate ourselves from God, preferring to act as gods rather than act in obedience to how God made us. This has led humanity into a morass of confused and wrong thinking, believing, and acting and led to the mess we see on the world stage. That mess begins in each human heart. The story of the Bible is one of God's cosmic quest to redeem us from our self-induced and self-deluded moral confusion and misguided identity, and restore us to a right relationship with Himself. He does this one person at a time, one transformed heart at a time.**

## **Redemption Is Personal**

**God so loved the world – meaning people, persons – that He did not send a committee, or a surrogate, a robot, or a 10-point plan to redeem humanity from the mess it has made of life and this world. Rather, He came in person. Jesus is that person; He is the human face of God.**

**Last week, Easter, I told you something that's still true this week. It is possible for us to get ourselves so dirty, to cover our lives with so much that's awful and repugnant that even our mother would turn her back on us. God says, if that ever happens, if you ever get to that place, know this: I won't run away, I won't forget you, I'm there for you.**

**Easter is not about religion. It's about a relationship - something personal; a relationship with the living God that leads to heart transformation. Easter is really an invitation, not to join a religion or a denomination, or a church. It's an invitation to join your life to the life of Jesus... I urge you to do so now ... it's a personal decision, for God gets that personal, reaching into the heart of each person who lets Him in. Join your life to One who truly rose from death... who will go to any length to win your heart... who will bring blessedness out of your brokenness... and who will overcome your death and give you eternal life.**

**The first disciples met the living God in Jesus and their heart-transformation propelled them out into their world with the life-giving and personal touch that God seeks to bring to us ... and through us.**

## **The Personal Touch**

**The Book of Acts tells the story of the early Christian community through the lives of Jesus' original apostles. His resurrection was astounding yet in retrospect made sense. His resurrection gave them a whole new outlook on life, on reality, while giving them hope and courage. In chapter 3 of Acts we read of**

**an event that deals with human healing on every level. Peter and John are going to the Temple for prayer and they meet a crippled man.**

**Interesting, it's Peter and John. Normally it was Peter and Andrew, James and John. That's how they are usually paired in the Gospels. Peter and John were such different persons ... yet Christ had brought them together, for a mission.**

**It says the man was lame from birth and he was carried daily (by family or friends we presume) to an opportune spot where he could beg for alms. He called to Peter and John.**

**Peter looked directly at him and commanded the crippled man, *"Look at us."* The man looked at them expecting to receive money. Then here's what Peter said, *"I have no silver and gold, but I give to you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."***

**We can only speculate about what this man's life was like, what effect his disability must have had on his heart. He could easily have been bitter. There had never been a day in his life when he had not been a burden to somebody. He couldn't walk or work. All he could do was beg and hope that people would have pity on him. In reality his poverty was not just his physical disability.**

**Most of us view poverty as a lack of material possessions: food, shelter, money. And the majority of anti-poverty programs seek to address that lack. Ironically, many of those in poverty define their condition with words like shame, inadequacy, fear, hopelessness, isolation, voice-less-ness. Spiritual poverty can be even more disabling than material poverty.**

**The fact is that everywhere we look there is human hurt, human suffering, and human tragedy. There are hundreds of thousands who are crippled spiritually. How many of our co-workers or friends or neighbors appear outwardly to be doing okay, yet inwardly they are struggling, in pain, or turmoil? People need a heavenly touch. What all people need is God's touch. But how was this poor, crippled beggar to get it? He was oblivious to the good news of Jesus Christ. He couldn't get to church, and I'm not sure he would have gone if he could. Why should he go? What was there for him?**

***"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you,"* Peter said. What the man wanted was money. But what he needed was healing. And so Peter told him they didn't have what he wanted but they had what he needed. He wanted to fill his cup, but God wanted to fill his heart. He wanted a handout, but he was about to receive a hand up.**

***"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk,"* said Peter who *"... taking him by the right hand, helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles were made strong."* He gave him a hand up and then the power of God came to heal. It says of the beggar, *"He jumped to his feet and began to walk."* Peter reached out to help this man get started on his own walk, then God's power became apparent. Peter didn't just share about Christ – he also encouraged this**

man to take a step of faith. Sometimes we have to do that to help others – hold their hand as they take the first step. We have to take action to encourage them to take a step toward Jesus. If we are going to touch people with God's presence, we must be there where they are, reaching out to them. When Peter did this, the man was healed and he realized that somebody cared, that God loved him, that he was a person of worth.

Powerfully transformed by Jesus, Peter and John wanted to share what they had experienced. This man was an opportunity to minister the touch of God. How many opportunities are there all around us? The down-and-out and the up-and-out have at least two things in common: They are both human and they both have deep needs. Inside every person living in poverty is someone needing hope, care, help, and direction. Inside every one of those nice houses sitting on their manicured lawns are people who hurt, who feel empty and alone, people who have unmet personal needs. They all have their own stories of human tragedy, which they could tell, and every one of them needs a touch from God. They all need Jesus. **Convoy of Hope** is a handout and a hand up – offering the personal touch of Christ who can transform lives. This coming Saturday many of us will join Christians in Bakersfield to be those hands to help people in need. I hope you'll join us.

You see the real message of Jesus' power to heal is that He can do it through us. As a crowd gathered round the once crippled man, who was clinging to Peter and John, Peter said to them, *"Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ... the faith which is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all."*

## **Not Religion, But Relationship**

Please notice that Peter and John could only give the man what they had. Peter could not give him silver and gold because he had none. He could only give what he had. And so it is with us. If we do not possess a living relationship with Jesus Christ, we will never be able to impart His heavenly touch to others. You can only impart what you have.

There is an oft-told story of Thomas Aquinas (medieval theologian, 1225 - 1274) when he visited Pope Innocent IV (1243-1254) and found him counting a large sum of money. "Ah, Thomas," said the Pope, "the church can no longer say, 'silver and gold have I none.'" "That is true, Your Holiness," said Aquinas, "but then, neither can it now say, 'Arise and walk.'"

The apostles didn't have silver and gold, but they had the power of God. Where is our power? Do you know the power of the Holy Spirit? Has the Spirit's filling given you a ministry? How has the power of God enabled you to reach out to others? How have the gifts of the Spirit enabled you to communicate the Gospel of Christ to human hearts?

**Easter is not about religion. It's about a relationship - something personal. Some religions diagnose the human problem as ignorance or disobedience and offer the remedy of rituals, regulations, and laws to follow. No so with Christianity. It diagnoses the human condition as brokenness and offers the remedy of God himself, a relationship with Him that leads to heart transformation. It's personal. It begins with you and me and is shared person to person.**

***"Praise the LORD, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name," Psalm 103:1.***

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<sup>i</sup>Nabeel Qureshi, *No God But One: Allah or Jesus?* Zondervan (Grand Rapids, MI, 2016), 66.

<sup>ii</sup>Ibid, 70.

<sup>iii</sup>Ibid, 71.