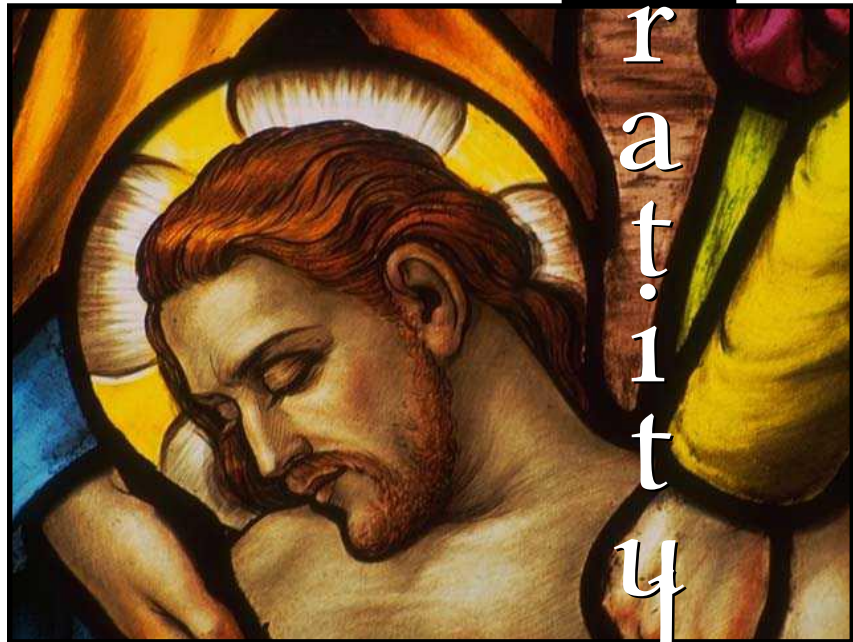


I CAN EXPRESS NO KINDER SIGN OF LOVE
THAN THIS KIND KISS. O LORD, THAT LENDS ME LIFE,
LEND ME A HEART REPLETE WITH THANKFULNESS!
FOR THOU HAST GIVEN ME IN THIS BEAUTEOUS FACE
A WORLD OF EARTHLY BLESSINGS TO MY SOUL,
IF SYMPATHY OF LOVE UNITE OUR THOUGHTS.

(WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE)

G r a t i t u d e



*Then shall my latest breath whisper Thy praise;
This be the parting cry my heart shall raise;
This still my prayer shall be:
More love, O Christ to Thee,
More love to Thee, more love to Thee!*
(Elizabeth P. Prentiss)



The Missing Element

RISKING A POTENTIAL STRIKE BY HEAVENLY LIGHTNING, this writer proposes that there is something missing from the Bible—specifically, from the narrative of Jesus’ final forty days on earth after the resurrection. What might that be?

Gratitude.

Put yourself in the sandals of Jesus. You have just suffered through the torment and humiliation of the cross and have finally died as a result. You have been wrapped up like a mummy and placed into a tomb where You have remained for two nights and a day. You have voluntarily put Yourself through this for no selfish reasons, but for the good of all people, so that they might have eternal life with God. You have sacrificed yourself unto death for others.

On the third day You show yourself alive, miraculously resurrected from the grave. You present yourself to those who had been mourning Your death, one after the other, singly and in groups. When some are told of Your resurrection they express disbelief, forgetting what You had told them just days earlier.

...and returned from the tomb and reported all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. Now they were Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James; also the other women with them were telling these things to the apostles. But these words appeared to them as nonsense, and they would not believe them. Luke 24:9-11

Some express joy at Your return, but others are still mystified and distrustful.

While they were telling these things, He Himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be to you.” But they were startled and frightened and thought that they were seeing a spirit. Luke 24:36-37

Later, the twelfth disciple is told of Your remarkable appearance, but gives voice to the doubt that percolates silently in the hearts of his brethren.

So the other disciples were saying to him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he said to them, “Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.” John 20:25

And even after they all believe that You are who You say, after they all understand that You are, truly, their risen Lord—after all of that, still no one says a simple “thank-you” for what You have done.

A survey of Scripture reveals quite a number of passages where gratitude or thanksgiving is offered to God. Very often, in the New Testament, this thanksgiving to God is offered because of or through Christ, but in only one instance is gratitude shown directly to Jesus for something He had done—and that for healing, not redemption.

As He entered a village, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him; and they raised their voices, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When He saw them, He said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they were going, they were cleansed. Now one of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan. Luke 17:12-16

In the narrative of Jesus’ last forty days with the people, after He had suffered the pain of the cross, I look in vain for someone—anyone—to come to Him and say, with grateful heart: “Thank you. Thank you for what you just did. Thank you for saving my life.” But nowhere do I find it. However, it is never too late. We still have the opportunity to thank Jesus for His sacrifice, for what He did so that we might live.

A Botched Job

IN JANUARY 1990, DURING THE DEMISE OF THE SOVIET UNION, the Communist Party relinquished its control over Yugoslavia. It was downhill from there.

By early in 1992 the country—whether by the name Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serb forces), Croatian Union of Herceg-Bosna (Croats), or Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnian Muslims)—was embroiled in a vicious civil war that even the most astute international diplomats found vexing.

Brutal, sadistic crimes were taking place and another beautiful country was being ripped apart by tribal and religious feuding. Human beings were treating each other as something *less* than human, and the rest of the world wrung its collective hands, and fretted over what to try next.

In May of 1992 the Serb forces began laying siege to the capital city, Sarajevo, which resulted in food and water shortages, winters without heat, and children learning to live without parents.

Still the international community was befuddled about how to respond to the carnage and inhumanity. So on May 30th the U.N., in all of its wisdom, imposed economic sanctions—which left the Bosnian Muslims with insufficient arms with which to defend themselves against the well-armed Bosnian Serbs. In July of the same year, the first U.N. “peace-keeping” troops entered Sarajevo to protect the people.

In essence the rest of the world said to the beleaguered Muslims, “We’re going to take away your guns now—but don’t worry: *we’ll* take care of you.”

Right.

A MAN HAD BEEN CONDEMNED IN A SPANISH COURT TO BE SHOT, BUT BECAUSE HE WAS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN AND ALSO OF ENGLISH BIRTH, THE CONSULS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES INTERPOSED, AND DECLARED THAT THE SPANISH AUTHORITIES HAD NO POWER TO PUT HIM TO DEATH. WHAT DID THEY DO TO SECURE HIS LIFE, WHEN THEIR PROTEST WAS INSUFFICIENT? THEY WRAPPED HIM UP IN THEIR FLAGS; THEY COVERED HIM WITH THE STARS AND STRIPES AND THE UNION JACK AND DEFIED THE EXECUTIONERS. ‘NOW FIRE A SHOT IF YOU DARE, FOR IF YOU DO, YOU DEFEY THE NATIONS REPRESENTED BY THOSE FLAGS, AND YOU WILL BRING THE POWERS OF THOSE TWO GREAT EMPIRES UPON YOU.’ THERE STOOD THE MAN, AND BEFORE HIM THE SOLDIERS, AND THOUGH A SINGLE SHOT MIGHT HAVE ENDED HIS LIFE, YET HE WAS AS INVULNERABLE AS THOUGH ENCASED IN TRIPLE STEEL.

EVEN SO JESUS CHRIST HAS TAKEN MY POOR GUILTY SOUL EVER SINCE I BELIEVED IN HIM AND HAS WRAPPED AROUND ME THE BLOOD-RED FLAG OF HIS ATONING SACRIFICE, AND BEFORE GOD CAN DESTROY ME OR ANY OTHER SOUL THAT IS WRAPPED IN THE ATONEMENT, HE MUST INSULT HIS SON AND DISHONOR THE SACRIFICE, AND THAT HE WILL NEVER DO, BLESSED BE HIS NAME.

(CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON)

WHAT JESUS DID HE DID PERFECTLY. God requires blood sacrifice, and though it may offend our modern sensibilities, God’s word is clear: where there is sin, there is no communion with God; without death there is no life.

So Jesus paid God’s price for us. He said, “The Father cannot have a relationship with sin. Your sin must be paid for with blood. So I will pay the price. I will die in your place, and give you a relationship with the Father.” (Matthew 26:28)

He died in our place. He wrapped us in His atoning blood, so that when the Father looks at us, instead of seeing our sin, He sees instead the righteousness of His Son.

Lord Jesus, thank You for dying in my place. Thank You for Your perfectly planned and executed mission of salvation that resulted in my eternal communion with God the Father. And thank You for doing everything in my life perfectly: for listening when I call; for never turning me away, but always being the perfect advocate on my behalf; for Your tenderness and compassion; and for loving me in spite of my unloveliness. Thank You, Jesus, for your perfect sacrifice.

“You Saved My Life”

ON THE SOUTHWESTERN HONSHU ISLAND OF JAPAN lies a city of more than one million people today. The city was founded in 1594 on six islands in the Ota River delta. It grew rapidly as a commercial city, and after 1868 it was developed as a military center. On August 6, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress named the *Enola Gay* flew over the city of almost 350,000 people and dropped the first atomic bomb.

In the resulting explosion and firestorm, approximately 130,000 people in Hiroshima were killed or injured and 177,000 were left homeless. 60% of the city was destroyed.

On a hot July afternoon in 1995, at an airfield just north of Des Moines, Iowa, three of the four surviving crewmen of the *Enola Gay* receive well-wishers and those requesting their autographs. Ted Van Kirk, the navigator, Tom Ferebee, the bombardier, and Paul Tibbets, the pilot, are comfortable with their place in history. Well aware of the controversy that surrounds their action fifty years ago, the three men are nevertheless confident that they did what was right, and what needed to be done at the time.

As the airmen receive visitors at their booth, a 68-year-old man nervously approaches Tibbets, 80, and asks if the pilot would pose for a picture.

“I’ve always wanted the opportunity to meet you and say thank you, sir,” Sam Parsons says. “You saved my life.”

The younger veteran goes on to explain to Tibbets that in 1945 he was a Navy man stationed on the island of Okinawa. If the bomb had not been dropped, he would have been part of the initial assault of the Allied invasion of Japan and, as he sees it, might well have been killed as a result.

There is no guesswork involved in what Jesus did for us. When He died for our salvation it was—and still is—a definite transaction. There was no maybe, no perhaps, no “might have been” involved. If Jesus had not died for our sins, we would have.

It’s true that the bombing mission of the *Enola Gay* saved thousands of Allied lives. And the pilot and flight crew certainly made a sacrifice for those lives by placing themselves in possible danger; no one really knew what would happen when the atomic bomb exploded—not President Truman, not even Robert Oppenheimer, who headed up the project that created it, and certainly not those riding in the delivery plane. In that sense, the airmen were like the Old Testament priests who offered a sacrifice at the altar for the people, yet who emerged from the holy of holies alive and well.

He shall also bring his guilt offering to the Lord for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin. Leviticus 5:6

Jesus, however, did not just *make* a sacrifice on our behalf; He *was* the sacrifice.

The next day [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29

Jesus did not place a lamb on the altar for our sins, He *was* the lamb on the altar. And there was never any question about the effectiveness of the sacrifice. If you believe that Jesus died for you, then He did. No question.



Lord Jesus, thank you for being the Lamb which God placed on the altar for our sins. Thank you for seeing it through to the end, for bearing the agony of separation from your Father and the weight of our collective sins. Thank you for willingly going to your death, and remaining there, until that bright and glorious Sunday morning when you arose in majesty and power. Thank you for doing it once, for all, for being the final sacrifice for our sins.

Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." Genesis 22:6-8a

Only a Fighting Chance

DENNIS KERNS, OF CLEARFIELD, IOWA, WAS INSTALLING a geothermal heating line at a construction site alongside Lake Panorama when the trench he was working in collapsed, burying him alive under twelve to eighteen inches of dirt.

At the nearby lake were four off-duty members of the Des Moines Water Emergency Team—medic John Leto and firefighters Ron Dycus, Chad Bruns and Rick Jacobsen—intending to enjoy their day off swimming and water skiing.

Noticing the commotion on shore, the four men and their companion, Scott Kurtz, rushed to the construction site to help. With no regard for their own safety in the still-dangerous, collapsed trench, they immediately began digging to free the buried man. After about ten minutes they had the unconscious Kerns' head uncovered, but because of the crushing weight of the soil on the rest of his body, could do nothing to help him breathe until his torso was free of the dirt.

Finally, after about thirty-five minutes of digging, Kerns was free and airlifted to a nearby hospital where he was listed in critical condition.

News accounts on television and in newspapers hailed the rescuers as heroes for saving the man's life. Tragically, while their bravery and quick action were rightfully lauded, the rescuers had only succeeded in buying the victim a little more time, for Dennis Kerns ultimately died in the hospital.

Christ is sufficient. We need add nothing to what He has already done on our behalf.

After Dennis Kerns had been removed from that premature grave by his "saviors" his salvation was still incomplete. The paramedics had to treat him, the pilot of the air ambulance had to get him to the hospital, the doctors and nurses had to go to work—even Dennis himself had to participate in struggling out of unconsciousness. And still, it wasn't enough.

But Christ's sacrifice was both sufficient and complete. He did it all. When Jesus saved your life, He did it completely, without anyone's help. Likewise, it is not necessary for you to do anything more to complete the transaction. It's done.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. Colossians 1:13-20

Lord Jesus, thank you for being complete. Thank you for completing my salvation in that one act of supreme sacrifice. My salvation is dependable because you are dependable and complete, and I thank you for that. Thank you for being sufficient, so that my eternity would not be dependent on anything I might be required to do—save believing in Your sufficiency—for if that were the case, I would most certainly be lost. Thank you, Jesus.



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