

His Wondrous Cross

The Story of Our Redemption

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Table of Contents

Foreword	4
Introduction	8
Chapter 1 The Bane and the Antidote.....	9
Chapter 2 Luminous Shadows of His Sacrifice.....	17
Chapter 3 Prophetic Profiles of Calvary.....	25
Chapter 4 Great Is the Mystery of Godliness.....	34
Chapter 5 Days of Ministry in the Shadow of Calvary.....	42
Chapter 6 The Crimson Trail.....	49
Chapter 7 Passage to Calvary	56
Chapter 8 O the Bleeding Lamb!.....	64
Chapter 9 He Is Risen!.....	72
Chapter 10 Paul, the Champion of Justification by Faith.....	81
Chapter 11 The Maligned Cross.....	89
Chapter 12 The Cross Triumphant.....	96
Chapter 13 The Light of the Lamb Forever	107

Foreword

Until I was twenty-three, Christ and Calvary meant nothing to me. Since childhood I had thought of Christianity as synonymous with fraud and deception. I felt arrogant pity for those who were naive enough to be Christians, people who clung to defunct creeds and gloomy symbols—especially the Cross. But my soul was acutely hungry for spiritual meaning.

In quest of truth, I explored all the major world religions—from animism to Zen—except for Christianity. Eventually I formed my own eclectic mélange of beliefs, tailored with precision to the warped contours of my ego. My religion was basically a hybrid of Hinduism, hallucinogens, jazz, Zen, and loosely strung social ideals that called for benevolence to people like me. In short, I was self-centered and confused.

But in the midst of these clouded views of life, I sensed a deep need for justification. Not justification in the biblical sense, but rather a perversion of it. For example, I justified my drinking and drugging on the grounds that doing so enabled me to play jazz and write poetry with more freedom. I justified my earthly sojourn by voluntarily picking up garbage on the roadside and taking it to the county dump. I was engaging in the age-old exercise of trying to establish my own righteousness by the performance of “meritorious” deeds, which in my case were of slender virtue at best. Peace eluded me, and so did purity of mind and nobility of conduct.

Yet in my own circuitous, shambling way I was seeking for truth that would bring me into harmony with the Over-Soul, as Emerson called it, the Creative Intelligence of the universe. Often disquieted by a sense of final accountability, I wondered what excuses I could offer for dissipating my energies in selfish, unproductive living. Who on earth was I benefiting by my existence? Yet, though I was afraid to go on, I was powerless to make a change.

By degrees I saw that drunkenness, sensuality, and detachment from society could hardly foster spiritual development. I read many books on mysticism, but they offered such a jumble of divergent possibilities that I began to feel like I was in the midst of a parching desert without chart or compass, surrounded with shimmering mirages and no oasis anywhere.

While vastly dissimilar in some respects, most of the false systems of religion held one proposition in common. They said that every

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

person is fundamentally divine; people need only find the spiritual discipline that enables them to discover and develop their godlike essence. This lie entertained me for several years. However, the longer I lived, the more confused and degenerate I became, buffeted by the erratic winds of passion, craving, and fear. Somehow the suggestion that my cohorts in debauchery and I were innately divine strained my credulity. In fact, we all seemed like fools—I especially, because I found no answers to my persistent questions.

Then, unexpectedly, I began meeting Christians. If I gave them a chance to testify of their beliefs, they all mentioned Jesus as the One who was crucified for their sins and who was now the Lord and Savior of their lives. This declaration of faith seemed to issue from a genuine experience that gave them great joy. I was both attracted and repelled by such testimonies. At times, under the compelling influence of these witnesses, I was almost persuaded to be a Christian. I knew that I needed spiritual renovation. And it was clear to me by now that no drug, no meditation technique, no deeds of valor or beneficence would provide that renovation because none of them could dispel my inner darkness and depravity, my coldness, my sour selfishness and incapacity to love freely.

However, the idea of becoming a Christian in order to be a new person was repugnant to my pride. I wanted to find something *I could do* to bring about the necessary changes in my life. Perhaps, I hoped, some philosophy sanitized of all superstition would put me on the pathway of upright living. Or maybe I needed to embrace some artistic discipline to put me in tune with cosmic reality.

Often I contemplated the matter of Jesus' promises and claims and uneasily discussed them with friends and acquaintances who had become Christian. I wondered how people could degrade themselves to worship a God who was tortured to death by some religious bigots who disagreed with His program. I thought God should be immune to that kind of treatment. And then, this idea of confessing oneself to be a helpless sinner in need of salvation—it was too humiliating. It exposed one to ridicule by the worldly wise and manipulation by religious parasites all too ready to hear confessions and take control of the conscience.

Objections to Christianity

As I resisted the conviction of my need for Jesus' salvation, objections to Christianity began to pile up mountainously high. But I

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

had no peace, and my spiritual life assumed increasingly chaotic overtones. Amid my angry darkness, the cross of Jesus was from time to time illuminated to my mind with a strangely beckoning light. But I writhed uncomfortably in the face of the vision. I didn't want to give up alcohol, jazz, and the liberty to do as I pleased—or rather, to do what the lusts of the flesh drove me to do. Yet the Christians I knew had peace, kindness, decency, compassion, and a freedom from fear that both puzzled and attracted me. Why couldn't I get what they had without having to lower myself to their beliefs? It was agony to live; it was still greater agony to contemplate death and the day of ultimate reckoning.

Then one day, after a night of shameless debauch with drunken strangers, I started out in the early morning hours to my hut in the woods. As I trudged homeward in the grey light of dawn and sensed the futility and declining value of my life, the words welled up in my heart, “God, I must have Your truth, even if it means becoming a Christian.”

At this point the Holy Spirit, knowing the peculiarities of my mind, began a rational dialogue with me. The thought came clearly to me, *If Christ is God, as Christians maintain He is, then He must have all knowledge and all power.* I could agree with this hypothesis, being convinced that God, being eternal and infinite, must by definition possess all power and all knowledge.

So, if Christ is God, He must have voluntarily committed Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of humanity, because He could not be robbed of His life unwillingly. This proposition also made sense.

And if Christ, though God, became a man to die voluntarily for your sins, doesn't it behoove you to become acquainted with such a merciful and loving God as this, and commit your life to His care and authority? I couldn't deny the logic of this position. And because the same Spirit convinced me that Christ is indeed God, I felt it would be inexcusable obstinacy to withhold myself from Him.

Not long afterward I became acquainted with Jesus' statement, “I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” This He said, signifying by what death He would die” (John 12:32, 33, NKJV). I also discovered the truth of the following statement:

The Spirit is constantly seeking to draw the attention of men to the great offering that was made on the cross of Calvary, to unfold

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

to the world the love of God, and to open to the convicted soul the precious things of the Scriptures.¹

The cross is no longer an object of loathing to me. It has become the tree of life to my soul, the instrument of my salvation, the mainstay of my comfort, the inspiration of my service, the bulwark of my values, the monitor of my conscience, the gateway of my liberty, and, as with the repentant thief, the trysting place of my hopes. Without the cross of Jesus, life on this earth would be devoid of meaning, destitute of hope. But with the Cross, the prospects of redemption, righteousness, and renewal are overflowingly abundant and available to all. I write this book as a former rebel against the government of God, now cheerfully reporting for duty and pledging allegiance to the conquering Hero of Calvary, who has conquered my heart by the solemn power and majesty of His love displayed on the cross.

1. Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1911), 52.

Introduction

Today the cross is an object of reverence. Found in churches, embossed on book covers, engraved in furniture, erected as sculpture, enshrined in paintings, worn as jewelry, exalted in sermon and song, the cross is Christianity's identifying badge. Preeminent symbol of religious faith in our world, it has revolutionized society as nothing else could, for its power is infinite and eternal. Fervently appreciated by some, it is largely misunderstood by many, being invoked at times as a bond of exemption from obedience to God and viewed as a magic charm against disasters caused by human folly. Yet the Cross shall ultimately eradicate all the errors, corruption, and misdeeds of humanity, and all the residue of Satan's mischief.

Not that the cross in itself has any power. Rather it is the One who voluntarily hung upon it that invests it with its fathomless might and majesty. Although we may contemplate the Cross with endless profit, no one can exhaustively explain it. Embodying as it does God's infinite wisdom and love, it will disclose its boundless treasures to reverent minds throughout eternity.

The great achievements of soldiers, philosophers, statesmen, and poets of previous generations gradually fade in significance, but the grandeur of Christ's cross increases with the passage of time. Yet time itself contributes nothing; it is the Cross that changes time and life into a loom on which God weaves a tapestry depicting the immortal splendor of all that Christ wrought out on Calvary for the eternal benefit of the universe.

Chapter 1

The Bane and the Antidote

It was a frustrating situation. More than that, it was desperate and dangerous. Catapulted into World War II by Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, America could keep none of its military and naval movements secret. Axis forces had broken the Allies' military codes and could readily decipher all transmitted messages. But American actions in the Pacific could not succeed without secrecy.

As American cryptologists futilely strove to invent unbreakable codes, Philip Johnston, an American missionary to the Navajo, remembered how thoroughly mystified the Germans had been in World War I as the Choctaws conversed freely over radio to convey critical messages that helped the Allied forces to victory. Philip Johnston spoke Navajo fluently. He knew that though government teachers appointed to Americanize the Navajo had striven to eradicate their richly expressive tongue in favor of English, the freedom-loving Navajo had refused to be driven into submission. And he knew that few non-Navajo were acquainted with this difficult language.

At Philip Johnston's urging, the War Department decided to establish a corps of Navajo "code talkers" to whom would be entrusted the secure information that had to pass quickly between American fleets and squadrons during their tactical moves. These Navajo code talkers devised hundreds of military terms and memorized them, leaving no written materials that could be captured. Throughout the war their unique language remained a mystery to Japanese cryptologists, allowing American nautical movements to take place with much less interference than before. Navajo code talkers played a vital role in every assault conducted by the U.S. Marines from 1942 to 1945, including the one on Iwo Jima. So it was that America's most effective secret military weapon during World War II was an ancient language. Ironically, the language that the United States sought to obliterate became the shield of its security and the sword of its triumph.

For many, God's Word is as incomprehensible as the encrypted Navajo of World War II's code talkers. They find prophecy as puzzling as hieroglyphics, and the basic doctrine of Scripture seems to them like twaddle (see Daniel 12:8–10; 1 Corinthians 2:12–14). However, there is a vital difference between the Navajo encryption and the Bible. The

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

Navajo code was meant to be understood only by a small number of initiated men, but God means for all to understand His Word and to follow its guiding light (see Psalm 119:105; Proverbs 6:23).

Japanese intelligence officials labored desperately to crack the code that exposed their naval and air movements and facilitated those of their adversary. In contrast, many regard the Bible as a book of so little consequence that if they ever open it, they peruse it languidly. Others try to crack the code of advanced theological constructs in Scripture by the use of their rational powers and linguistic skills. But they miss the essential power and beauty of the Bible's message because they do not approach it as humble learners in the school of Christ. The Bible is so simple that an attentive child can understand most of it. But that which is spiritual is spiritually discerned, and the Bible is a spiritual book.

Hidden From the Wise

In Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He says, " 'Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.' " Before the conceited doctors of the law He declared, " 'I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in Your sight' " (Matthew 11:29, 25, 26, NKJV).

God's Word does not disclose its treasures to the casual seeker, nor to the scornful inquirer, nor to the enemies of truth who seek to decode the sacred volume only to mock its devotees. No degree of scholarship can construct a tower so tall and sturdy as to reach the heights of Heavens wisdom. God declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. . . or as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9). We must wait quietly before the Lord, and prayerfully ask Him to open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of His law and discern the glories of His gospel with unclouded vision. No matter how limited our present knowledge and powers of comprehension, if we're willing to do God's will, then we shall understand His truth (see John 7:17).

Those who study the Bible to discover God's original order and the beginning and end of evil begin their study with the right objective. If, however, in our deluded intellectuality we turn God's revelation of these basic issues into a myth or an allegory, then for us the plan of salvation becomes mystic vapor, a mere fairy tale for simpletons.

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

God's Word bears the protective seal of its divine Author so that the Scripture cannot be broken (see Psalm 12:6, 7; Isaiah 40:8; John 10:35). It discloses its treasures to the brokenhearted who seek wholeness on God's terms and for His honor. Taking this approach to the entire subject of Christ's cross, from its first foreshadowings to its starkly sublime accomplishment on Calvary, opens the doors of perception to the fundamental issues of life that have occupied philosophers for centuries. Our understanding of these issues fashions the direction and destiny of our lives.

How did it all begin? How did the need for Jesus' sacrifice arise? What is the reason for all the desolation and disarray that we see in our world socially and morally? These questions become particularly pressing if we start with the foundational belief that God is love. Certainly the murder, violence, warfare, crime, vice, profanity, and brutal entertainment that shape life on earth are not manifestations of love but of its very opposite. So why all this twistedness that we call evil—this cruel impetus that drives people to invent stories that exalt vileness and deride decency, to sell mind-destroying drugs, to blow up buses carrying school children, to drop bombs on cities, to ram airliners into crowded office buildings?

In His Word, God declares that He created the world and that everything He made was very good. He made Adam and Eve in His own image, innate partakers of His divine goodness (see Psalm 25:8; Ecclesiastes 7:29). *Yashar*, the root word in Hebrew translated "upright," has connotations of "straight," "even," "proper," "seemly," "equitable," and "good." It's no surprise then that Scripture associates evil with crookedness, the root word for which in Hebrew is *akal*, which literally means to "wrest" or "twist" or to "pervert" (see Deuteronomy 32:5; Psalm 125:5; Proverbs 2:5).

God's original creation was entirely free from the anguish that sin has since brought into the universe. Every intelligent being knew that God is love. All served Him with boundless joy and delight. No pain or fear marred the perfect happiness of God's creatures. No shadow of egotism, impurity, violence, or vexation crossed the path of any. No doubts arose concerning the Creator's wisdom and perfect love toward all.

But God knew from the start that a hidden risk accompanied His imparting to every rational being a special gift that He could not bear to withhold—the gift of free choice. He knew that without freedom of choice, life would be a sham—an intricate marionette show in which

He pulled all the strings. Such an arrangement could not bring satisfaction to God or His creatures, for they would be no more than robots with a simulated identity and a mock allegiance to their Creator—their cosmic puppet-master. For life to have meaning, God must grant to all rational beings the irrevocable powers of moral discernment and of choice. However, the possessors of this privileged power could potentially abuse it. Any beings who willfully disobeyed would thereby engender a moral crisis beyond their own capacity to solve.

Naturally, the God who created the universe by His word also communicated to every part of it complete and clear instruction in all that pertained to life and godliness (see Psalms 19; 139). Moreover, He generously met the needs of all, leaving no grounds for any to be dissatisfied. No good thing did He withhold from His faithful, loyal creation; daily He loaded all with benefits. God's love is attentive, bountiful, and expressive. Therefore, departure from His stated will could not be an accident but a choice, a deliberate act of ungrateful rebellion and distrust.

The Originator of Rebellion

Lucifer, the highest ranking of God's created beings, the one who stood next to His throne as prime minister of the universe, was the originator of rebellion. Scripture reveals that Lucifer abused his free moral agency not by mistake or under any provocation, but through pride and self-exaltation. God did not plant these seeds of evil; Lucifer was perfect when he was created (see Ezekiel 28:15). He was not the victim of mistreatment, poverty, overwork, or any form of abuse. Rather, God conferred every privilege and honor upon him, and He endowed him with every talent that the most intelligent and enterprising mind could wish. But gradually Lucifer became infatuated with himself. Pride blurred his awareness that all his talents and abilities and his life itself were gifts from his Creator. Eventually he coveted the honor and worship that belong to God alone (see Isaiah 14:13, 14).

Until Lucifer converted his liberty into rebellion, all God's creatures had served God with a pure, cheerful love borne of an appreciation of His character. Their allegiance to Him sprang forth unshadowed by doubt or discontentment. But Lucifer was a cunning communicator. He subtly insinuated his disaffection toward God into the minds of the angels over whose ranks he presided. He expressed his innuendoes concerning God's character so artfully that the angels were perplexed.

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

After all, Lucifer was the premier angel, and the questions he raised seemed plausible: Why do perfect angels need laws of governance when their own inherent wisdom is a sufficient guide? What greater claim to worship did the Son of God have than did Lucifer himself? Indeed, Lucifer's beauty and capabilities did not seem conspicuously inferior to those of the Son.

God clarified the matter before the universe. He plainly identified His Son as co-eternally divine and co-supreme in authority with Himself. He bade all the angels of God to worship Him, not under duress, but because He is the Creator and Sustainer of life (see Hebrews 1:1–8). And the majority of the angels sided with God in the controversy that Lucifer had ignited. Their love for God and loyalty to Him became more deeply rooted when Lucifer's slanderous breath blew its sharp blasts. Despite God's compassionate reasoning with Lucifer and the intercession of angels to persuade him to reconsider his ways, Lucifer progressively hardened himself in rebellion and pride. He wove an ever more intricate web of complaints and charges against God—misrepresentations both subtle and malevolent.

Lucifer's sophistry ensnared a third of the angels. They joined him in sullen resistance to divine counsel, thus shattering the atmosphere of harmony that had previously flourished in heaven. Angels, loyal and disloyal, became engaged in complex theological discussions about God's character and purposes—which had previously never been called into question. Dissension deepened. Two camps were formed, and the gulf between them widened as time passed and the controversy grew.

Eventually, the dissidence that Lucifer implanted in the hearts of the disaffected angels flared into open rebellion. No longer God's light-bearer to the universe, Lucifer was now Satan, the adversary—also called the dragon because of his ugly temper and violent passions. A parting of ways between the loyal and the disloyal became inevitable:

There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him (Revelation 12:7–9).

God revealed to the faithful angels the price that He would pay to restore moral harmony to the universe. He would not revoke freedom

of choice. He would not resort to coercion. He had a better plan. Deep in His heart lay a reserve of love's noblest quality—self-sacrificing mercy. This sovereign remedy for moral revolt and its ensuing disorder would be revealed only if necessity called it forth. God deemed free choice to be so vital that He was willing to pay the cost for its perpetuation while at the same time securing the universe against all future abuse of moral freedom.

“The plan for our redemption was not an afterthought. It was a revelation of the mystery which hath been kept in silence through times eternal.’ Rom. 16:25, R.V. It was an unfolding of the principles that from eternal ages have been the foundation of God’s throne. From the beginning, God and Christ knew of the apostasy of Satan, and of the fall of man through the deceptive power of the apostate. God did not ordain that sin should exist, but He foresaw its existence, and made provision to meet the terrible emergency. So great was His love for the world, that He covenanted to give His only-begotten Son, ‘that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ John 3:16.”¹

The Suffering Commander

By settled commitment as unchanging as divine law and love, Jesus was revealed to unfallen beings throughout the universe as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). What grief it must have caused the universe to realize the suffering that their beloved Commander would endure for redemption’s sake! But recognizing that this sacrifice would ensure the eternal security of the universe, the angels bowed low in reverence before Him. They were willing and eager to assist Him in every way toward the accomplishment of His great design. Their vital participation in carrying out God’s plan offered the angels a far deeper education in the mysteries of divine justice and mercy than they could possibly have had if they were mere passive spectators of all His actions (see Psalms 103:19–21; 104:1–4; 68:17; Deuteronomy 33:1–3; Acts 7:53; John 1:51).

God’s loyal angels uphold the law and accentuate His overtures of grace. But Lucifer, the sworn enemy of God’s law, began by resenting the first commandment, which declares God’s unique supremacy and establishes His right to rule. Thus he violated the two fundamental precepts of all the moral law: love to God and love for all His created beings. Lucifer’s daring, demented words reflect his hunger for the homage that belongs to God alone: “I will exalt my throne above the

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

stars of God; . . . I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:13, 14). This warped and unwarranted craving for worship drove him to ply his energies toward discrediting God and making Him appear unworthy of worship.

Just as Lucifer had deceived the angels by his charming sophistry and insinuation, so he deceived the first woman. A careful analysis of Genesis 3:1-6 exposes the basic methods of deception that he uses to entice humanity to apostatize.

1. He assumed a disguise.
2. He asked a question designed to raise doubts about God and the reliability of His word.
3. He implied that God was arbitrarily restrictive.
4. He denied that disobedience to God’s word would result in any adverse consequences.
5. He denied the reality of death, implying that its prospect was an empty threat of a tyrannical and impotent god.
6. He said that disobedience to God’s word was the path to a liberation that would enable the latent divinity of human beings to blossom independent of any external divine authority.
7. He implied that evil was a more advanced form of good that God was jealously withholding to keep human beings blindly under His dominion.
8. And he implied that human powers of observation and judgment were superior to any divinely revealed instructions or warnings.

This is Satan’s eight-fold path to ultimate ruin. All false religion and philosophy offers endless variations on this octave of beguiling sophistries.

Eve capitulated to Satan’s lies, and Adam, prizing her supremely, followed her example. Having cast away their garments of light, they now stood naked, shivering in the chilly air of insubordination to God’s loving will and flight from His fellowship. Their venture into psychedelic indulgence left them frightened, bleary, and degraded. But God did not abandon our first parents. He drew them forth from their quivering fear and shame and their vain hiding place, and He clothed them with substantial garments that represented the covering of His grace and the glory of His plan.

Adam and Eve could not transmit to their offspring anything but their now-fallen nature, but God revealed that His grace is sufficient to subdue humanity’s inborn corruption and implant His regenerating

HIS WONDROUS CROSS

righteousness in all who will accept it. His plan ensures the redemption of their souls and the eventual annihilation of all evil and its dread effects. It reveals that until the battle against good and evil is finally and fully resolved on this stage of action called earth, the whole planet and all its inhabitants will be enveloped in an atmosphere of grace charged with opportunities and providences, with revelations and influences to maximize each person's prospect of redemption.

With magnificent compactness of thought, Romans 5 expounds the theology of God's epic intervention. Indeed, all Scripture unfolds redemption's story in a continuous panorama of preserved history and sure prophecy. Whether we accept or reject salvation, each individual life attests to the reality of God's labors of love to turn defeat and disgrace into glorious restoration for this sin-ravaged race.

1. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1940), 22.