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The Saving Life of Christ

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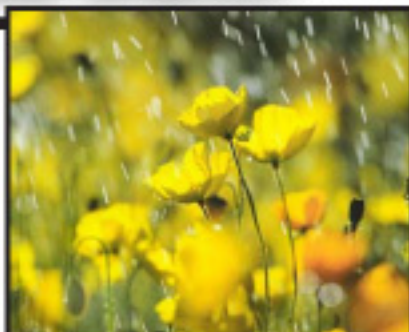
A Quick Focus

The Book's Purpose

- Call Christians from a life of self-dependence "in the wilderness," into a life lived by the power of the in-dwelling Jesus Christ—the "promised land" God intended.
- Offer hope to the well-meaning, weary Christian who is seeking to serve God on his or her own power.

The Book's Message

- ▶ "Christ *Himself* is the very life content of the Christian faith.
- ▶ The Gospel is not just the fact that Jesus Christ died to pay for our sins. The message and power of the Gospel is that, through His resurrection from the dead and His indwelling within us, Christ continually lives out His life through us. "The Lord Jesus Christ therefore ministers to you in two distinct ways—He reconciles you to God by His death, and He saves you by His life."
- ▶ Jesus Christ Himself demonstrated God's will and design for the Christian life: "a whole personality yielded to and occupied by God for Himself."



THE SAVING LIFE of CHRIST

Foreword by Dr. Alan Redpath
MAJOR W. IAN THOMAS

by Major W. Ian Thomas

Zondervan/ISBN 0-310-332-621

- ▶ Our activity *for* God is nothing—good works that are of any value must be those that originate from Jesus Christ and are expressed through our bodies in total dependence upon him.
- ▶ The "exchanged life" (Galatians 2:20) must control me and be my top priority. I need to understand that who I am and what I do is of no consequence—it is who Christ is and what He does in me that matters to God.
- ▶ The early history of the nation of Israel presents a "spiritual master key" to understanding our salvation—through the death and life of Christ.

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the Saving Life of Christ


The Gospel message is more than just trusting Jesus Christ to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God through His death. The power of the Gospel is in trusting Jesus Christ, who also saves us by His *life*. When you embrace this fullness of salvation, you begin to live supernaturally. You live totally dependent upon Jesus Christ, who indwells you through the Holy Spirit. Yet you are truly emancipated from the bondage of self-trust and doubt and the tyranny of your enemy, the devil.

When you trust Christ, not just for His death, but also for His life within you, you are restored to true humanity in order to be a human conduit of the divine life. This is

what Jesus Christ Himself demonstrated by fulfilling man's true vocation, "for He came in His sinless humanity to be what man through sin had ceased to be—the willing vehicle of the Divine Presence." This allowed the Father to express himself in action through humanity.

How shall you live in total dependence upon Jesus Christ, as described in John 15? First, you "ex-

pose by faith every situation as it arises to the all-sufficiency of the One who indwells you by His life." Second, the work of the Holy Spirit is to make experiential Christ's life within you. To be filled with the Holy Spirit is allowing Him to occupy your whole personality with the adequacy of Christ.

You overcome the law and limits of gravity by putting your trust—your very body—in the power of an airplane to take you across the ocean. The moment you reject this position of faith, you are once again controlled by the law of gravity and suffer the results. That is how your walk of faith in the Spirit liberates you: You rest your entire personality upon Christ who lives in you. Then you are "set free from the down-drag of that inbred wickedness, which Christ alone can overcome." 

A New Principle

"We have begun to see that victorious Christian living is not a method or technique; it is entirely different, revolutionary principle of life.

It is the principle of an *exchanged* life~ 'not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Galatians 2:20b)."

This principle of the exchanged life is not an addition to the Gospel—it is the whole Gospel. It is "not just heaven *one* day, but Christ *right now*" that enables the Christian to live out his or her faith. Living faith in the indwelling Christ pro-

duces good works. How? Just as the living body breathes, so the living faith breathes Jesus Christ's activity. True good works have their origin in Him.

The Scriptures provide insight into this principle. First there is the illustration of the two trees: The tree, which healed the bitter waters Marah (Exodus 15:22-26) and the tree on which Jesus Christ bore our sins in His own body (1 Peter 2:24a). When Moses cried out to the Lord over the bitter waters of death, God showed him a tree.

Adam broke his relationship with God at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by saying no—and we all have experienced death because of it. In the same way, God shows us a tree that will bring

healing—the tree on which Jesus Christ died. At this tree, Adam's "no" can become our "yes." This is the beginning of our faith.


The second illustration is that of salt. In 2 Kings 2:19, a beautiful city suffers from a terrible secret: its waters are stagnant, producing sterility. When the people come to Elisha for help, God instructs him to place salt in the waters.

"Salt speaks of the risen life of the glorified Saviour, imparted by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to the redeemed sinner. It is the *tree* for bitterness! It is the *salt* for barrenness!"

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A NEW PRINCIPLE
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Who are these barren people who need this salt? They are carnal Christians~not backsliders, but those living in reliance on the flesh. "They are wonderful people....They are not hypocrites! They are tired.... They are overwhelmed inwardly with a sense of defeat and frustration and futility and barrenness." They are men and women who cry out to God because, despite all their efforts, they know how barren and stale their lives are and they do not know the answer.

Just as God required all sacrifices to be brought with salt (Leviticus 2:13), so it is the salt of the indwelling Christ that makes the sacrifices of our daily lives acceptable to God. Jesus calls his followers to a life of discipleship~but it must be a life with salt that does not lose its strength or flavor (Luke 14:33-35). There is no substitute for true salt that preserves, and there is no substitute for the living Christ within to empower us to live for God. This salt is freely given without measure to every believer. 

Three Categories of Men


"One of the most remarkable episodes in the Bible is the story of how God brought His people Israel out of Egypt, through the wilderness, and into the land of Canaan. It is as though the Holy Spirit gave us here a master key, a point of reference, a framework into which are woven all the mighty-colored threads of truth."

The suffering and enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt represents the unforgiven sinner. With Adam's sin, man became spiritually dead and bankrupt~"empty of God." Just as the physical body without life is dead, so the spirit without the life giving presence of God is dead. We are all born into this condition, "easy prey to the ravages of a sin principle that came into the human heart in the day that God went out." This principle is the flesh, that which, like the Egyptian taskmasters, controls everything we are and do.

God's desire and plan has always been to redeem His people out of this bondage! The blood of the Passover Lamb represents and foreshadows the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and the blood which, when applied by faith, covers our sins and reconciles us to God.

Next, God judged and destroyed the Egyptian army while leading His people to safety. "So the enemy was buried in the place of death, while God's people passed on *through* the place of death into a new land and on to a new life." This is the picture of God's purpose to save us from sin's penalty through Christ's death and to save us from its power because we, too, have died with him.

Through faith, we receive the presence of the Holy Spirit and the life of Christ. He becomes the controlling principle and power of our life. Just as the glove moves only through the activity of the hand, so Christ's presence by the Holy Spirit within you transmits all things that pertain to life and godliness. "It is this enjoyment of Christ's indwelling which is represented by the land of Canaan.... He desires that the natural man...might become the spiritual man~filled with the Spirit of Christ, alive unto God."

And what is represented by the wilderness? *The wilderness represents the carnal Christian.* Like the Israelites, he or she has been rescued from bondage but lives in self-imposed poverty, refusing to enter into the goodness of the Promised Land. A carnal Christian has received the Holy Spirit and the fullness of Christ but chooses to ignore God's presence and struggle to live the Christian life on his own. 

A Day to Be Remembered

The Passover was both the day of redemption and the day to begin all days for the people of Israel (Exodus 12:2-3). It was celebrated as the beginning of a journey. So, too, we can look back to the day of our redemption as the beginning of new life and walking in the Spirit, not in the flesh (Romans 8:1-2). Our new walk vindicates our new relationship with God.

Yet the Passover was to be celebrated, not in the wilderness, but in the Promised Land!

"Only in the land could the people celebrate the day intelligently... There is only one place where you can intelligently celebrate your redemption through the death of Jesus Christ, and that is in the fullness of His resurrection life!"

The Passover was to be a memorial of redemption and a changed life~including the things the children of Israel did, thought, and said (Exodus 13:9).

In the wilderness, the people did what was right in their own eyes, with no sense of the sovereignty of God. "Maybe that is precisely where you are right now~still doing what *you think* is right *in your own eyes*, because...you never realized that this experience of Jesus Christ was a *crisis* calculated...to precipitate a *process*, a walk no longer under the dictates of the flesh, however sincere, but under the dictates of the Spirit."

In the wilderness, the people filled their thoughts with what they had left behind in Egypt, consumed with that from which God had redeemed them! Their imagination led them into sin. "They only had

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TRANSFORMING THE MIND
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memories of that *from* which they had been redeemed, because they had never gone on and in, and so had no memories of that *to* which they had been redeemed." If you do not live the exchanged life of the indwelling Christ, all the promises of victory and power will be meaningless and you will only have memories of defeat.

In the wilderness, the people said that they were holy. They grumbled against Moses and Aaron and insisted that they were holy enough~by their standards. "Are you perfectly content to live a self-centered life that renounces and repudiates the lordship of Christ? Are you holy enough?"



Any Old Bush Will Do!

Moses was a man God raised up to deliver his people from Egypt, but only after God dealt with him.

"Moses took it for granted that he would be accepted in the ministry for which he believed God had called him." He supposed that the Israelites would understand and accept them as their deliverer. He murdered the Egyptian because he was falsely committed to the task, not to God.

For Moses and for the Christian, the need does not constitute the call! He was "a man whom God had specifically raised up for a particular task, but who on the basis of his own sincerity and...enthusiasm, neutralized his usefulness because he committed himself to a need instead of to God." Trying to do God's work man's way skips over the fact that it is not learning but relationship, not ability but availability, which qualifies a man for God's work.

"Any old bush will do...if only God is in the bush!"

So Moses ran away and hid in the desert for 40 years until God caught his attention with the burning bush. To Moses' credit, he was aroused with holy curiosity over this bush that burned and was not consumed. He inquired and discovered what other great men of faith have learned~that when you come to the end of yourself and have nothing, you discover that "all God demands of a man is his availability~to be what man was created to be, the human vehicle of the divine life, inhabited *by God for God.*"

As Moses gazed on the bush and God spoke to him out of it, one truth became very clear. It did not matter at all about the bush~"any old bush will do...if only God is in the bush!" For it is not the bush that keeps the flame going; it is God in the bush! For that reason, any old bush will do!



The Church in the Wilderness

The experience of earthly Israel~her relationship with God and His dealings with her~present a vivid picture of the greater spiritual Israel, all who are God's people by faith. For example, we are brought into the covenant of Abraham, not through physical circumcision, but through identity with Christ. This

circumcision was not practiced in the wilderness~there it would have been a sign that they had failed to come into all the promises of God. The Israelites were baptized into Moses as they passed through the sea. We are baptized into Jesus Christ through his death and are raised to a new life.

God's provision of manna further demonstrated that the people were never meant to stay in the wilderness. The manna was "something new" from God, just as salvation and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit is God's new gift to every believer. The manna tasted of oil and honey. The Holy Spirit is both the oil of the presence of the living God and the honey which stimulates our desire for the land of milk and honey, the place of life in Christ.

"Manna was given only to sustain life, but never to satisfy... God refuses to satisfy His people in the wilderness, when He has spread the table with good things in Canaan!"

God never intended for the Church to stay in the wilderness. For those who are bored, weary, and empty, God calls you from simply witnessing the Spirit in the wilderness to the fullness of the Spirit in the Promised Land.



Then Came Amalek!

God gave His people food and water~water from the smitten rock, which is the gift of eternal life through the smitten Savior and poured out as living water through the Holy Spirit. But no sooner had God given the waters of salvation, the enemy came in!

Amalek represents the flesh, which always seeks to prevent believers from entering into the land of God's promise. The flesh resists the Holy Spirit impacting all facets of your being and redeeming your humanity to make you His temple. The flesh fights the Holy Spirit's every attempt to lead you into spiritual maturity. "Standing across your pathway from the very outset of your Christian life is Amalek!"

God gave the Israelites victory over the attacking Amalek~but only as Moses kept his hands and the rod of God raised. Victory over the

flesh is never won, it is always given. Victory comes from walking by faith in the Spirit and assuming the victory that he has already won.

"To walk in the Spirit is not a reward~it is the means! It is to enjoy the saving life of Christ!"

Amalek descended from Esau~the man who despised His birthright, the very promise of God to redeem man and restore him to dependence on God through Christ. "Why did God hate Esau? Because God can do absolutely nothing with a man who will not admit that

he needs anything from God." But God could do great things through Jacob, as sneaky and deceitful as he was, because Jacob wanted everything he could get from God. God doesn't love you for what your flesh can make of yourself~He loves you for what Christ will make of you.

God says to forget what He forgets~our sins and iniquities. Christ is your righteousness. Do not let Satan accuse you when the blood of Christ cleanses you. But God says to remember Amalek~know your enemy. For if you compromise with the flesh and make an unholy alliance with that which is opposed to God (and will perish in eternity), then you have forgotten. God says we must remember our enemy!



The Man Who Forgot to Remember

Saul was a promising young man who led God's people as their first king~but he forgot to remember Amalek. God had declared that there was nothing good, nothing worth saving in Amalek~but Saul forgot to remember, and he spared both the king of Amalek and the best of the sheep. He decided on his own that there was something good in that which God had condemned. Moreover, Saul presumed to present an offering to God from that which God declared evil.

Amalek represents the flesh. There is nothing that originates from us that is righteous. Anything done of the flesh is sin.

"Men everywhere are prepared to dedicate to God what God condemns~the energy of the flesh!"

Saul showed his own mercy to Amalek~but Amalek shows no mercy to Saul and the flesh shows no mercy to you! Haman, the enemy of the Jews in the book of Esther, was descended from Amalek. The flesh will always look for an opportunity to destroy. When Saul faced death on the battlefield, it was an Amalekite who was prepared to take his life and his crown. After Amalek came, the Israelites lived in self-imposed poverty in the wilderness instead of enjoying the land promised to them. Don't be deceived by Amalek, the flesh!



The Man Who Died Too Young

Moses lived to be 120 years old~but he died too young. There never was a prophet like Moses, a man whom the Lord knew face to face, but he died in the wilderness because of his unbelief. Perhaps God allowed his choicest servant to suffer such drastic consequences to emphasize that that no one is excused.

The Lord instructed Moses to strike the rock to bring forth water for the people. That is the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, smitten and crucified for our salvation. But the second time, God told Moses to *speak* to the rock. Why? Because Christ died once for all. Christ has risen; He is no longer on the cross! God wanted to give a picture of the rivers of living water that are given through the Holy Spirit.


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The first rock, Christ's death, reconciles us to God. The second rock, the living rock, is the life of Christ within us. Moses was striking, as it were, Christ. He was seeking to bring forth life from the death of Christ, not from the resurrection. He was preaching a half message, and it only did half a job. He brought them out of Egypt, but he was not able to bring them into the land. Because he didn't believe God.

“It is our solemn responsibility not only to present the Lord Jesus Christ as the One who died historically to redeem sinners through His atoning sacrifice, but as a contemporary experience~as the living Rock.”

It is not an issue of a second blessing, but of rediscovering and living the first blessing. “When you come to know Jesus Christ in the power of His resurrection, you receive absolutely nothing new from God; you simply discover and begin to enjoy experientially what you received from God the day that you were redeemed.”

Moses had brought the people out of Egypt, even against their protests, but he was not able to overcome their complaints to bring them into the land. Moses taught the Israelites the kind of faith that gets out but he did not know how to teach them faith that gets in.

Moses was a marvelous man of God, but even he, in his own strength, could not do God's work. Moses did his best! But that is the mistake God wants us to avoid. *God* wants to do *His* best in us. Anything else will leave us and those who follow us miserable in our service, circling in the desert. 

The Man with the Sword in His Hand

Truth is consistent. Circumstances may change, our understanding may be challenged, but that doesn't mean that truth has changed. Jesus Christ is the incarnation of truth and it is truth that sets us free. It is the truth of these basic first principles, which spurs spiritual awakenings. It is not our techniques or methods. Those are only secondary to God, who will use any method when there is a return to these first principles.

God waited for the Israelites to return to this first principle of trust and obedience by which He led them out of the land of slavery. Now, by this principle He brought them in to the Land of Promise.

“Moses was the man who *tried*, and he gave them the law without the land! Joshua was the man who *trusted*, and he gave them the land in which to practice the law!”


Joshua brought them into the land on the third day~just as Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day, ensuring our new life in Him. This is yet another picture of the land of Canaan as the believer's experience of Christ's resurrection life.

Like Moses, Joshua had sent in spies before they invaded the land. These spies made a startling discovery. Rahab told them that the people of Jericho were terrified when they heard what God did for the Israelites at the Red Sea. The Israelites had been wandering the desert for 40 years and the entire time their enemy had already been

defeated! This is the same spiritual lesson to be learned. Our enemy has already been defeated and we can live enjoying the victory of life in Christ.

Joshua told the Israelites, “Hereby ye shall know that the living God is among you, and that he will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites” (Joshua 3:10). Do you live as though you are alive in God~as though He is alive in you? What difference would it make in your life if you were to find out that God was dead?

As the ark went before the Israelites when they crossed the Jordan, so God's promise and His purpose must go before us. We must follow Him daily, one step at a time. Don't be angry when confronted with the idea that you must change something about your Christian life and that you must return to first principles. The Israelites came to the Jordan and they crossed it as they had the Red Sea~they went forward, put their feet in, and God divided the waters. How they got in was the same way that they had gotten out. “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Colossians 2:6). You received Jesus by faith and walk with Him by that same faith.

The Israelites entered the land and celebrated the Passover~finally in the place where God meant it to be celebrated. God had appeared to Joshua as the captain of the host of the Lord as he brought them in. This was Joshua's burning bush experience. He saw the Lord with the sword in His hand and found out that he was not there to take sides; he was there to take over. Are you prepared for God to take over? 

Victory and Vocation

Jesus is all we need to know about God and man. We look to Him to understand what it means to live in the land as God intended. For though Christ was fully God in the beginning of the creation of the world, He came to earth as a man in the fullest sense of the word.

“He became man: but He became man as God intended man to be...walking day by day in that relationship to the Father which God had always intended should exist between man and Himself.”

That is the marvel of the life of Christ, the life He now calls us to live. Jesus Christ lived in complete dependence on the Father. All God’s inexhaustible resources were available to Him because He was unreservedly available to God. Jesus knew His origin was from God and that He was going back to God, so He could do everything, literally everything, through divine resources. Not just wonderful works of healing, but the humble act of washing the disciples’ feet. He demonstrated that it is not the nature of the activity, but the origin that makes it spiritual. “Spirituality in man is his availability to God for his divine action, and the *form* of this activity is irrelevant.”

Jesus Christ was perfect in His victory and in His vocation. He was completely perfect in His person. But the Scriptures tell us that, “He learned obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). This was His vocation. This vocation could only be realized by total dependence on the Father. He was completely submissive to that which

the Father had purposed. “... As He hung upon the cross....In that moment of time He was “made perfect” in His *vocation* as He had always been perfect in His *person*....”

The victorious life of Jesus Christ was more than just not committing sin. He could have continued in righteousness in heaven. But the nature of his victory was that He carried out everything for which He became a man.

“...He positively *accomplished* all that was *right*; that His absolute availability to the Father for every moment of 33 years enabled the Father in His deity to do in and through the Son in his humanity all that had been agreed on between the Father and the Son before ever the world was.”

Jesus Christ made Himself available in offering his body and his total being to the Father. Every step, every thought, every word was an expression of the activity of the Father. The Lord Jesus was clear that the basis of our relationship with the Father now is the same as His relationship to the Father was then (John 6:57).

We have and enjoy eternal life *right now* because we have Jesus Christ Himself within us. And the time between when we first come into eternal life, the life we live by His power on this earth, and the time we go into His presence, we fulfill God’s purposes as our vocation. Fulfilling this vocation is the object of our redemption and is only possible in the energy and power of Christ’s indwelling through the Holy Spirit.

You can do nothing without Jesus Christ. But God’s purpose is that everything you do is done as an expression of Christ’s life within you.



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Michael J. Chiapperino

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The author: Major W. Ian Thomas has spent his life in Christian ministry. He founded and directed the Torchbearers, an international Bible teaching organization perhaps best known for its two dozen Capernwray Bible schools.

Summarized by: David and Renée Sanford, directors of Sanford Communications, Inc., and authors of the notes for the *Living Faith™ Bible*.