

EXHAUSTED AT THE CROSS

We see that there are many ways to come into the presence of God.

All make their way to Christ eventually. The tired, the poor, the huddled masses, yearning to be free. Here they come with the remnants of their tattered lives draped around them. Here comes the woman with the issue of blood, down to her last dime. Here you come with your human concepts of self reliance and proper dignity. And here we come. All pitiful in His sight, all reaching to the hope raised up before us. All exhausted at the foot of the cross.

Why do we do it? Why do we turn to the Creator of the heavens and the earth as a last resort? Instead of the author and the finisher of our faith, we make Him an unwilling necessity. Consider the following.

The statue of liberty. It is a symbol of freedom that speaks her message of new life, new hope, and fresh opportunity to a desperate world. And the masses come. They sacrifice all, even their lives, in search of liberty. Disappointed, they face the reality of life as second class citizens in a strange land, enduring for the hope that their children will be truly free. Who will tell them that only those whom the Son sets free are free indeed?

The beggars of life. Those who wait until they have nothing of substance left before they cast themselves down at the foot of Calvary. With nothing to offer, they wait with outstretched hands and face averted. Expecting nothing, yet they reap the wealth of glory. A new name. An everlasting inheritance. A reprieve from condemnation. Incredibly, with lives restored, some will later choose to walk away from the source of Life and return to a world without hope.

The woman with the issue of blood. A woman of means, capable of spending money on physicians for many years. She had been to every doctor and tried every remedy. This was not the first time that Jesus had been in her town. Not the first time He had performed miracles. But it was the first time she had been desperate and out of options. All of her substance had been spent. This cure would not depend upon her or her resources. She would neither control the situation or obtain help in a dignified or socially acceptable manner. This time she would crawl for a chance at life. She would rise with her pride shattered, but her health restored.

We don't know why you finally came to Christ. Chances are that you did not care for the hand that life had dealt you. It is probable that one day you found yourself hungry, naked, and destitute in the throne room of God. Through grace, you found that the poor in spirit would be blessed, the hungry would be fed, and the naked could stand before Him without shame.

We only know why we came. More importantly, we know why we stay. Like the blind man Bartimaeus, we know exactly what He has done for us. We can tell you of broken dreams, wasted time, and wasted talents. We can speak of the emptiness of self produced success and achieving temporal goals. We can even chronicle the misery of trying to live a good moral life utilizing personal strength of character to combat a legacy of sin and carnality. Best of all, we can testify of the time when we came with no gift to offer the King of kings. We came asking for His name and an inheritance with nothing of value in exchange. He said it was good enough.

There are many good reasons why we are willing to enter into a covenant with Jesus Christ. Our question is, "Why does HE do it?" There are many who will understand the question. They are those

who have been picked last when teams are being chosen. They are chosen only because everyone had to be allowed to play. Then they were expected to do their best for a team that did not want them. This is the position that we often place Jesus Christ in. When we pick Him, He is usually the only choice left. Astonishing, isn't it? Then when we ask our last choice, the most holy God, to give us His best effort. In response, He gives us His Life.

We cannot fathom the love, the motivation, or the wisdom of God. We can hazard a guess though, as to two reasons why He would respond in love where bitterness would rule us.

Restoration from what we have become, back to what He intended us to be, is an act of creation. He takes the nothing that we bring Him and makes of us new creatures. When He remakes us in the image of His spirit, He must smile with the memory of a clay man. When from our knees, we behold Him lifted up before all men, the purpose of His sacrifice at Calvary is fulfilled. When He brings us out of our personal hells, we can imagine Him patting the keys of hell and the grave in His celestial pocket. And when He makes something of our lives with no help from us, then all praise and glory belong to Him. He likes it that way.

As parents, we can also understand the motivating power of love for our children. We are happy to hold them whenever they are willing to be held. Yet, we would rather hold them and rejoice with them in their triumphs than hold them and cry with them in their pain. Assuming God is the author of that love, we would like to change the timing of our approach to the Heavenly Father. We do not want to wait again until we have no youth, no time, and no energy to bring to our Savior. Everyday, we want to bring not only our troubles, but our triumphs and talents to the throne. We want to come victorious rather than defeated. We want to learn to turn to God first for strength and fellowship, rather than later for comfort. And to bow at His feet, rather than collapse there.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think that most people are so unwilling to ask others, even God, for help, until there are no other options available?
2. Have you ever known an immigrant family whose parents really worked hard to make a better life for their children?
3. When you gave your life to Christ and He gave you eternal life, who got the better end of the deal? Did you feel good about what you were bringing to the exchange? Surprised at all by His acceptance?
4. Even though you realize the incredible gift given to you, have you ever contemplated walking away from it? Why? What characteristic of our new life in Christ eventually makes us yearn for what we had before that we know was not worth having?
5. Have you ever known anyone as desperate for hope and freedom and life as the woman with the issue of blood? Did you tell them about Jesus being nearby and able to help them? Even if you have before, maybe this time they will be desperate enough to seek His attention.
6. If you were dying, and you knew others had been healed while being prayed for by the elders, and there were so many people in the aisle that you could not get to the altar, would you crawl under the pews for a chance at life? How about for a chance at salvation?
7. If you have ever been tempted to turn your back on God and the church, why did you stay? How many reasons can you think of?
8. There are specific times in your life when God has undeniably demonstrated His love or power to you. These are called landmarks, for when we begin to lose our way, they remind us of who we are and why we are on the path we are on. What are your landmarks?

9. Have you ever obviously, and publicly, been chosen last for a team? If you were in God's position of usually being chosen last, would you respond without bitterness?
10. Do you think God the Creator is proud when He is able to restore us back to what He meant for us to be? Do you think He shows us off to His angels? Read the introduction to the book of Job.
11. Have you ever taken credit personally for something you know God miraculously changed in your life, simply because it was easier or more comfortable than trying to explain your relationship with God to an unbeliever? For example. Maybe God delivered you from smoking and you explained that all you need is will power. How did you feel afterwards about not giving the glory to God?
12. Have you ever prayed just to share something good in your life with God and to say "Thank you?" How did it make you feel?