

**THE GOSPEL**  
An Introduction

Dear Friend,

I was on my way to a lunch appointment some time ago when I saw the newspaper in a sidewalk rack. The leading stories were grim: a young boy has been shot dead by another, and a veteran police officer has been found dead – of a self-inflicted gunshot. The senselessness of both tragedies struck me as I prayed for their families – families whose lives have just been shattered. But lament was not the only emotion that I felt as I continued walking; I also felt a smoldering anger. Have you ever felt anger toward death and evil? Why does sin consume so many lives? How long will death stalk us? Is there anything to be done? Is there any hope?

It was then that my thoughts turned to the gospel, and the letter which I am now writing to you. There is hope. But it is not found in human effort. It is found only in divine grace. There is much to say about this divine grace, and I hope you will read closely. In the end, however, a Christian is not defined by the breadth or purity of his knowledge. He is not defined by how much he knows or how well he knows it. Rather, a Christian is defined solely by *who* he knows and by *whom* he is known. It is my hope that this will become clear to you through the rest of this letter.

### **Who God Is**

One of the best descriptions I have ever heard of the Christian message is this: the gospel is good news, not good advice. It is the good news of what God has done to deliver sinners, not pious advice about what people can do to curry God's favor or pacify his anger. It is crucial to understand this distinction. Every other religion in the world (including self-religion and non-religion) is about pious advice. Every other faith treats God as though he were an infantile Being who can be easily satisfied, quickly distracted, or safely ignored. Dealing with him becomes about self-redemption. Ultimately, our fate is in our own hands.

The gospel proclaimed in Scripture turns this notion on its head. The message of the Bible is that human beings are helplessly lost, and that God does for men and women what they cannot do for themselves. He does this not in the hope that they will pay him back, but for the sake of his own glory and his great compassion for them. It is not stretching the point or exaggerating in the least to say that, according to the Bible, the gospel begins and ends with God. The Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah expresses this vividly:

Remember this and stand firm,  
recall it to mind, you transgressors,  
remember the former things of old;  
for I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like me,  
declaring the end from the beginning  
and from ancient times things not yet done,  
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,  
and I will accomplish all my purpose,'  
calling a bird of prey from the east,  
the man of my counsel from a far country.  
I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass;  
I have purposed, and I will do it.

Listen to me, you stubborn of heart,  
you who are far from righteousness:  
I bring near my righteousness; it is not far off,  
and my salvation will not delay;  
I will put salvation in Zion,  
for Israel my glory.

(Isaiah 46:8-13)

This God-centered nature of the gospel is one of the things which make Christianity unique. All other religions offer good advice; the gospel offers good news.

The good news of the gospel is the true story about how the Creator became the Redeemer, and how he is coming again to finish

what he started. But who is this Creator-Redeemer? The Old Testament passage I quoted above lists some of the most fundamental facts about him. The first is his uniqueness: he is the only God, and there is none like him. The next thing to note is that God is the sovereign Creator: he creates and controls all things, "declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done." Thirdly, he is all-powerful: his counsel shall stand, his purpose will be accomplished, and his salvation will not be delayed. And when his salvation is described as his righteousness, we learn a fourth fact about God: that he is righteous.

### **Who We Are**

But where does this leave us? You and I are neither all-powerful nor all-righteous. What is the point, then, of spending so much time talking about the qualities of God? The reason is simple: until we understand who God is, we will never understand who we are. We are not God. However, there is a sense in which you and I may say that we are *like* God. The Scripture says that God created human beings in his own image:

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth

and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.

(Genesis 1:26-31a)

God not only created us in his image, he created us to bear his image by exercising dominion over the rest of his creation. And notice the last verse: all that God made was "very good." There is a huge disconnect between the world as it sits in the biblical text quoted above, and the world as it stands today. If the biblical story is true, something has gone horribly awry between then and now. But what?

Humanity fell. After he had created the first man and woman, God established a *covenant* with them. You have probably heard this word before. In the biblical sense, a covenant is a relationship established and guaranteed by God. God creates the relationship, and he sets its terms. This is what God did with the first parents of the human race, Adam and Eve. He did not come down and create them, only to disappear again forever into heaven. He created them in order to relate to them:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

(Genesis 2:15-17)

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the

trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

(Genesis 3:8-9)

The terms of God’s covenant were simple. Adam was to tend the garden of Eden and eat its fruit. The only tree he was not permitted to eat of was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. So long as he obeyed God, he would live in fellowship with God. The second passage shows that God himself came and walked in the garden where they lived. But it also shows that at some point, something went wrong. That something was rebellion:

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

(Genesis 3:1-6)

Adam stood by silently while the serpent lied to his wife. He and Eve both choose to believe the lie and tear up the covenant God had made with them. Rather than trust and obey God, they chose to trust themselves. They did not just desire to be wise like God – they desired to be wiser than God. They desired to *be* God. And so they rebelled.

There is no way we can understate what happened with that first bite. Think of it, friend! God created the whole universe out of nothing. In that universe he created a paradise. Into that paradise he placed our ancestors. He gave them everything they could possibly need. He gave himself to them in fellowship. After doing all this for them, he commanded them to obey. Adam and Eve were not starving when they took the forbidden fruit, and they were not uncertain about God's command. Their taking of that fruit was an act neither of necessity nor ignorance. It was an act of treason. And it was through that first sin that death and evil gained a foothold in the human race:

...sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...

(Romans 5:12)

God established his covenant was made with Adam not only for himself, but for all his descendents. In Adam's first sin, his whole being was corrupted. The image of God which he bore was marred. Adam and Eve had not just sinned, they had become *sinner*s. Just as one drop of ink dropped into a glass taints all the water, so Adam's first sin tainted his whole nature and the whole natures of all he would sire. And so a sin nature has passed down through all ordinary generations of history – all the way down to you and me. We start our lives with a tainted glass. Is it any wonder that only tainted water flows out?

We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

(Isaiah 64:6)

Why do children shoot other children? Why does a grown man commissioned to protect others take his own life? Why do you and I

rebel against God at every chance, thinking we are wiser than he? Why do we die? Why do we sin? Because we are by nature sons of Adam. Because we not only sin, we are sinners.

### **The Righteous Branch**

Just as God was under no obligation to make a covenant with humanity, so he was under no obligation to help us once we had broken his covenant. He could have left us all to die. He could have put the whole universe to the torch that very instant. He would have had every right to do so. But he did *not* do so. Instead, God graciously chose to make a new covenant with humanity. We see it immediately after the rebellion in Genesis, and throughout the Old Testament. Here are just a few examples:

The LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

(Genesis 3:14-15)

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

(Genesis 12:1-3)

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus

destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

(Job 19:25-27)

In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'

(Jeremiah 33:15-16)

These passages give us a sense of the presence of God's second covenant immediately after the fall and throughout the Old Testament. God's people sin, and they are exiled; God has mercy, and he delivers them. Yet throughout this pattern runs a scarlet thread – a line of grace pointing to a promised Redeemer.

Notice how Job describes this Redeemer. The Redeemer is God, but he will be seen with human eyes. The prophecy of Jeremiah predicts that the righteous Branch shall be a man: a descendant of David, who was a descendent of Abram, who was a descendant of Adam and Eve. But he will not be *only* a man. The righteous Branch will also be God: "the LORD is our righteousness." How could Job claim that he would one day see God? Because the Redeemer would be both God *and* man.

## **God With Us**

The Old Testament does not reveal the specific identity of this Redeemer, nor does it reveal when he will come. From the end of the Old Testament to the beginning of the New, a period of 400 years elapsed with no word from God. And then God sent some surprising news:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us). When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

(Matthew 1:18-25)

What the Old Testament foreshadows, the New Testament reveals. Who is the God-man Redeemer of the covenant of grace? He is Jesus Christ, Immanuel. Being born of a woman, he is fully man. Yet being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of a virgin, he is fully divine and without sin. Jesus Christ is just what the prophecies foretold: He is fully God and fully man. He is God – with us.

In the person of Jesus Christ, God himself arrived on the ruined landscape of history to bring salvation and redemption from sin and death. But if this is true, you might ask, why haven't things been fixed? Why do we still see evil in the world? If God really entered history, why hasn't he dealt with sin?

The answer is that he has dealt with it. Remember that in his covenants, it is God who sets the terms. God *has* dealt with sin. But he has done so according to his own terms – not according to our expectations. How then has God dealt with sin? He

became man in order to take the punishment for the sins of his people upon himself:

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it – the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

(Romans 3:21-26)

This passage explains that there was simply no other way. God is righteous, and righteousness cannot ignore evil or sweep it under the rug. Righteousness requires that sin be punished. Every sin is treason, and treason is a capital offence. Sin must be punished by death. Yet no sinner can survive a death sentence. How then could God punish the sins of his people without crushing them?

Only one thing could be done. In the person of Jesus Christ, God substituted himself. He stood in the place of his people and paid for their sins. The righteous Branch of God was hung on a cross. The full wrath of God upon sin was poured onto his head, and for the sake of his people he was broken:

Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?  
For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned – every one – to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.

(Isaiah 53:1-12)

By the will of the LORD, Jesus was crushed for the sins of his people. Standing in the place of those he loved, he bore the full curse and punishment that their sins had earned. He died, and was buried. For two days, all seemed lost.

But then something happened. On the third day after his burial, Jesus walked out of the tomb. How could this be? The answer is simple: because, though he bore the sin-guilt of many, he himself was not guilty of any sin. As a result, though he died for sins, he himself could not be held by death. In his resurrection, we see the victory of the covenant of grace was accomplished. Because he rose from the dead, those doomed to death in Adam can now be made everlastingly alive in him:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

(1 Corinthians 15:21-26)

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be

to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

(1 Corinthians 15:51-57)

How does God give his people the victory through the Lord Jesus Christ? In two ways. The first I have already mentioned: Christ died to take away sins. But the second way is equally vital: he lives to provide righteousness. I have already said that God's righteousness means he cannot ignore sin. But God's righteousness also means that he cannot tolerate anything less than perfect obedience. Yet no sinner can obey God perfectly. How then can God accept anybody?

Only through the righteousness of Christ. Jesus Christ is the only person who has ever kept God's law perfectly. Those who are to be accepted by God must have his obedience applied to them. Having no righteousness of their own, they must be robed in the righteousness of Christ:

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

(Galatians 3:27)

But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith – that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

(Philippians 3:7-11)

Jesus Christ is called Immanuel – a name which means “God with us.” I hope now you understand the reason why. God came to be with us, in order that by his life, death, and resurrection, he might bring us back to himself.

## **Believing God**

At this point, dear friend, I suggest that we pause a moment to take stock. We have seen who God is, and we have seen who we are. We have seen our guilt as covenant-breakers, and we have seen God’s love as a gracious covenant maker. We have seen the promised Seed of Genesis, the Redeemer of Job, and the Righteous Branch of the prophecy of Jeremiah revealed as the God-man, Jesus Christ. We have seen that he has completely accomplished redemption for those who belong to him. But do you belong to him?

There is no question more ultimate than this. You cannot ignore your sins or pay for them yourself. The Bible proclaims only one way to belong to Jesus Christ, only one way to have his payment for sin applied to your account. That one way is by faith alone. This is stated over and over again in the New Testament, but is perhaps best demonstrated by the example of Abraham:

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and

whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

(Romans 4:1-8)

Earlier in this letter, I quoted the passage from Genesis where God appears to Abraham and promises to establish the covenant of grace through and with him. This passage from Romans tells us that in believing God, Abraham was "justified." What does it mean to be justified? It means to stand in a right relationship to God – a relationship where your sins are covered and you are accounted righteous. In short, it means to be in a state where the work of Jesus Christ is credited to you. Our passage tells us that Abraham was brought into this state by "believing God." And then it tells us what it means to "believe God": not just to believe what God says, but to believe *in* – to *trust* – the one who justifies the ungodly.

The only way to be justified before God, to belong to Jesus Christ and have his work applied to you, is to trust him. Faith is not an act by which you contribute to what he has done, nor is it a special work you do to earn his salvation. Rather, faith is an act of complete surrender. It is giving up on any hope of saving yourself, and staking all your eternity on the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is the righteous Branch who descended to the depths of hell and rose victorious. He stands at the brink and bids you cling to him. We are all born falling over the cliff of death, friend. But if we cling to the righteous Branch, we will be saved. Trusting Christ is not about any quality of strength in us. Nothing in us can save us; and likewise nothing in us can damn us, if we cling to Christ. It is only the strength of the Branch that matters. Would you trust Christ? Then abandon yourself to him.

What happens when we abandon ourselves to Christ? What flows from Christian faith? The apostle Peter tells us that putting our faith in Jesus Christ will imply major changes in our lives:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent and be

baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 2:37-38)

If you are sincere about putting your trust in Christ and becoming a Christian, then you will repent of your sins. You will turn from living after your own will, and live according to God's. Why should this matter? If we are saved wholly by the grace and work of Christ, what does it matter how we live? The apostle Paul answers this question directly:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

(Romans 6:12-16)

The point is plain. Our lord is whomever we serve. If Jesus Christ is our Lord, then we cannot serve sin.

The second change of life implied by putting your faith in Christ is that you will be baptized and join yourself to the church. Christians are commanded to be baptized, and baptism is a sacrament which Christ gave only to the church:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the

Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

(Matthew 28:18-20)

Again, the point is not that baptism – any more than repentance – somehow adds to faith or earns forgiveness of your sins. The point is showing one's professed faith in Jesus Christ to be genuine. If Christ is your Lord, you will obey him gladly.

Jesus promises never to abandon those who belong to him. He is always with us, to the ends of the world and to the end of the time. He dwells in the heart of every believer in the person of his Holy Spirit. Through the grace provided by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled more and more to slay our sins and serve our Savior. The Holy Spirit intercedes in our prayers:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

(Romans 8:26-27)

But the Holy Spirit does not operate or intend for us to live in a vacuum:

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many.

(1 Corinthians 12:12-14)

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

(Colossians 3:16)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

(Hebrews 10:24-25)

In the church, the Holy Spirit unites us in one body with other believers. We are taught, admonished, encouraged, and stirred us up to love and good works. The church is the worshipping community of God's new covenant. And God promises to work all things for her good:

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8:28)

Would you belong to Christ? He is freely yours through faith. But if he is yours, then you are his. And if you are his, then repentance, baptism, and the church are not optional.

### **Final Warning & Free Offer**

The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news, not good advice. It is not a prescription for self-salvation, but the proclamation of Christ's coming kingdom. The kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ was inaugurated when he accomplished salvation in his life, death, and

resurrection. It grows every day as men and women come to put their trust in him, and as they continue to walk in repentance and obedience to his Lordship. Someday, however, it will come in finality. Jesus Christ will return to gather his church to everlasting life and to judge the world:

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

(Revelation 20:11-15)

My friend, you do not have to live your life wondering if your name will be found in the book of life. You do not have to spend every day in fear of death. You do not have to lie awake at night, vexed by the certain dark shadow of the grave and the judgment beyond. Christ is freely offered to all who thirst for him:

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.

(Revelation 22:17)

Do you thirst the water of life? Do you desire forgiveness of sin and restored communion with God? My dear friend, it is yours for the free-taking! You cannot pay. But you do not have to pay – Christ has done it all! This is the gospel. *He* is the gospel. All you have to

do is trust in him. Abandon yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will never abandon you:

All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.

(John 6:37, 40)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

(Revelation 21:1-5)

My friend, it has been my great privilege to write this letter to you. I am grateful for your willingness to read it, and I hope you have found it to be clear and understandable. I pray that through my feeble explanations, the Lord may be pleased to discover to you the great riches of his glorious gospel.

Yours sincerely,  
A Friend in Christ

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