

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 79 – The Cross, Resurrection and New Life!

By Sharon K. Griffiee

Several years ago, around Easter, I heard from Pete. Sitting in a Maximum-Security Prison, with 23 hour a day lock-down, Pete was left with a lot of time on his hands. Having served 16 years on his sentence (his second time back in Max), his mood had sunk into a state of depression. Confined to a tiny concrete cell, his days were mainly spent sleeping and watching TV. Eating, sleeping, and watching TV. That's how Pete described what he referred to as his *miserable* life.

Despite his daily misery, tucked away somewhere in his memory bank were glimpses of his early childhood days. Brief snapshots about Jesus at Easter, came to mind. Pete recalled what that big day was like as a youngster.

“As a child I would attend a church service with my brothers, where there was usually a play or a story for us kids about the resurrection of Christ. It was the only time of year my mom insisted we go to church. Then it was off to hunt Easter eggs. So much fun!”

Pete's remarks confirmed he knew *about* Jesus from stories and plays he heard as a child, but he did not refer to Jesus in a personal way. Pete is not unique in his childhood memories of Easter, memories that in and of themselves are good. His memories, however, reveal a deeper problem, which unfortunately is passed on by many who profess Jesus Christ as Lord.

For many families, Easter (Resurrection Day) has been boiled down to a once a year religious event. It's as if *showing up* at the Easter Service somehow secures one's salvation, or at least one's place in the community of the faithful. With this rationale in mind, folks who religiously *show up* for the big event must carefully plan just the right outfit to wear. That thought struck me as I was walking through a department store prior to Easter one year. I over-heard a teenager protesting to his mother, *“But Mom, I really don't need to buy anything new this year, I'll just wear what I wore last Easter.”*

For prisoners (far removed from shopping centers), there is no choice about what to wear on Easter or on any other day. This is not an issue with God, because He is not looking at the clothes we wear. God is looking beyond our cloths to the heart within. His attention is on our spiritual well-being, what is going on inside us. The real clothing our Lord Jesus wants us to suit up in, is Himself! Apostle Paul made this clear,

Romans 13:14 (NIV) – *“Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”*

To clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ is to put on the new nature, which is created to be like God, righteous and holy. (See: Ephesians 4:22-24) It takes time and effort to get to know God and to become like Him, so our daily thoughts must be centered on God and His Word. But, if we let our thoughts wander off, the tendency is to profess faith in Jesus for the wrong reasons; to get what He can do for us. If we seek His hand, rather than His face, we will find ourselves disappointed in Jesus, time and again. Why? Pretentious, superficial professions of faith do not please, nor move God. Our motives must be pure to grow in His likeness. If you are incarcerated in a county jail awaiting sentencing, or in prison serving time, take the necessary step to, *“Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine.”* (See: II Corinthians 13:5)

Ask yourself, am I professing faith in Jesus, because of my desire to obtain a more lenient prison sentence? Am I professing faith in Jesus, because I believe He is my parole ticket out of prison? Or, am I professing faith in Jesus for a nobler cause, my sincere desire to repent of my sins, turn from my past way of life and become a follower of Jesus?

Despite the selfish desires of the human race, when we consider the common background we all come from, *that of sinner*; every one of us should be forever grateful that we can come to Jesus on the same footing. We all need to *examine* ourselves because every one of us have stood for lesser good,

at one time or another in our lives. We have said and done things that we are ashamed of, things that go against God’s spiritual laws of righteousness. The Word teaches that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious standard and need forgiveness and reconciliation. (Romans 3:23). Brothers and sisters, we should never take lightly what Jesus did for us at the cross. Peter said,

1 Peter 1:18-19 (NIV) – “For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”

Jesus’ death on the cross redeemed us from an empty, meaningless life. That empty way of life handed down (generational curses), does not have to be passed on. We have been redeemed from all these curses through the precious blood of Christ. We need to stop dwelling on that old life. We must now *sow* into the new life that Jesus made possible for us, through faith. However, a basic Bible truth must be understood before this can happen.

1 Corinthians 15:36-37 (NIV) – “...What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.”

There are gradual changes that must take place in a grain of wheat before it can reach its full maturity. I heard once that the changes a grain of wheat goes through, involves seven metamorphic changes. It is significant that most of this change (development) takes place underground, completely out of sight. When the grain of wheat is placed in the soil, that is only the beginning; the seed’s development gradually continues through various stages, until it finally reaches the visible fruit bearing stage.

Similarly, there are stages of growth and development Christians must undergo to reach full spiritual maturity. Jesus proved through his teaching, as well as through his example, what was at stake. As the time drew near for Jesus to be lifted upon the cross, He gave the following parable in response to some Greeks who had come looking for him. They had come to worship at the Passover Feast and were determined to see Jesus.

John 12:23-24 (NIV) – Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”

The hour had come for Jesus to face the dark tragedy of the cross. Only then would he be *glorified* to a place of honor in God’s presence. Consequently, there were two realities coming together at the same time – both death and life! When Jesus speaks of the kernel of wheat in this parable, he is referring to none other than Himself. Jesus must die on the cross, so that by his death many seeds will be produced. Meaning, many people would receive his sacrifice and be saved.

John 12:32 (NIV) – “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we too can rise in newness of life. Jesus is calling us to the cross, that there we might surrender ourselves in union with his death. If we willingly surrender ourselves, we are accepting the death of the old man, to make way for the new man; our new life in Christ!

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV) – “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

Questions for personal or group study

- 1) How different would Pete’s life have been, if he had remembered Easter as more than an *event*, and instead focused on developing a personal relationship with Jesus, as Savior and Lord?
- 2) What did the Apostle Paul mean when he said, “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.”?
- 3) We only live on this earth for a brief period. How important is it to have pure motives in our profession of faith in Jesus? (See: II Corinthians 13:5)
- 4) What did Jesus mean when he said, “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”?