

“HIMSELF HE CANNOT SAVE”

By Paul Penno

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It was May 21, 1946, the place — Los Alamos. A young and daring scientist was carrying out a necessary experiment in preparation for the atomic test to be conducted in the waters of the South Pacific atoll at Bikini. “He had successfully performed such an experiment many times before. In his effort to determine the amount of U-235 necessary for a chain reaction—scientists call it the critical mass—he would push two hemispheres of uranium together. Then, just as the mass became critical, he would push them apart with his screwdriver, thus instantly stopping the chain reaction.

But that day, just as the material became critical, the screwdriver slipped! The hemispheres of uranium came too close together. Instantly the room was filled with a dazzling bluish haze. Young Louis Slotin, instead of ducking and thereby possibly saving himself, tore the two hemispheres apart with his hands and thus interrupted the chain reaction.

By this instant, self-forgetful daring, he saved the lives of the seven other persons in the room. As he waited for the car that was to take him to the hospital, he said quietly to his companion, ‘You’ll come through all right. But I haven’t the faintest chance myself.’ It was only too true. Nine days later he died in agony.

When Jesus hung upon the cross, the priests and scribes and elders said in mocking contempt, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” Matt. 27:42. And in these words there was a truth far beyond what the Jews had any thought of,—a truth that even the followers of Jesus do not appreciate. Whoever grasps the full meaning of the statement, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save,” and who allows it to apply to himself, has salvation, for it contains the whole of the Gospel.

“He saved others.” The Jews acknowledged this, yet they crucified Him. He whose only offence was that “He went about doing good,” was hanged as a malefactor, and He lifted no hand in self-defense, nor uttered a word of reproach against His persecutors. “He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.” Isa. 53:7. He saved others, and even while hanging on the cross, “a reproach of men, and

despised of the people," He showed His power to save, in the case of the penitent thief; but Himself He could not save.

And this was the secret of His power to save others. It was not simply that He *would not* save Himself,—not alone that He unselfishly forgot Himself,—but He *could not* save Himself. To have saved Himself would have been the destruction of all others; for if He had planned to save Himself, He would have stayed in heaven, and never exposed Himself to reproach and cruelty. But such a thing was impossible; He *could not* thus save Himself, for such a saving of self would have been selfishness, and there was no selfishness in Him. He absolutely could not remain in heaven and leave man to perish. But He could not save men, while keeping Himself in safety apart from them and their troubles. So "He gave Himself for us." Titus 2:14.

Thus we see that the Gospel has the origin and perfection in giving. "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." John 3:16. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,"—not to be served, but to serve,—and to give His life a ransom for many." Matt. 20:28. "For ye know that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." 2 Cor. 8:9. He had everything, and we had nothing; so He gave up everything, and He kept nothing, in order that we might have everything.

Most clearly is this set forth in Phil. 2:7, but in the rendering of the Revised Version, where we are told that when Jesus had everything, He did not count it a thing to be desired to hold it, "but emptied Himself." The Greek word from which this is translated has the sense of "to drain out." In a sense He annihilated Himself. Threw Himself away, in order that He might save those who were lost, and in danger of annihilation. He took no thought for Himself; He did not defend Himself against attacks that were made upon Him; utterly regardless, reckless of self, He was lost in solicitude for others.

This neglect of self was not a momentary enthusiasm, as when one under a strong impulse saves another from the impending death at the expense of his own life. On the contrary, it was a deliberate, settled purpose. Calmly and deliberately, looking over the whole situation, and counting the cost, He laid down His life, that is, He placed it from Him, gave it up to the service of others, and when that was done, the moment of death was but an incident in a long career of the same giving. His life was just as truly laid down for the sheep before He came to earth, and while He walked and talked and

suffered in Judea and Galilee, as when with His expiring breath He cried, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit."

In all this history of self-sacrifice there is a lesson for us. We are not simply to admire the example of devotion, but to follow it. In it alone is there salvation. Jesus seemingly threw Himself away, yes, that is what He actually did, for He "poured out His soul unto death" (Isa. 53:12), "emptied Himself," drained the last drop; "wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name." Phil. 2:9. His humiliation was His exaltation; His casting away of self was His salvation. And that was the only possible way of salvation; for, as before stated, to have sought to have saved Himself would have been to deny Himself, that is, to prove false to His nature. Since God is love, unselfishness, the only way that He can preserve His own existence is to give Himself away.

"Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." 1 John 3:16. "The brethren" for whom we are to give ourselves are the sons of Adam, for all who are children of Adam must be brethren. Of course those who give themselves for their brethren in Adam, will without question give themselves for their brethren in Christ, who Himself counts even those who do not know the name of God as His brethren, saying, "I will declare Thy name unto My brethren." Heb. 2:12. "We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." Let no one say or think, "My life is so commonplace and uneventful that I have no occasion to lay down my life for anybody; no great opportunities come to me." It is not in dying on some great occasion, that laying down one's life consists; the laying down of life consists in not counting it our own, reckoning ourselves as dead, deliberately putting our life from us, and forgetting all about it in thoughts of others. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

To reach the home of Desmond T. Doss near Rising Fawn, Ga., you take the Desmond T. Doss Medal of Honor Highway. The folks around there are mighty proud of their neighbor up on Lookout Mountain. As a 20-year-old in 1945, the shy, slim Seventh-day Adventist became one of the most famous and unusual heroes of WWII. A strict believer in the Sixth Commandment—Thou shalt not kill—he refused to bear arms. But he was willing to serve as a medic, one of the most dangerous jobs the Army had to offer. One day on the Pacific island of Okinawa, Private Doss rescued almost a whole company of men who had been cut down by Japanese fire while

trying to capture an important hilltop. Crawling out among bullets and shell bursts, he dragged the wounded one by one to a sheltered spot behind a rock, tied a double-bowline knot around their chests and legs, and lowered them over a 35-foot cliff to safety. "Dear God," he remembers praying over and over, "let me get just one more." It took all day, but he got them all. The Army estimated he had saved 75 lives.

At Okinawa, his outfit was given orders to assault the Maeda Escarpment. That was a jagged hilltop, one side of which dropped away in a sheer cliff. From there, the dug-in Japanese could direct artillery fire for miles in all directions. His company decided to climb up behind the enemy: they would scale the cliff with ropes and ladders. We went up and pushed over against the Japanese position, got pinned down and couldn't move," Doss recalled. Another company was supposed to take the opposite side of the escarpment, but word came that they had been "all shot up," he said. "We had to take the whole thing by ourselves. How'd you like to be pinned down, where you couldn't move, and get an order like that. But Uncle Sam has to sacrifice lives. This was holding up the works."

"We had orders to withdraw," Doss said, "But I couldn't leave my men. In combat you get very closely attached to each other. When you see your buddy hit, you just can't leave him out there. It's like a mother with a house on fire. She doesn't think of herself; she's thinking about that child. And that's the way I felt about my men." Exposing himself to mortars, grenades and machine guns, he crawled out into the open and dragged the wounded back to cover. The Army at first said he had rescued a hundred. "I didn't see how it could be more than 50, and I still don't. So they settled on 75. I didn't think I'd get killed. But I felt it would be worth getting wounded if I could save just one more man. I kept praying for the Lord to help me, and He did." The battle started on April 29. It was May 5 when Doss performed the principal deeds that resulted in his winning the Medal of Honor, the nation's highest award for heroism. President Harry S. Truman himself would place the medal around his neck on the White House lawn in October 1945. April 2, 1995.

The lesson is that nobody can be saved by trying to be saved. Salvation is too great a thing to be accomplished by human efforts. Strange as it may seem, we can be saved only as we cease all efforts to save ourselves, and lose all thought of self in efforts to save others. Only so do we enter into full sympathy with Christ, and

become laborers together with God. But that casting away of self is our salvation, for while we are concerning ourselves for others, Christ, who is also concerning Himself for others, is as a matter of course caring for us. "God turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends." Job 42:10.

Freedom from anxiety is thus assured to us. How easy to cast all our care upon Him, when we know He cares for us. And when we know that He cares for us, what need have we to care for ourselves? Thus we experience the truth that the Lord's yoke is easy, and His burden light.

One thing more. Paul said, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians, both to the wise, and to the unwise." Rom. 1:14. That which was true of Paul, is equally true of us. Why was he debtor?—The answer is plain, when we once stop to think; it is simply this, that Paul had received the whole of that which was given for the world. Christ gave His life for the world. He "tasted death for every man." But Christ is not divided; every soul gets the whole of Him. "Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." Eph. 4:7. His life is light; and a light that shines for me, shines equally bright for all. He is the "Sun of righteousness;" but the sun shines for all; each one gets all the benefit of the sun, and no one could get any more, even if he were the only person on earth. So each person gets the whole of the life of Christ, which is given to the world. Now it is very evident that if I get the whole of something that is given to all the world, that I am debtor to the world; and the same is true of every soul. The only difference between the most of us at the Apostle Paul is that he realized that to him was the fullness of Christ given, and he accepted and appropriated the gift, while we are too often content with but a little of the Divine life. We selfishly think to take just enough for our own use, and put a part away from us, not realizing that we must have the whole; and so we fail to realize that we are debtors. May God grant that we all may have the eyes of our understanding enlightened by the Holy Spirit, so that we may know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and may not reject that portion of the life of Christ which to the natural man seems disagreeable, but may allow His perfectly unselfish life to abide in us, so that we, not alone with our lips, but by the glad offering of ourselves for others, may truly render thanks unto God for His unspeakable gift.

Ado felt bad when some boys said his mother was ugly. But when he learned why she had scars, his mother became beautiful to him.

Today's story comes from Nigeria.

"Fire! Fire!" the neighbors shouted, alerting Ado's mother that her tiny thatched home was on fire. Flames shot from the roof and walls, and smoke filled the hut. Mother managed to escape, but then she realized that her baby boy was still inside the house. Ignoring the flames and thick smoke that billowed out of the doorway, she ran into the house to rescue her baby.

Neighbors held their breath as seconds passed and the flames grew brighter. At last Mother emerged from the burning hut with her baby held close to her body. The little one was safe, but Mother had been burned on her arms and face. In time most of her wounds healed, but her once-beautiful face was forever scarred by the fire.

Ado Grows Up

Ado grew to be a strong boy. He noticed that his mother's face did not look like other mothers' faces, but he did not ask why. Someone had told him the story of how his mother had saved him from the fire when he was a baby, but he did not realize that the scars on his mother's face had come because of her love for him.

One day when he was playing with his friends, someone made fun of another boy, but the comment hurt Ado deeply. The boy taunted his friend by saying, "Your face is ugly, like that of Ado's mother." The boys burst into laughter, but Ado stopped in his tracks. Yes, it was true that his mother's face was not pretty to look at. He ran home so his friends would not see the tears forming in his eyes.

What Happened?

Ado hurried into his hut and sat down to think. When his mother came in, she could see that her happy boy was unusually quiet. "Is something wrong, my son?" she asked.

Ado thought for a moment, and then asked, "Mama, what happened to your face?"

"Why do you ask, my son?" his mother questioned, stiffening a bit but trying to be calm.

"The boys—one of them told another boy that he was ugly—like Ado's mother," Ado blurted out. "What happened to your face?"

Mother was quiet for a moment. Then she stood up and walked to her drawer and pulled something out. She gave it to Ado. It was a photograph of a beautiful young woman. Ado studied the picture and then looked at his mother. "Is this you?" he asked.

“Yes, it was taken before the fire.” Ado knew about the fire. He knew that his mother had pulled him from his bed and saved his life. But he had not thought about what her unselfish act had cost her.

Ado stood and hugged his mother. Now he understood. His mother had given everything for him. Without her unselfish act, he surely would have died in that fire. He looked up into his mother’s face. It was no longer scarred and wrinkled to him. It was beautiful; it was the face of love.

Ado squeezed his mother tightly. “To me you are beautiful—even more beautiful than your picture.”

Jesus’ Scars

Boys and girls, Jesus loves us, too. He loves us enough that He carries scars from the day that He saved you and me and everyone in the world from the fire of sin. He has scars in His hands, His feet, and on His side, where the sword pierced Him. And likely He has scars on His back and on His head. Jesus could have gone back to His Father in heaven without dying for us, but He loves us so much that He could not bear the thought of spending eternity without us. He knew that if He did not die for us, we would all die without Him.

When Ado sees his mother’s scars, they remind him how much she loves him. And when we think about Jesus’ scars, we remember Jesus’ love for us. We can say thank You to Jesus by giving our offering to missions every week so more people around the world will learn what Jesus did for them. Then we can all say thank You to Jesus together. I want to do that. Do you?