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When Last Did You Visit the Hill?

966-A

Series: In Everything Give Thanks

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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There is no way for words to adequately describe what was happening. The sky was now an ashen gray, not at all untypical of the kind of oppressive day it was. At the entrance to the garden, eight somewhat impatient men waited as their leader, accompanied by His three most trusted companions, entered to pray.

Not too far away, the one they called “Lord” paused and asked His “inside circle of men” to remain there and maintain what was to be a kind of “spiritual guard duty”. They were to “watch and pray” as it were. Their definition of “watch and pray” was obviously not the same as His. (As it turns out, neither is ours.)

The incredible intensity of the unseen battle that was taking place in the realm of the spirit was, for the most part, lost even to these, the Master’s most trusted friends. To them, this was just another excursion, another church retreat, if you will. So out of touch with the depth of the significance of that hour were they, that even as the powers of light and darkness garnered their forces for this, the most crucial spiritual conflict in history, the Savior’s prayer partners became overcome with exhaustion, and one by one, sleep overtook them.

Now, as He faced the one hour in history around which all of history finds its meaning, the Son of Man finds Himself alone. Well, He was not really alone, for He was in effect never really alone. Yet from man’s perspective, He was facing the darkest hour since the inception of time, an hour never again to be faced by God or man. He was about to look down the annals of eternity and walk headlong into the depths of hell in order to rescue for all eternity men and women and boys and girls who had, or who would fall, under the yoke of bondage to sin and so need a Savior. He was about to die for you. He was about to die for me.

He, the Living Son of God who knew no sin, was about to be made sin for us. That is what Paul said in II Corinthians 5:21,

For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin;

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that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

II Corinthians 5:21

My friend, if you can read that verse, and contemplate that moment in that garden 2,000 years ago; if you can stand up and sing “I will cherish the Old Rugged Cross where my burdens at last I lay down,” all the while looking around, preoccupied with what others are doing, or yawning and thinking of what you’re going to do after church, or groaning in your spirit about the awful headache you have, something in your life is out of balance. The measure of thankfulness in your spirit has been drained into a sea of ingratitude, and all that is left is a remnant of the reality of what happened *for you* and what happened *to you* as a result of that one solitary event that took place on that Judean hillside 2,000 years ago.

The Savior died for you that day. And because He did, death is no longer your enemy but your ally. Because He did, fear is no longer a viable emotion for you. Perfect love took leave of eternity long enough to demonstrate Himself in time, and perfect love casts out fear.

We are in the process of looking into the remarkable subject of thanksgiving. Our first lesson included God’s perspective of a thankful heart, and God’s perspective was, in essence, that He has commanded the Christian (every Christian) to in everything give thanks. In everything? In everything. We are, for the next six lessons, going to continue to explore exactly what He means by that clear, uncompromising instruction.

We have already learned, I trust, that the most vital part of giving thanks is learning to be thankful for God Himself...not just for what God has done, as remarkable as that is, but rather learning to be thankful...just because He is.

This lesson is designed to explore the second major wellspring of thanksgiving that the Christian possesses. It’s a fountain that flows with never-ending praise from the bosom of the Father into the spirit of the saint. It is a reminder that if you knew nothing about God but what happened 2,000 years ago at a place called Golgotha; if you had no Old Testament and no New Testament except for the lessons that deal directly with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; if all you ever knew about God was that at a point in time He purchased eternity for you by giving to you the life of His Son that ought to be enough to cause you to fall to your

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knees in utter abandonment before the throne of God and in perfect awe at His mercy, give Him your life, and then spend your life as though every day were Thanksgiving.

And you and I have more than that. We have the entire written Word of God, the entire heart of God recorded for our admonition and instruction—and we who have trusted Christ as Savior possess the Holy Spirit, who lives *in us* to live *through us* the very life of God, and who bears witness moment by moment to the reality of Calvary.

Yet so often, you and I who have been to that Cross and had our entire lives transformed, our eternity assured, the shackles of death broken, having been infused with the very same power that raised Christ from the dead; we born-again ones walk around on a day-to-day basis as though mortgages and misunderstandings and contracts and ball games and broken mufflers and skinned knees and all the rest of the things the world falls apart over are enough to arrest the attention of our spirits and divert our hearts from a life of praise. No wonder the world is unimpressed with what they construe the Cross to be. They've yet to see an army of saints who are living lives of constant thanksgiving because they have not only been to that Cross and been transformed at that Cross...an army who will not ever allow the vision of what happened at that Cross to fade.

When last did you visit the Hill? How long has it been since you have stood at the foot of those three barbaric crosses and gazed heavenward to view those two thieves, one taunting and bitter, one broken and penitent? How long since you have looked into the eyes of the man on the center cross as the soldiers jeered, as the heavens prepared for that cataclysmic cosmic revolution that would announce the death sentence on sin once and for all? How long since you've walked up that narrow path alongside the Son of God and stood in absolute grief at the awareness that God was dying...and that you were the cause? How long? When last did you visit the Hill?

Well, get packed. We're about to take a trip. We're going to go back in time to the edge of eternity and relive the reason you will spend that eternity in the presence of the Living God, singing anthems of praise rather than in an eternal hell where you deserve to be. We're going back to Calvary, and I pray that you will never again, and that I will never again wonder just

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what we have to be thankful for.

For some of us, at least, it's been too long since we've been to the Hill. That's tragic. If you have all of your spiritual belongings packed in the suitcase of your heart, please climb aboard Trans-Eternal flight 777 with me for a one-way trip to Thanksgiving Mountain, just outside of Jerusalem. The trip will be brief, but I pray that its brevity will in no way affect its impact.

We leave our affluent, active, seemingly pressurized world en route to the Holy City. As the plane begins its ascent into the heavens, some of us are having a difficult time just shaking the cobwebs out of our minds. There seems to be no end to our problems. At work, there are pressures that seem eternal. At home, the family seems destined to make a perennial soap opera out of what ought to be that "Happy Haven on Earth" that Dr. James Dobson talks about. Finances go from bad to incredibly bad, and then, when on the upswing, back to bad again. And the inner frustration, the anger, the bitterness, and for some, the constant depression, never seems to go away. The regular responsibilities of life seem endless at the moment.

As the giant airliner cruises above the clouds, we cannot help but think about the series of messages our well-meaning, but obviously impractical Bible teacher has been harping on these recent weeks. He keeps muttering something about "in everything give thanks" and giving us projects (boy, is he long on projects) designed for us to spend every day of every week for at least eternity meditating on the character of God. If we did every project that guy assigns to us, we'd be so busy making charts and checking off character qualities and spending days in the country that the only time we'd have to eat and sleep would be between 2:00 and 3:00 a.m. on the second Thursday of each week. We shudder, wondering what wild-eyed idea this guy will dream up next. "In everything give thanks" indeed! Boy, this guy hasn't walked in my shoes.

At last, as sleep overtakes you and you can, at least for a few moments, forget all of your pressures and problems—until suddenly the jolt of the wheels as they make contact with the ground jars you back to reality. "Not the smoothest landing I've ever had," you mutter; but then, as you look out, you see that there is no runway. You have landed instead in a bright green meadowland somewhere in tiny Israel, and the pilot informs

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you that it is somewhere about the year 30 A.D. The landing is forgivable.

To bring us into the context of where we are both geographically and chronologically, Jesus has completed his final discourse and His final prayer, and He and His followers are preparing to go forth out of the city to the Mount of Olives. Passing by the gate to the north of the temple, the Master and His entourage descend into a lonely part of the valley of Kidron. The valley is lush and partly underwater from the torrential rains that seem so typical this time of year.

Having passed through the valley, the group turns leftward towards Olivet. Still a bit further along, they come to the place called Gethsemane, meaning “the oil press”. It’s a tiny area, in reality a sort of summer retreat enclosed by fruit trees and various kinds of flowering shrubs. Jesus was no stranger to this garden. Often He and His disciples would withdraw within its confines to study and to pray. It was so common that Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, who was strangely missing at the moment, would have no trouble at all knowing where to find them a few hours from now.

At the entrance to the garden, Jesus softly cautions eight of the eleven to wait for Him there, beckoning to the three whose hearts have been so knit together with His (Peter, James, and John), asking them to come with Him into the garden itself. Perhaps He desired that they who had shared in such glories as the Mount of Transfiguration, also experience with Him His greatest hour of grief. We do not know, but enter with Him they did.

If we glean information about Gethsemane from all four Gospels, we can see details. Joined together we read,

Then came Jesus with them across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, a place called Gethsemane, into which he and his disciples entered. And when he had arrived at the place, he said to them, “Sit here, while I go yonder and pray.”

And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, he began to be sorrowful and amazed, and deeply distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death; remain here, and watch with me. Pray, that you enter not into temptation.”

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And going forward from them a little further, about a stones throw, he knelt down on the ground, and fell on his face and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”

And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? So you could not watch with me one hour! Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

Gathered from Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22, and John 18
(The Life of Christ in Stereo)

How long has it been since you have returned to Gethsemane? How long has it been since you have looked into the eyes of God as He knelt down in that beautiful green paradise, so filled with the blossoms of life, and contemplated the unthinkable—death. When last did you envision the Son of God, kneeling before the Father in total subjection and watched the agony of His soul intensify as He faced the prospect of the one thing He had not experienced...separation from the Father? If you could walk up alongside His sobbing body as He knelt there and whisper in His ear, would you not ask “But Lord, why would you have to face the prospect of death? You have never sinned. You were in the bosom of the Father even before the world began. You were in the beginning with God.¹ All things were made by you, and without you was not anything made that was made.² You are the light of the world.³ Lord, why would you lay down the banner of your Holiness and taste sin? Why?”

You and I ought to ask the Lord that question at regular intervals. Now is a good time to do so. There He is, kneeling in that garden, His slumbering saints just a few feet away, sleeping away the most spiritually important moment in history as the burden of the sins of the entire world begin to descend upon the shoulders of the one man who has never tasted of sin. Go ahead, ask Him. Say, “Why Lord, why? What could be worth it for the Son of God to die?” Ask Him.

I think He heard us. He turns His head for just a moment. The agony that is encompassing Him for one brief second fades,

¹ John 1:2

² John 1:3

³ Matthew 5:14a (New King James Version)

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as though He is reminded that it is worth it all and He answers, *“for you, my child; for you. Gladly I die. I’ll tell you why...gladly I die...for you.”*

Are you still wondering, my friend, what you have to be thankful for? Are you still struggling to find meaning to life? Are you still arguing with God over His right to do with your life as He pleases?

Are you still struggling with God over His ownership of your life? Still angry and filled with self-pity, wondering what you have to be grateful for? Beloved, it’s Thanksgiving! Gethsemane is Thanksgiving! Listen as the grief of God unfolds in stages before our very eyes, all on your behalf, and on mine.

First we read, He began to be sorrowful.⁴ The heaviness of what He faced began to descend upon His spirit. Now, mind you, we’re talking about God. Have you ever walked down a long hospital corridor and suddenly a knot began to form in the pit of your stomach, and you began to feel a sense of heaviness or foreboding that you could not shake? You suddenly sensed what was ahead and began to be sorrowful. The Word goes on to state: He became exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.⁵ Have you ever seen someone literally die from grief? Most of us have. Have you ever been a parent, or watched a parent, literally become sorrowful even unto death as you, or they, watched a child, one they have nursed and nurtured and trained and loved and been willing to die for walk headlong into the jaws of rebellion? Have you ever experienced that level of grief that caused your life to literally depart from your spirit?

Again, we would ask “Why, Lord, why?” And again He would answer, “For you, my child, for you.” Oh, Beloved, it’s thanksgiving.

Can you imagine how much grief it added to God’s already broken heart when He returned and found the three men He had chosen of all the men in the world to share His heart with, the three musketeers of the King’s Kingdom, the inner circle of heaven and earth...sound asleep? “Could you not watch with me one hour?”⁶ He asked. Watch the disciples through all of this. They are a living picture of our responses to the responsibilities of life.

⁴ Matthew 26:37

⁵ Matthew 26:38

⁶ Matthew 26:40

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Listen now, Jesus is about to speak. He is about to pray what I believe to be the most profound prayer ever uttered.

And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee;
take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will,
but what thou wilt. Mark 14:36

There is so much revealed in that one sentence about the nature of God and the nature of man and the plan of God and the prayers of man that it alone would be a phrase worthy of several weeks' study, rather than two or three fleeting moments. Our purpose today, however, is simply to see life pass before us through the wide-angle panoramic lens of God's supreme act of love at Calvary. But oh, what a master stroke on the canvas of that final portrait does this one statement paint. Jesus was saying, "You who truly *are* My Father, there is *nothing* you cannot do."

Oh, listen carefully, Beloved. Jesus was facing the most grievous single moment in the history of mankind. He was facing it alone, for His famous friends who had been so quick to argue over who would be the greatest in the Kingdom had suddenly been overtaken with sleeping sickness. Here He was, alone, but not alone in the face of the challenge of eternity. And the first words He uttered to the Father were, "Oh, My Father, there is nothing you cannot do. Nothing."⁷

That's real prayer. God the Son facing the unthinkable, thanking God the Father that heaven and earth are His, therefore if He so chose to, He could rearrange the heavens, make a few thousand more galaxies, or but blink His eye and send this troubled earth reeling into the distant eternity, never to be heard from again. God was not threatened by a few insecure Jewish rabbis whose hold on their flock was threatened by this miracle-working Galilean. God was not threatened by the crafty, self-serving spirit of this one traitor who was about to sell the Son of God for a few pieces of silver. *God was not threatened by circumstances. He cannot be and still be God.* Beloved, remember that. The issue wasn't "Lord, isn't there anything you can do?" There wasn't anything He *couldn't* do. The issue was, then, "Father, what's the best thing for you to do in order to glorify your name?"

Oh, if only the "God, gimme another miracle to prove who

⁷ Mark 14:36

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you are” crowd would just go back to Gethsemane. Jesus was not afraid to rebuke the demonic host that surrounded Him, and Jesus was not afraid to march triumphantly into the city, claiming His rightful royalty as King. Demanding a miracle of the Father would have been easy. But humbling Himself before the Father, simply seeking to do His will? That is not as easy.

“Lord, if it be possible let this cup pass from me.”⁸ He wasn’t saying, “Father, if you can do anything about what’s about to happen, do it.” He had just acknowledged that there wasn’t anything the Father couldn’t do.

The issue was: “Father, if it be possible for our will to be done,⁸ for your plan to be executed, for maximum glory to accrue to your name without this Cross, then Father, do it that way. Father, if it be possible for man to be saved, for death to be swallowed up in victory, for the heart of man to be reunited with the heart of God without your Son, who knew no sin becoming sin, then Father, if that be possible, take this cup I am about to drink, this cup of death and pour it into the furnace of eternity. But Father, if this is what it takes, I would not choose, nor even think to suggest another way. Father, if the only way to life is by way of death, I stand before you prepared to die, yea, anxious to die, that they (here He, in essence, points to us) that they might never die.”

You may think that the crisis that faces you today is the most unthinkable, insoluble trauma that a human could face. You might be torn with grief, overcome with anger, submerged in self-pity, seething with vengefulness, or crushed in defeat. Or you may simply be facing something that you feel no man or woman should ever have to face. And when someone stands up in front of you and has the audacity to command you, in the Name of God, to in everything give thanks, you either cringe in anger or stand astonished in disbelief. Perhaps you have prayed for God to take that cup from you...again and again. Yet with every new day that dawns, you awaken only to find that the clouds have not vanished, the storm has not passed, the crisis has not eased. And you are prone to cry out to God, “Lord, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.”

The question is what do you mean by that statement? Are you really praying as Jesus prayed? It is not “Lord, if I have

⁸ Matthew 26:39

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enough faith,” nor is it “Lord, if you have enough strength.” It is “Lord, if it be your will, take this thing away. Remove this chain that seems so to bind me to this world’s grief; take from me this oppressive thorn that remains in my side and fills me with excruciating pain every time I move. If it be possible to do that, Lord, and still accomplish your best, then, Lord, please take it away. But, Lord, if that thorn, if that chain, if that thing that I would have removed is your vessel to bring life to those who are in darkness, if that thorn is part of your plan, Lord, please don’t take it away. Your will, your will, your will...be done.”

If you have been struggling or suffering or sighing and have lost your sense of thanksgiving for who God is and what God has done and what God is doing even through that hurt or pain, Beloved, when last did you visit Gethsemane?

The story goes on:

He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. Matthew 26:42

And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Luke 22:43,44

I do not believe any man has ever prayed with the intensity with which Jesus prayed that day. Oh, what lessons we can learn from *how* He prayed that day. Prayer is hard work. Prayer is spiritual warfare. Prayer is the process of remaining in place, holding up the Word of Life in defense of the tactics of the evil one, and having done all, to stand.

Do you know what Satan wants prayer to become? Satan wants prayer to become a spiritual experience. Satan is after some form of prayer process that makes the Christian feel good. Satan’s definition of worship is that which warms the heart, excites the soul, and gives you a giddy feeling. A hot fudge sundae can do that! Prayer isn’t God’s tool to make man feel spiritual; prayer is man, standing in the gap before a Holy God, lifting up the banner of His Word, and holding fast to the reality of His Will no matter what the enemy brings his way.

Sweat drops of blood falling. Does that sound like fun and games? Like something the Father was doing to make Jesus

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happy? Not on your life. He was standing before the Father while the bullets of eternity were flying to His left and to His right. This was God in the trenches. You ask me why? Ask Him. Ask Him why the King of Kings and Lord of Lords must suffer such agony of soul. Ask Him. His answer will still be the same. Through tears of grief and anguish He will answer, “For you, my child, for you”. When last did you visit Gethsemane? I promise, when you come away, it will be Thanksgiving Day in your heart.

* * * * *

We have spent a great deal of time in the Garden with Jesus, because what took place on the Hill took place because of Gethsemane. It was on that Hill that Victory’s song was sung; but it was in that garden that the battle was won.

In Gethsemane, the mantle of choice was given to the Father by the Son. On Calvary, the Father demonstrated once and for all just how perfect real love really is.

Time does not permit us to walk with Jesus before the high priest, before Caiaphas, or before Pilate. Were there ten thousand hours to walk that walk again with the Master, the hours would be too few to adequately visualize just what He did on our behalf, what abuse He took, what pain He bore. The purpose of this message is to paint once and for all, indelibly upon our consciences, the need to regularly visit the Hill. Our goal is to take our ungrateful spirits back to that Garden and then to that Cross, where ingratitude melts into grief and self-centeredness dissolves in an ocean of praise. The reason for this study is to remind us that regular visits to Calvary are the Master Physician’s prescription to help us develop a thankful heart.

* * * * *

The scene now shifts to that infamous day outside the Praetorium where Pilate has summoned from the Temple the Sanhedrinists and others. The custom had been that at Passover time the Roman Governor would release to the Jewish people some notorious prisoner who was condemned to die. Pilate’s assumption, which grossly overlooked the spiritual implications of the hour, was that the populace would choose to release this one whose claim it was to be the Son of God, this one about whom it was said, “He was a King whose Kingdom had not yet

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come.” Pilate was dead wrong. We take up reading at that point.

Pilate then went out unto them, and said, What accusation bring ye against this man? John 18:29

Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:

John 18:31

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?

John 18:33

Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done? John 18:35

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. John 18:37,38

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.

John 19:1

Reading now in Matthew, chapter 27 beginning at verse 15,

Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would.

And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.

Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ?

For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him.

But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.

The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.

Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus

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which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.

And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.

Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children. Matthew 27:15-25

And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews?

And they cried out again, Crucify him.

Mark 15:12,13

Given an opportunity, the world will always crucify Jesus. What He is, they cannot be. What He gives, they cannot receive. Who He is, they cannot believe. Therefore, given the choice between justifying evil and exalting righteousness, the world will always justify sin...always. But this second stage of our visit to the Hill, though brief, is to make sure that we see that though human instrumentality at the hands of the Deceiver demanded His death, those shouts of “crucify Him” outside the Praetorium that day were not the death knoll for the Master. The Jewish leaders did not sign His death warrant. His own Father did.

Human reasoning cannot grasp that fact. The Cross makes no sense to the natural mind. It is foolishness. It is a stone of stumbling. Why the Eternal God, who created heaven and earth would sacrifice His own Son on the altar at the hands of a group of jealous Jewish antagonists cannot be answered in any manner to satisfy the natural mind. There had to be a sacrifice or man could not be saved. The sacrifice had to be perfect, a lamb without spot or blemish, one who had never sinned. There were none. None, that is, except Jesus.

Only the sinless one could settle the sin question once and for all. So in the glories of eternity past, the Father, Son, and Spirit had of one accord agreed on what had to be done if man was to be born again.

Only Jesus could do it. That is why that incident in the garden was the key to what He did. Caiaphas had no power, save what the Father had given him. Pilate had no power, save what

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the Father had given him. The Sanhedrin had no power, save what the Father had given them. No one took Jesus' life; He gave it away. He so loved. Remember what love is? Love is God giving Himself away. God, by essence of His being, so gives Himself away, that He by nature of who He is was compelled to give His only begotten Son so that the decision of whether to live or to die, to face heaven or hell, would now rest solely with man. Now because of God's unfailing love, whosoever believeth on Him, will not perish, but have everlasting life.⁹

Time will only permit us instantaneous flashbacks, momentary mini-scenes, if you will, as the drama of the ages unfolds. But walk along with me for only a moment or two and see what can be seen only through the eyes of the Word. Just listen as God's Spirit describes for you what God did for you, as once more, you visit the Hill. Please try to imagine as you go the Master saying, over and over and over, "I did it for you. I did it for you."

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!

And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head.

And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him.

Matthew 27:27-31

When last did you visit the Hill? When last did you see God in human form being treated with the contempt and scorn of a dog so that you could one day reign over angels? When last did you visualize the King of Kings and Lord of Lords wearing a crown of thorns while lowly fools mocked Him and spit on Him, and crowned the eternal deity with laughter and scorn? When last did you visit the Hill? Can you watch this, and hear this, and see this and not fall to your knees blinded like Paul on the Damascus road so that you can see nothing, hear nothing, want nothing, ever again but Jesus? We must constantly visit the Hill.

⁹ John 3:16

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And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of a skull, which is called in the Hebrew Golgotha:

John 19:17

And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God.

And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,

And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.

Luke 23:33-37

Oh, Beloved, He could have. He was not held there by nails but by love. He could have *but spoken* and legions of angels would have filled the skies; the mountains would have quaked; the hills burst forth into singing; the trees of the fields would have clapped their hands, and the earth in a moment would have swallowed up His accusers like swarming ants on their way to their destruction. He could have.

But if He had, you and I would have died in our sins. If He had, you and I would have been sentenced, and justly so, to an eternity in hell where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies. He could have come down, and the tongues that wagged their taunting cries would have been silenced, never again to raise their jeering voices against the Creator God. He could have saved Himself; but then He couldn't have saved you; then He couldn't have saved me. And that, Beloved, is the choice He made in the garden that day as His favored few slept the hour away.

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Matthew 27:45,46

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith,

When Last Did You Visit the Hill?

I thirst.

Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

John 19:28-30

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

Luke 23:46

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent;

And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,

And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.

Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.

Matthew 27:51-54

It was the Son of God indeed. He who knew no sin *became sin* that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. He who was in the form of God, who thought it not robbery to be equal with God, had made Himself *nothing*, so that you and I, wretched, rebellious, fallen man, might be exalted to the place of Kings, and given the honor and glory that was designed for Him.

He became nothing that we might have everything. He tasted death that we might be guaranteed life. He tasted sin that we might be freed from the clutches of that sin and the penalty of that sin, for all eternity.

And you ask, “What do I have to be thankful for?”

If ever you ask that question again, I must answer it with another question: “When last did you visit the hill?”

When Last Did You Visit the Hill?

WHEN LAST DID YOU VISIT THE HILL?

When last did you visit the Hill?
When last did you cry within
As you watched the Living Son of God
Bearing the load of your sin?

When last did that garden you see,
Where Jesus, in anguish of soul,
Saw sweat drops of blood fall from His brow
As the weight of our sin took its toll?

When last did you watch as the King,
A mock, thorny crown on His Head,
Hear the multitudes cry: "Crucify Him!
We'll take Barabbas instead!"

When last did you walk by the way
As He trudged 'neath the load up that hill,
Knowing, that though that Cross crushed Him so,
Our sins would be heavier still?

When last did you watch from afar
As they nailed our great God to that tree,
And watched as He bled, and watched as He died;
God died! For you, and for me?

When last did you fall to your knees,
As you watched the transaction take place,
And acknowledge that never again must your mind
That memory, that picture erase?

Oh, Christian, give thanks, from morning to night;
In everything, give praises still,
For nothing but praise should spring from your lips
When once more you have been to "The Hill".

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When Last Did You Visit the Hill?

A Challenge to Further Study and Application

Consider scheduling a day once a month or once a quarter when you and your family regularly “visit The Hill”.

Make it a day of quiet recognition and thanksgiving. Assign the children (or other adults) passages of Scripture to meditate on for the day. The verses in this lesson can serve as a beginning.

One such assignment might be to write Jesus a personal letter, thanking Him for being willing to suffer such agony at Gethsemane; such ridicule before the Jewish leaders; such pain and such grief over being separated from the Father on that Cross. Ask each member of the family to write such a letter, and after supper, gather around and read those letters and pray together.

Make it a practice in your family, when complaining and murmuring and the absence of a grateful spirit surfaces, to gather together again and “visit The Hill”; humbly recognizing that nothing we might suffer here is significant in the light of that Cross.

Start a notebook or a card file of verses that deal with the crucifixion and the sacrifice God made for our sins. Divide them according to what facet of His character they most magnify; His grace, His love; His mercy; His power; His knowledge; His justice. Integrate them into your regular daily study of the character of God, so that what He did for us will amplify for us who He is.

Do not remain at the Cross. We are not to worship the Cross. But we are to visit the Cross frequently enough for our hearts to be filled with gratitude and awe at the price a Holy God paid to rescue sinful man and bring us to Himself. Live in the victory that is yours because of the empty tomb; but live with the thankfulness that is yours because you have been to the Hill.

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