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# salt&light

1st Quarter 2013

WWJD

...AND HOW DO YOU KNOW

PEGGY DRINKARD

PLUS:

2CITIES CHURCH

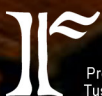
IDENTITY THEFT

INFANT SACRIFICE: ABORTION AND RADICAL FEMINISM

WARREN BUFFETT AND THE HUMBLE CHRISTIAN

SESAME STREET AND A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

US FREE CANADA \$2.50  
a quarterly  
publication  
of  
Riverwood  
Presbyterian Church  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama  
[www.riverwoodchurch.org](http://www.riverwoodchurch.org)



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A PUBLICATION OF  
RIVERWOOD  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

501 Rice Valley Road North  
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35406

Member church of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)  
[www.riverwoodchurch.org](http://www.riverwoodchurch.org)

# FROM THE EDITOR

As I write this, it is raining outside my window. It is a cold rain, and it has seemed endless this winter. It isn't. Spring will come, but now we need diversion, and in the nick of time, a new issue of Salt & Light appears. So get a hot cup of coffee or cocoa, your favorite chair, revel in warmth and dryness, and read and consider the thoughts of your fellow members of Riverwood.

Our lead article, *WWJD....And How Do You Know?* is by Peggy Drinkard, our Director of Children's Ministries. Peggy looks at the recent "What Would Jesus Do" fad and considers how we can extrapolate the words and events of Jesus' life into the 21st Century dynamic, and the ways we can go very wrong doing so. It will give you much to think about.

Riverwood has always been a missions-minded church, and in this issue, we present two looks at our missionaries. Earl Adams and his wife Rosie, have just retired from long service on Peru and Bolivia. Earl writes of how his efforts were enhanced by others God sent to serve humbly beside him.

The second article is by Parker Johnson, a former student who attended Riverwood and who is now an ordained minister involved in a church plant in downtown Montgomery. In *2Cities Church*, we get an inside look at the start of a new church. You even get a prayer list so you can take part in the work of God at 2Cities church.

Who are we? What will we be known for? What will our legacy be? Pastor Tim Lien explores these topics and more in *Identity Theft*, a look at who he has tried to be and who he really is. You will find much to consider regarding your own identity as you read.

Robert DeWitt, senior writer for the Tuscaloosa News, has contributed a piece he recently wrote for the newspaper, *Infant Sacrifice: Abortion and Radical Feminism*. Robert speaks to the reality of 55 million babies whose lives have been taken and cites a strange ally who agrees that it really is murder, not just semantics. It's a must read.

Dr. Robert Thornton, in *Warren Buffett and the Humble Christian*, writes of the motivation and philosophy of philanthropy and the gifts God accepts. It speaks to our own giving, and to our heart attitude in our giving.

Eric Venable, our assistant minister, considers his daughter's fascination with Sesame Street, in *Sesame Street and a Christian Worldview*. It is an interesting look by a Christian father at the on-going desire for Christian values for his children.

The *Finale* speaks of looking for Jesus and features a beautiful poem by George Herbert, *Redemption*, about finding Him.

Happy Reading.

# WWJD...AND HOW DO YOU KNOW?

By Peggy Drinkard

You might remember the WWJD (What would Jesus do?) fad of a few years back featuring WWJD bracelets, necklaces, T-shirts, etc. I do not doubt that the good man who originally wrote the tract or book suggesting the use of this searching question was well intentioned and accomplished a good purpose. As I understand it, that was many, many years ago, and to everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven. My problem when attempting to pose this question to myself in the face of a uncertainty is that the honest answer is so often, "I don't know."

If a temptation enters my mind to steal something, I don't need to ask WWJD? The scriptures are straightforward on that issue. Neither do I need to pose it when being tempted to say something cutting or insensitive to my elderly mother. There, it is in black and white; "honor thy father and thy mother." (To be perfectly honest, I sometimes dicker about the nuances of the fifth commandment...there are times I'm not sure how to do it right. I usually ask myself then how I want to be honored by my own sons.) I find it's always those trickier, grayish looking issues that tend to tempt one to resort to WWJD, and for those, I see a real danger in asking that little question; I just might substitute my imaginary Jesus and what he would do for the real one. When I read through the Gospels one of the more notable features is how often those nearest and dearest to Jesus were shocked by the things he did and said. Do I think I can do better?

When I must shop at Wal-Mart it is usually on Thursday afternoons. A few weeks back as I was walking through the parking lot a disheveled-looking

woman approached me and said, "Ma'am, I'm Mary Jane Smith, (name changed, of course,) from Gordo. My mother had a stroke this morning and I had to bring her up here to Druid City Hospital and I wonder if you could give me a few dollars for gas so that I can get back home?" I never carry cash and explained that to her with, "I'm sorry." It did pop into my mind that I could ask her to meet me at the gas station across from Wal-Mart and use my debit card to get the gas, but I was slow of foot on that one and she didn't seem too interested beyond "I have no cash" so I let it go.

**I see a real danger in asking WWJD; I just might substitute my imaginary Jesus and what he would do for the real one.**

The following week as I entered the same parking lot, there she was, approaching another woman a few cars down. Hmmmm....could be a pattern. Then lo and behold, yesterday as I was walking toward the Wal-Mart entrance yet again, a poor excuse for a car came rattling up and stopped beside me. Sure enough, it was her. She rolled down her window and said, "Ma'am, can I ask you a favor? I'm from Gordo and this morning my mother had a stroke and I had to bring her up here to Druid City Hospital and...." I cut her off right there. My first impulse was to say, "Why, Mary Jane, do you realize that your mother has a stroke every Thursday morning?" but instead I looked her squarely in the eye and said, "You just told me this exact same story two weeks ago." "That wasn't me..." she said. "Yes, it was you," said I, never breaking eye contact. She put her car in gear and drove on.

When I tell this, I do so with some shame. It has crossed my mind more than once that, whatever her story or motive, Mary Jane is obviously a needy woman. Her clothes and car give that much away.



And while I don't know what Jesus would do, I'm pretty sure he wouldn't be a smart aleck or just go on his way, either. I think he would address Mary Jane at the point of her real, truest need, which, in his wisdom, he would know. This is where WWJD fails me. Looking into hearts is a gift I don't possess.

But let me think. What DO I know? On the one hand, He said to be wise as serpents, and I resent the fact that when someone like Mary Jane looks at me she seems to see the word "mark" written across my forehead in neon. Things like this happen to me often enough to know something in my demeanor implies "soft touch." On the other hand, Jesus says to be harmless as doves. Being rude or making her feel like less than someone made in God's image can't be right either. As I pondered these things during my devotions a few things came to mind.

I am not enamored of the "name it and claim it" stream of evangelicalism. The people who defend the practice of "claiming God's promises" so often go astray. There's presumption that almost any Scripture can be considered a promise and one made to anyone and everyone. No context...no need for exegesis, just "abracadabra." I think of the story I heard of a Florida pastor who, with his wife, laid hands on a pricey Mercedes Benz at a car dealership and "claimed" it for themselves in Jesus' name.

After all, Psalm 37 says to "delight yourself in the Lord," and "he shall give thee the desires of thy heart." I suppose a verse like that is the basis of the notion that we can have a Mercedes if that is what we desire...but what of the prerequisite? Do we truly delight ourselves in God? Is He the sum of all our desires...the satisfaction of all our longings? When He is, I imagine the desires of our heart are met right then and there at His feet, not at the car dealership.

Nonetheless, God's word is true and reliable, and I feel reasonably safe in applying the truth of James's words in chapter one, verse five. He says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." While he continues with qualifications

concerning the solidity of our belief that God can and is willing to do this, I take this word to heart. God is a good father. He wants to share His wisdom with His children. He's not stingy or aggravated that we are lacking in it, and we need to ask Him for it. As it happened, I was reading the last few chapters of Romans when I asked for wisdom about Mary Jane. I didn't recollect anything there that would be particularly applicable, but I plunged ahead, and I found I was wrong.

In Romans, chapter ten, Paul discusses his longing for the salvation of his fellow Israelites. It seems in all his relationships, Paul's chief concern was the state of men's souls. That alone is instructive, because I am afraid that is not always my concern in my encounters with fellow human beings. If my spiritual eyes were more open, I would, no doubt, see what is at stake for everyone I encounter...the destiny of their being. This understanding is a restraint on any temptation to be flippant or careless. As C. S. Lewis said, "You have never met a mere mortal." Chapter 10 also reveals that God is not a respecter of persons, so neither should I be. "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Rich, poor, sneaky or guileless, all of us have the same, and only, need, choice and chance...salvation through Jesus. Paul explains, though, that belief comes by hearing, so how can someone be saved if they haven't heard the gospel? While I don't think evangelism is my strong suit or my spiritual gift, I still have an obligation to somehow or other proclaim Christ to the lost. This includes the lost who may not even want to hear. Romans 10:20, "I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me."

Chapter 11 instructs me that God is persistent in his love and wooing of His chosen ones. He is good in His nature, and yet He is severe. This precludes any pride on my part about my own standing with Christ, and again, alerts me to the situation of those outside of Him.

One of my favorite Bible teachers was a wonderful

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man who traveled to the University of Oklahoma in Norman from Dallas early every Saturday morning to instruct a rag-tag group of hippie Christians, or “Jesus freaks,” in the book of Romans. I could, and probably should, devote an entire article to the late Russ McKnight and his improbable and wise teaching. One thing I will always remember from Romans 12 was his shorthand explanation of verses 1 through 3. He told us that presentation, plus transformation, equals revelation. In other words, when we give ourselves to God, and our obedience grows, we will grow in our wisdom and insight into God and His ways. I have found this “presentation” cannot be a one-time thing, but something we do over and over, for we do love to possess ourselves! But this promise of growing wisdom and knowledge of God is a great encouragement when we feel the weight of our insufficiency. The remainder of Chapter 12 exhorts us to be kind, patient, earnest, and fervent in serving Christ, while rejoicing in hope and continuing continually in prayer. The last two verses tell us that, even with our enemies, we are to overcome evil with good. It’s safe to say I can find some applications here to my Mary Jane dilemma.


If that were not enough, reading on into Chapters 13 and 14 I am reminded that, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,” and “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” Paul tells us our time here is short, that we are to regard the weaknesses of others and shape our response accordingly, for “every one of us must give and account of himself to God.”

In Chapter 15 I am reminded that life is not about pleasing ourselves. When I encounter Mary Jane, it is so easy to be thinking of myself. I need to ask myself what is good for HER. That may or may not entail granting her requests, but the changed motive alone should help guide me. Referring to his ministry to the Gentiles, Paul reminds us of the humility and gratitude we should possess in light of our salvation, a disposition that cannot but affect how we regard others.

In the final chapter of Romans, Chapter 16, you

may recall that Paul painstakingly sends regards to the various individuals and households in Rome. I am struck with how he seems to labor not to leave out anyone. He calls them by name, and he usually recounts some fact or the other about each one, usually referring to some good thing they have done in serving Christ and helping in his ministry. This tells me that individuals matter to Paul. He wants them to know this, and to know he thinks of them particularly. He doesn’t forget his history with them. This helps me to see how I should regard people. I shouldn’t look at them as “teenagers” or “new moms” or “the elderly” or “beggars.”

I should, instead, see Billy who lives with his uncle, who’s a believer, or Jane, who brought me a meal when I was sick, or Mrs. Johnson who lives across from my mom and seems lonely, or Mary Jane, who hangs out at Wal-Mart on Thursdays.

I know, more than anyone that I have not “arrived.” The guidance I receive from Romans today may not address tomorrow’s uncertainties and may not answer “What would Jesus do?” for each new conundrum that presents itself. But I also know that God is good, that He promises to give me daily bread (whatever I need for each day,) and that He wants to give me wisdom. Proverbs reminds us, though, that wisdom has to sought like hidden treasure. This involves desire, openness, and (the part we tend to avoid) study, work and thought. But I am going to take God at his word from James; “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” I hope, then, I can stand before Him unashamed when I am called to give Him an account of my dealings with the Mary Janes’ His providence brings across my path. 

*Peggy Drinkard is the Children’s Director at Riverwood Presbyterian Church. You may contact her at [pdrinkard@riverwoodchurch.org](mailto:pdrinkard@riverwoodchurch.org).*

# THE PRIVILEGE OF SERVICE

## Humble Participation in the Work of God

by Earl Adams

*[Earl and Rosie Adams served many years on the foreign mission field in South America. After Earl's retirement, he thought back on the many servants God sent to Earl and Rosie to assist in carrying out His commission.]*

One of the wonders of God is that He allows us who have been saved by His grace through faith in Christ alone to have the privilege of serving Him in any way in which it might be pleasing to Him. It is just incredible that He has chosen to use weak instruments like us to be among His ambassadors. To be saved, to be called, and to be sent by the Living God is evidence of His amazing grace in our lives.

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, made it clear that it is not because we are sufficient, but because God is all-sufficient, is the reason His mission is being accomplished. It is not because of us, but rather it is He Who lives in us that is bringing forth fruit for His Kingdom.

Another great blessing from the Lord is that He provides help for us all along the way. It has certainly been so throughout my life. He sent people to help us understand the Gospel, to witness to us, to pray for us, to disciple us, to encourage us, etc. We certainly saw Him provide help while we were on the mission field in Peru and in Bolivia. We would never have been able to see the Lord do what He did were it not for all the help that was provided.

For example, we are so thankful to the Lord for bringing Juan and Casiana into our lives when we first arrived in Peru. Juan was a believer, but Casiana was not. However, little by little the Holy Spirit worked in her and gave her the gift of saving faith in Christ Jesus. That couple worked alongside us all the time that we were in Peru. Juan was just an humble, poorly educated Quechua man, that had a servant heart, and he desired to be used of the Lord in any

and every way that he could make himself available. Juan went with me to every Bible study that we had during the week, and sometimes that was five times a week. He labored as a deacon, cared for the people, encouraged us, did carpentry work, gardened, served as caretaker for us and for the church, and helped with maintenance and construction. He never grumbled, never complained, and he never looked for credit or praise from men. His character and his honesty made him an admirable role model for others in the church and community. By his presence alone, he opened doors and gave me credibility that never would have happened otherwise.

Casiana worked several days a week with Rosie in the house. She cooked, cleaned house, helped with children, and looked after her own family. She became a very gifted Sunday School teacher, and she loved to teach God's Word to the children. She was a dear and trusted friend to Rosie.

Juan and Casiana continue to work with Keith Powlison, the Hinterland

Director, and his wife, Ruth, there in Cusco, Peru. Their zeal for, and joy in the Lord has never waned.

There are many more examples of God's faithfulness during the years we were missionaries that could be shared to give Him praise and honor, but this is one example that will hopefully cause you to rejoice and to commit your way unto the Lord so that He can guide, provide, and use you as His humble servant as well. "To God be the Glory." ¶

**We would never have been able to see the Lord do what He did were it not for all the help that He provided.**

*Earl Adams has retired from his work as a missionary in South America. He currently resides in Jackson, MS and serves as an Assistant Pastor at First Presbyterian Church. He can be reached at earlandrosie@msn.com.*

# 2CITIES CHURCH

## Church Planting in Alabama's Capital City

by Parker Johnson

When I left for the University in 2003, I was vaguely aware that downtown Montgomery existed. I attended several dances downtown each year and only made it back home because of the hand-drawn map provided by my parents. It had the reputation of being the place you could go if you wanted to get shot. People worked downtown, but only because their companies had not yet relocated out east to the very edge of the city of Montgomery. Entire blocks stood condemned and the only nightlife near the city's fountain was the kind that could get you in serious trouble with the law.

In 2004, however, things started to turn around for the Capital City; the Montgomery Biscuits minor league baseball team came to town. What downtown Montgomery desperately needed had come: an anchor near the river to serve as a catalyst for development. The downtown area slowly started to change, and picked up much speed in 2009 when the "Alley" entertainment district finally came to fruition. Since then, the cityscape has begun to change at a very steady clip.

Alongside new restaurants and businesses, new residential opportunities opened up, especially as several companies took a rather risky gamble and developed loft space in several of the abandoned, historic buildings. It was into one of these that my wife and I moved when we returned to Montgomery in April, 2011. I still often marvel at the progress that has been made in the downtown area.

God cares about the city; we started in a garden, but will end up in a city. Historically, the elders would sit in the city gates and render justice on the behalf of the oppressed. Still to this day, the poor and marginalized gather in cities to combine their resources. Cities,

including our Capital City, are the centers of government, culture, religion, social innovation, and education. As goes the city, so goes the countryside (eventually). Now, more so than any other time in history, people are leaving the countryside and moving to the city, opening up more doors for ministry and evangelism.

However, as with many historic cities, the church and its people have long fled downtown Montgomery.

Driven by social and economic concerns, some legitimate and many very bad ones, the city has been largely neglected by the Church and both have suffered. With the renewal of downtown Montgomery, it was time for that to change. Enter *2Cities Church*.

Brian MacDonald, the senior and founding pastor of *2Cities*, began the church with only three other people in his living room roughly three

years ago. Their vision was to see a gospel-centered church planted in downtown Montgomery that would be committed to the renewal of Montgomery spiritually, physically, socially, and culturally. Their strategy was simple, but costly: move into the area as families and incarnate themselves among a largely unreached demographic while creating a worshipping community that would be on a mission: to declare and demonstrate the love of Christ in word and deed.

Fast-forward three years, and the Lord has blessed that vision. We have been worshipping publicly for two and half years and the Lord continues to bring laborers to join us in this work. We have seen lives changed, sinners converted, many baptisms, and a church come into being that seeks to see the gospel proclaimed to a city center that is at the same time the "Cradle of the Confederacy" and the "Birthplace

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of the Civil Rights Movement.”

Much work remains to be done. As we are praying for revival for not just downtown Montgomery, but the whole city, we are seeking to fully plant *2Cities Church*.

It has been claimed that “*Planting new churches is the most effective evangelistic methodology known under heaven.*” Why would anyone make that claim? Here are a few reasons:

- Churches under five years of age are 8 times more likely to see conversions than established churches.
- New Christians attract non-believers to services 5-10 times more than a long-time Christian.
- The average new church gains 60-80% of its people from those who are not attending any worshipping body (unchurched/dechurched)

Whom are we reaching? We can speak of our target people group in two ways, geographically and demographically. Geographically, *2Cities Church* has a parish model: we are seeking to reach those who live, work, and play in downtown Montgomery and the two neighborhoods on either side to the east and west. In order to do this, many of our people have

moved into these key areas and became literally a part of the community. While we love for people to join us who do not live within these boundaries, we are concentrated, for ministry purposes, on these three areas.

Demographically, we have focused on young creatives and postmodern professionals, the majority of whom do not feel as though they fit in more established churches. We are seeking to engage the culture in downtown Montgomery through participation in the arts and through deeds of mercy as we proclaim the only hope of man: the great gospel of Christ.

Please pray for *2Cities Church*, especially as we look to 2013 to be a very crucial year in the life of our church.

- Pray for laborers to join us. Especially needed: established families, evangelists, and nursery workers
- Pray for conversions
- Pray for the men nominated to be elders, who will be taking part in a 9-month apprenticeship this year.
- Pray for the finances of the church



*Parker Johnson is the Assistant Pastor at 2Cities Church (PCA) in Montgomery, AL. He is married to Kristy and they have one son, Thomas. He was an associate member of Riverwood while attending the University from 2003-2007. You can follow the Lord's work at 2Cities Church at [www.2Cities.org](http://www.2Cities.org).*





# IDENTITY THEFT

## How I Lost Myself and then Became Me

by Tim Lien

I lost myself. Or was it identity theft? It certainly wasn't amnesia. I knew my name, my address, my social security number, and my mother's maiden name, but somehow I had misplaced myself. How embarrassing. How does a person lose what they can't escape from? And to make things more difficult, how does one "find" what is already right there in front of them? And why has it happened so many times? Occasionally losing your keys seems reasonable, but when it happens every week perhaps a healthy evaluation is in order.

Let me back up bit. Well, maybe, further than a bit.

The epic quest to find myself began in Mrs. Johnson's kindergarten class. "What do you want to *be* when you grow up?" she sweetly asked, "Draw a picture." To *be*. I knew then, that I was already behind. I wasn't. But I *could* be. I *would* be. *Hopefully*, I would *be*. Not now, but someday. Poor future-Tim. Everything relied on the questionable decisions of a 5 year-old.

The class busily crayoned their future selves: teachers, firemen, policemen, artists, scientists. The pictures smiled, except for Daniel's masked bank robber. But even then, there was purpose and *being* wrapped up in his gun and bag-o'-cash. We weren't, but we could be. It would just take some tweaking, some searching, some finding.

"Whoever finds his life will lose it," He said.

In an attempt to be inspiring, the Older Ones gushed, "You can *be* whoever/whatever you want to *be*!" It was a long time until I realized that their enthusiasm stemmed from a great sadness, like an ex-drug addict on the school-assembly circuit. And instead of narrowing down the possibilities, the limitless choices began to crush any real hope of selecting the right one. Who will I *be*? Who *am* I? The odds seemed fairly decent when someone said, "Pick a number, one through ten." But what happens when they *inspire* you with *more* choices? "Pick a number, one through a million."

The stalwart ones pick a number and decide to follow

it through. "Well, I *do* like numbers, so I guess I'll *be* an accountant." "Hey, I love being active; I *am* a football player." "I've always *wanted* children; *being* a mom just makes sense." The more introspective (or panic-stricken) ones want to get it perfect. "I'll pick a number and try it on. If it doesn't work, I'll pick another." No one wants to *be* someone they shouldn't be.

I was the latter. How could I find identity, uniqueness—that every-snowflake-is-different kind of identity? How would I know when I found it? Would there be an inaudible alarm?

The best thing to do is try, and sometimes you don't know you are even trying. In sixth grade we were given an assignment: write a story using your spelling words. "I'll read the best one out loud," my teacher announced. I did the assignment. To my surprise, my teacher began reading my story to the class. Intrigue, mystery, explosions—a real who-done-it. The feedback was surprising. "That was awesome," the class tough-guy said. With this endorsement, it became sixth grade fact at Brethren Elementary School.

Maybe I was a writer. "I *am* a writer," I thought. "I think I may have found something here."

"Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it," He said.

In ninth grade I wrote a short-fiction piece. My teacher liked it and sent it to the school district. They liked it, too, and encouraged me to enter it into Disney's Young Writer Contest. I did and a gold-embossed letter arrived in the mail. Congratulationsyouhavebeenselectedasasemifinalist, it said, Youareinvitedtoournationalawardsceremony. "They see it, too," I thought, "I *am* a writer."

I have a friend who attended a prestigious academic university. He said that it was easy to find identity in being the smartest person in high school, but it was harder to find that same kind of identity among the nation's brightest. When he went to college, he suddenly became average. That's what happened to

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me. There were 100 better writers at Disney’s Young Writer’s Contest. I didn’t win anything, and the winners had poetic steroids in their pens. Maybe I wasn’t a writer. Who wants “above-average writer” as an identity? Not me.

Pick a number, one through a million. Find out who you *are*.

“I’ll be smart at everything, then,” I thought, “That’s who I’ll be.” I enrolled in a school where they offered International Baccalaureate classes, Advanced Placement classes, and a unique technology magnet program. My first year, I made a calculator from a mass of wires, transistors, resistors, and a keypad. I took an AP biology class with a bunch of seniors. “Maybe I *am* a scholar.”

But even scholars are not unique, especially when they see that a GPA of 4.5, is just good enough for a class rank of #30. Who remembers 30? Name the 30<sup>th</sup> best football program in the country last year. “There’s only one number 30,” my mom said. Thanks, mom.

Perhaps I had missed something—something obvious. Who *was* I?

Somebody noticed that I was tall, and said, “You should go out for the basketball team.” Nothing changes your social status more noticeably than wearing a uniform in high school. I wasn’t 30<sup>th</sup>. I was one of five. My odds had improved, and so had the external recognition. Maybe I *was* a basketball player.

This one was tougher to shake. When people start identifying you *as* an athlete, it’s harder to denounce it. In interviews with athletic legends, they speak of not knowing who they *are* when they finally age out of the League. Who am I when I am not still throwing touchdowns? Do I still have to *be* the *memory* of me? Even if I acquired some gleaming hardware along the way, will that be the sum of who I am—that chiseled 24 year-old with a good arm? The same thing happens with retired professionals that saunter back to the old office. “How’s it going?” they say wanting to be a part of what identified them for years. “Why does he want to be *here*?” the office politely thinks to themselves.

But it’s easier for the less-than-great—the ones who spread out and fill all the second, third, and small-college divisions. These are the ones who are smart enough to see that going to the League is simply a physical impossibility. I *am not* a basketball player. This happened to me my junior year in college.

Pick a number, one through a million. And you really shouldn’t have wasted so much time playing basketball.

Maybe I *was* a leader—a spiritual leader. My increased hungering after God must have meant something. The Double AA, farm-team equivalent for spirituality is youth work. I started there. Maybe I would find myself by serving— by teaching kids the forgotten value of morals. Promotions can really mess with your identity. With just a seminary degree and some enthusiasm, people can call you a pastor. “I *am* a pastor.”

An incredibly cute and wonderful woman can make you think, “I *am* a husband.” A howling little alien bursting into the hospital room slaps you with some more identity: “I *am* a dad,” you suppose.

“Yes, that’s nice,” you might say, “those are good things.” And they are. But they create more problems. If you are going to find *identity* in them, if you are going to say, “That defines me. That’s who I *am*,” then it better work out for you. But what if it doesn’t? What if the woman who says “I *am* a mom,” finds out that her kids don’t listen, make horrible choices, and end up not marrying who they should have? What then? Well, that identity didn’t work out. It can cut pretty deeply when you’ve put all your energy in one place.

What if you’ve said “I *am* a pastor. This *is* me,” and then you discover that you are not even a particularly great one. What if the number of people you let down increases every year? What if the whatifs are not whatifs, but true?

Pick a number, one through a million. But now you’re tired and life is half over.

“But what should I say, if they ask me your name?” asked Moses. “I AM,” came the reply.

Solutions abound for what moderns call the “identity crisis.” What makes me, me? Is it a job, a title, a sex, an orientation, a country, a history?

Specialization is a favorite way to find identity. What better way to find unique identity than to burrow into arcane niches, disciplines, and tastes? The academic finds a neglected 15<sup>th</sup> century poet. The biologist separates himself from his peers by studying one cell. The botanist finds a curious Amazonian plant and becomes *the* authority. The surgeon concentrates on one procedure to one organ. The musician sniffs at Coltrane and cites a regular trumpet in a Louisiana honky-tonk. The theologian nitpicks and nuances until he finds original air. The mom finds an exhaustive combination of soy milk-no television-homeschooled-whole grains-low sugar guaranteed to separate herself from the mindless pack of other non-vigilant moms. The hipster keeps trekking through obscurity to find forgotten trivia. Bake it thoroughly and the resultant cake promises to be special. Maybe unique. Maybe identity-worthy. Or maybe not. I heard a comedian say once, “Dating must be tough in China, even if you are one-in-a-million, there’s always a thousand guys just like you.”

But specialization is often just pride with an important-looking badge. And pride is never original. Jake Smith croons it better than me:

*/They all strive to deviate from the norm/  
/But collectively swarm to be all the same/*

In fact, when one specializes too much, instead of gaining identity, they lose it to the very thing they sought to master. In his novel, *The Brothers K*, David James Duncan describes the descent into specialization:

Technical obsession is like an unlit, ever-narrowing mine shaft leading straight down through the human mind. The deeper down one plunges, the more fabulous, and often the more remunerative, the gems or ore. But the deeper down one plunges, the more confined and conditioned one’s thoughts and movements become, and the greater the danger of permanently losing one’s way back

to the surface of the planet. There also seems to be an overpowering, malignant magic that reigns deep down in these shafts. And those who journey too far or stay down too long become its minions without knowing it – become not so much human beings as human tools wielded by whatever ideology, industry, force or idea happens to rule that particular mine. Another danger: because these mines are primarily mental, not physical, they do not necessarily mar or even mark the faces of those who have become utterly lost in them. A man or woman miles down, thrall to the magic, far beyond caring about anything still occurring on the planet’s surface, can sit down beside you on a park bench or bleacher seat, greet you in the street, shake your hand, look you in the eye, smile genially, say “How are you?” or “Merry Christmas!” or “How about those Yankees?” And you will never suspect that you are in the presence not of a kindred spirit, but of a subterranean force.

This is the penalty for finding identity in specialization: you may certainly find something new, but you quite literally lose yourself to the thing that you thought would define you.

There is another solution to the modern’s “identity crisis.” If specialization goes north, then herding runs south. If specialization seeks to find the minute and novel, herding finds something big and worthwhile to attach itself to. Something big, but something less big than God. This is a person who finds primary identity in something bigger than himself: “I am an American. I am an Alabama fan.” Sure, there are others just like you, but the idea of the greater establishes the personal identity of the lesser. This can manifest itself in many ways. Some people will join a cause that is national or global. “I am a vegetarian.” “I am a Republican.” “I am an advocate for child literacy.” Some of these identities are not-so-kind and difficult to surmount: “I am an abuse victim. I am a cancer-survivor. I am a criminal.” Being unable to change the past, makes forging an identity a difficult, if not impossible, task. If conventional wisdom tells you that you are a product of the past, then that is hardly a consoling piece of information.

## Perhaps I had missed something— something obvious. Who was I?

# The most severe crises demand the best answers, and Jesus found the lost me.

Yet another way to find yourself amongst the herd is to blend in with the right people. A person often finds an idealized group that they admire. Fraternities and gated communities are small examples. A person who identifies himself as a “people person” has honed this seemingly outward focus right back onto himself. “Good with people” is just shorthand for a superficial ability to evoke pleasant feelings in people back to your self. It is less about the people and more about your snazzy self being esteemed as nice, humorous, kind. Simply by maintaining the prized aesthetics (hygiene, fashion, taste) of the herd, a person can find that they “fit,” they belong, they *are* a middle-class suburbanite.

The problems with this sort of identity come when the problems come. Which is another way of saying: that when the herd does well, so does your identity, and when the herd suffers, your identity suffers. Notice the severe grief of people on the wrong side of an election. Notice the anguish of a person who describes themselves as “a huge fan,” when the team loses. Their identity and joy are tied closely to the outcomes of the herd. Surely, true identity cannot be that unstable.

“This is my Son in whom I am well pleased,” said the father.

Another solution to the modern’s “identity crisis,” is to delete the verb “to be.”

This was first suggested by D. David Bourland, the creator and advocate of ePrime English. Mr. Bourland saw problems with that insistent, tiny, overlooked verb of being. Am, are, were, is, was, be. The truly modern mind must free itself from all that “I am” talk, mused Bourland. He considered it to be “upsetting but useless self-talk.” Simply excising “to be” from our vocabulary would virtually “eliminate metaphysics in its present form,” he said. That pesky verb “to be” smacks of something beyond the physical. Bourland asserted that if we all conscientiously tried to work on kicking “to be” out of our sentences, we would not be removing identity, but rather establishing it upon something superior, namely our own feelings.

Thus, a person would not say: “I am sad,” but “It seems to my current perceptions that I possess feelings of sadness.” To Bourland, the first sentence is describing


an inappropriate soul-like state of personhood (which could be damaging, according to him), while the second sentence detaches your circumstance from identity description. This sounds noble, of course, but Mr. Bourland failed to see that blowing up the bridge that links circumstance and being, also diminishes the importance of both. A person has no referent for identity other than a name, and external actions become essentially meaningless. For example, there are no people who *are* bad, they just made some poor decisions. Hitler made an awful lot of poor decisions, we might say, but ePrime English reminds us to never assert that he *was* bad.

“I am who I am,” *He said to Moses.*

It’s hard to delete “to be,” without deleting God.

The most severe crises demand the best answers, and Jesus found the lost me. He seems to still find me when I still insist on trying to find myself. I am not a writer, nor a dad, nor a pastor. Sure, I do those things. But my first, most primary identity is elsewhere, offsite from me, where I can’t screw it up. “Who am I?” I ask myself on dark, depressing days, when my failures scream at me. “I am a son of God, made right by Jesus.” Yeah, that’s me. I lose myself in the work of another. A work that doesn’t age. A work that doesn’t get old. A work that doesn’t change. A work that is irrevocable. A work that doesn’t get all wrinkly and stops throwing touchdown passes. I am not defined by people’s disappointment or pleasure. I am not what the trophy case says. I am not what the embarrassing whispers say. I am His.

Who am I, above all and before all?

Martin Luther got it right when he said that “all humans are curved-in upon the self.” What/who can free us from finding ourselves? The One who finds us. Losing ourselves in Him, we find him...and our truest self— 30<sup>th</sup>, average writer, uncoordinated basketball player, mediocre dad, slow learning husband, struggling pastor...son of the Most High. 

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# INFANT SACRIFICE

## Abortion and Radical Feminism

by Robert DeWitt

Back when I was a kid, I went to see John Huston's "The Bible." There was a scene in it where it appeared people were throwing infants into a big roaring bonfire.

It made me think how often the Bible mentioned infant and child sacrifice. As gruesome as the practice seemed, it was hard to have a very visceral reaction to it. I thought that it was among the things in the Bible that had slipped from relevancy. After all, nobody sacrificed babies and children to idols and false gods anymore.

Later, I realized I was wrong. Infant sacrifice has reached unprecedented proportions. During the 40 years since the U.S. Supreme Court issued its Roe v. Wade ruling, an estimated 55 million children have been sacrificed to the false gods of radical feminism. So much for the irrelevancy of ancient barbarism.

The similarities between today's abortion proponents and the ancient pagans is striking. They placed greater value on sexual fertility and crop production than the lives of children. They burned their infants and slit their throats hoping that their gods would make them more prosperous by providing them with more children and more bushels of wheat or more livestock.

Today, with a greater degree of sophistication, people take the life inside the womb so that a woman has the opportunity to pursue a career and ambitions unimpeded by the necessity of caring for a child. People value sexual freedom and downright irresponsibility more than the lives of children.

Those who call their position pro-choice seek to

separate themselves from the barbarity of what they would grant the right to choose. One of them once told me, "nobody is in favor of abortion." They just want people to have it available to them as a choice. Odd that what no one favors has been done 55 million times.

I'm not going to dither around and call my position "pro-life" just to pretty it up and give it a semantic advantage; I'm anti-abortion. I'm not going to lie to

you and tell you that I have a raw, emotional response when I think about the "fetuses" killed in the procedure. I read the obituaries every day and I don't weep at the deaths of people I don't know.

But I don't pretend they aren't people. I don't try to claim their deaths aren't real because I didn't have a personal relationship with them. It's not necessary for me to

have an emotional reaction to the taking of an unborn life to know it's wrong.

For years the argument has been whether the being within the womb was really living. The pro-abortion side has typically engaged in linguistic and logical acrobatics to arrive at a point where removing it wasn't really killing it.

But at least one member of the pro-abortion camp has thrown off the oppressive yoke of that argument. In an opinion piece in Salon, Mary Elizabeth Williams doesn't argue that "fetuses" aren't alive.

"When we on the pro-choice side get cagey around the life question, it makes us illogically contradictory," Williams writes. "I have friends who have referred to

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# I'm not going to dither around and call my position "pro-life" just to pretty it up ...I'm anti-abortion.

their abortions in terms of 'scraping out a bunch of cells' and then a few years later were exultant over the pregnancies that they unhesitatingly described in terms of 'the baby' and 'this kid.' "

She describes people who were relieved over abortions and grieved over miscarriages. "Why can't we agree that how they felt about their pregnancies was vastly different, but that it's pretty silly to pretend that what was growing inside of them wasn't the same?" she says. "Fetuses aren't selective like that. They don't qualify as human life only if they're intended to be born."

Williams argued that the pro-abortion side has been wimping out. In a nutshell, she's saying own it for what it is. Abortion takes a life.

It's always been my belief that if people really owned that, they couldn't support abortion. This is a country that goes all queasy and agonizes over taking the life of merciless killers. But I might be wrong. And God help us, we really are barbarians if we've reached that point.


Williams says that if it takes killing to guarantee women "unrestricted reproductive freedom," then kill. Her piece carries the headline, "So what if abortion ends life? I believe that life starts at conception. And it's never stopped me from being pro-choice." It fits the content perfectly

"Here's the complicated reality in which we live: All life is not equal," she says. " ... A fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always."

She concludes that if a living human inside a womb

stands between a woman and her unrestricted reproductive freedom, well then, it's a life "worth sacrificing."

All life is not equal, she says. But what about an old man or woman who has lapsed into dementia? What about the child with Down syndrome? What about the person who sustained brain damage in an auto accident and needs care? If we kill unborn life for little more than convenience, what about them?

"All life is not equal." Christmas is gone more than a month but I still remember what the Ghost of Christmas Present said to Scrooge: "Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions ... " 

*Robert DeWitt is a member of Riverwood Presbyterian Church. He is married to Regina and has two children. He is employed by The Tuscaloosa News and is a Senior Writer. This piece was published by The News January 30, 2013 and is used with permission. You can contact Robert at doveshooter@hotmail.com.*

# WARREN BUFFETT AND THE HUMBLE CHRISTIAN

## Philanthropy and Justification

by Robert Thornton

*Humility is not thinking less of yourself, its thinking of yourself less. —C. S. Lewis*

In 2012 The Chronicle of Philanthropy published a list of the largest contributors to charity. Leading the list was Warren Buffett, the 82-year-old CEO of Berkshire Hathaway and a multibillionaire. He gave \$3.09 billion. That was more than half of the total amount of the next fourteen largest contributors. No question, that's a pretty large amount. More than likely a greater amount than you or I could earn in a hundred lifetimes.

Mr. Buffett is, according to his assistant Debbie Bosanek, an agnostic. Is he, by way of his prolific philanthropy, more acceptable to God than, let's say, a Christian mother of three on welfare? I suppose the logical response would be to look at the parable of the "Widow's Mite" Jesus commends the poor widow's faithfulness and condemns the rich men's pride.

But, what do we know about Mr. Buffett's attitude? After all, he may have donated the money with a sincere concern for the poor and needy. To know what God expects we need to review some Reformed Doctrine.

First, we know that we all are sinners. And as sinners we all are deserving of Hell. Even Mr. Buffett. The book of Romans tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,..."

Our only hope of salvation is Christ's redeeming work on the cross as stated in Titus:

*But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.*

Because of Christ we are now children of God, imparted with great value. With this in mind, can we now more accurately assess our worth in relation to Mr. Buffett? Can't we feel more superior, now? After all, our merit, despite our lack of financial dominance, is much greater than his.

To answer this, we must take a much closer look at our salvation. As stated earlier we know that we are saved by grace. But wait, there's one thing more. We don't choose God. God chooses us. In other words, we can't boast of our genius in assessing the situation and making the smart choice in picking God over living a life of doubting the likelihood of God's existence.

What I'm talking about is Limited Atonement, the third petal of Calvin's TULIP. Before the foundation of the World God chose us not based on any merit we possess but based solely on His good favor. The Good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep

**Is Buffett, by way of his prolific philanthropy, more acceptable to God than, let's say, a Christian mother of three on welfare?**

pays for our salvation. And the Holy Spirit moves our trust in Christ. In short, we have God's unwavering guarantee of salvation based on His pleasure. As Paul describes it in Romans: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

So, there we have it—Christ's righteousness freely given. We haven't labored for it. We haven't bought it. We haven't negotiated for it.

We should be like Paul, considering ourselves the chief of sinners, as he states in I Timothy: "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." And as we grow in grace we should see our sin in a whole new glaring way, which should make us grow in humility.

The world sees Warren Buffett, by way of his works, above all others. Realistically, we know that we are sinners, like everyone else, no better, no worse. What sets us apart is Christ's work on the cross freely given for us. As a result, our attitude as Christians should be one of humility. Even though God values us above all others, we must recognize that our righteousness is Christ's righteousness imparted to us.

There may be untold thousands of non-Christians who are more loving, more charitable, and more hardworking. As children in God's Kingdom we will grow in grace. Our current state as sinners saved by grace is not our final state. We can live humbly, trusting God in the firm knowledge that all of the billions of all of the Warren Buffetts of this world pale in comparison to the riches we have in Christ. ¶

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# INTERACT WITH CULTURE

## RIVERWOOD MOVIE NIGHTS

Movies are an important part of our culture, perhaps the most important purveyors of ideas and a significant part of the 21st Century canon. As such, and as Christian men and women, we at Riverwood believe that it is important to both be aware of what the culture offers and how we need to respond to it. To this end, at irregular intervals, Riverwood will have a Movie Night on Sunday evenings and will screen a movie that we feel is important to be aware of and to which we, as a Christian community have an interest in.

To demonstrate this, we have shown, among others, the following movies and have discussed the issues they raise:

### ***Crimes and Misdemeanors***

Is God a luxury post-modern man cannot afford? Is the capacity to love the only thing that gives meaning to an indifferent universe?

### ***The Purple Rose of Cairo***

Is there an alternate reality? Why does modern man so casually, if not accept, then utilize this concept? Is truth really the shifting, relative thing demonstrated here?

### ***The Tree of Life***

Do the events and concepts of life prove the existence of God? How do the events of tragedy and triumph in the lives of a family affect and drive their belief? Is belief tied to everything that is?

### ***The Painted Veil***

Is work and self sacrifice a method of redemption? What are the responsibilities of marriage regarding love according to Western culture? Is it possible to fall in love with virtue?

### ***The Sunset Limited***

What is the Christian responsibility toward the non-Christian? Are we to respond with a dramatic struggle as if everything depends on it, even with a perfect stranger? How are we to finally react when a man sees the inevitability of the abyss?

Join us on Movie Night for needed and profitable Christian interaction with the questions and ideas provided by today's movies.



# Sesame Street and a Christian Worldview

Understanding the Why Behind the What

by Eric Venable

Lately I've had two widely divergent thoughts swirling around my neurotic head...the apologetics of Cornelius Van Til and *Sesame Street*. Let me try to explain. A few months ago I read *Christian Apologetics* by one of the great minds of the Reformed faith, a dead guy named Cornelius Van Til. Van Til was famous for his apologetics, his defense of a particular way that God calls Christians to think about the world and defend their faith. Van Til was one of the church's greatest proponents of a form of apologetics called "pre-suppositional apologetics." Don't be intimidated by nerdy theological words like these. His main idea is pretty simple but very profound I think—everybody on earth makes some sort of a faith claim, even staunch atheists who are adamant that there is no God.

Everybody at some point is forced to build their lives on pre-suppositions, unproven assertions about the nature of the universe, the nature of human beings, the existence of God, etc. Everyone's "facts" about God, him/herself, the world, rests upon assertions that cannot be put to the test of any scientific method. Van Til asserts that the Christian worldview has the only faith claim that make sense and that all other worldviews, faith claims and assumptions about human life in the end break down into meaninglessness. He writes, "He [the Christian] must say to the unbeliever that *unless* he will accept the presuppositions and with them the interpretation of Christianity, there is no coherence in

human experience...unless one accepts the Bible for what true Protestantism says it is, as the authoritative interpretation of human life and experience as a whole, it will be impossible to find meaning in anything".

Now to the really important stuff...*Sesame Street*. For at least the last year, my house has been under the tyranny of Elmo and his merry cohorts. You definitely know you're a parent when besides your first four seasons of *The Office* you see gripping titles like *Elmo goes to the doctor*, *Elmo's ABC Preschool* and *Big Bird's Big Wish*. But Mr. Van Til has really got me to thinking about the worldview of *Sesame Street*...seriously.

*Sesame Street* has taught my kid some valuable things so far. Sharing is good. The alphabet song. You don't have to be afraid of the dark when you go to bed at night. Going to the doctor can be fun (which is certainly a half-truth). And maybe the most treasured lesson my child has learned on "the Street"----using an adult potty is as cool as cool gets. But I'm increasingly struck by just how incomplete and ultimately meaningless the knowledge that is given to my daughter from *Sesame Street*. Don't get me wrong; I don't want my little girl to scream her head off in terror every time we go to the doctor. I'm thankful she now thinks singing the ABCs is fun and hip (thanks to the help of professional recording artist India Arie on *Sesame Street*). But apart from a Christian worldview all of these things are really

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**...everybody on earth makes some sort of a faith claim, even staunch atheists who are adamant that there is no God.**

meaningless. *Sesame Street* can help our children sleep through the night without being afraid, but it cannot give them a reason to get out of bed the next day and live life. Elmo and pals can teach the alphabet effectively, but they cannot give our children the real reason why God gave us language—in order to help us better understand God’s revelation of himself in his Word. Apart from a Christian worldview, the world can only teach me a lot of “what’s”, but never any of the coherent “why’s” behind the “what’s.”

Now I’d imagine most people would think I’m a little nuts for looking for the answers to life’s deeper questions in *Sesame Street*, and I in a way, I would agree. The makers of *Sesame Street* are too smart to risk losing mass amounts of customers by answering controversial why questions behind the simple ideas that it attempts to teach children. However, I’m convinced more and more that we do our children in the Christian community no favors by living as if God’s authoritative interpretation of all the facts of the universe can or should be divorced from any realm of knowledge. This is true no matter what kind of facts you are looking at, from language to history or science or what makes for good manners. A God-centered worldview is one that sees God as the source of all knowledge and the One who should get the glory for all the wonders of His vast universe, even the lesser glories of red-haired puppets with a maniacal laugh. The “what” of knowledge matters, but it’s God’s “why” behind everything on earth that should be the glue that holds together a worldview with God at its center. **IF**

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# INTERACT WITH CULTURE



## RIVERWOOD BOOK GROUP

This group meets each Monday evening at 7:00 pm in the Church library to discuss books we have chosen to read together. We cover a wide range of theology, fiction, history and commentary, looking at all subjects through the lens of the Gospel and “sharpening each other” in our interaction. If you enjoy books, Christian fellowship and good coffee, please join us. All are invited. Upcoming selections include *Will in the World* by Stephen Greenblatt and *Twelfth Night* by William Shakespeare.

# FINALE

Several articles in this issue of *Salt & Light* are concerned with an overall theme that can be loosely described as “Seeking Jesus.” Peggy Drinkard describes a phenomenon in which people are searching for the ways Jesus would handle their problems and quandaries in today’s world. Earl Adams and Parker Johnson speak of helping others seek Jesus in foreign countries and American cities. Tim Lien speaks of trying to find his identity in different guises before discovering that he was seeking Jesus the entire time.

All men seek Jesus. All men seek a Reason and a Redemption, and both are found nowhere else. Some don’t know what, why or even that they *are* seeking but they are because they must, it is in them to seek. They seek in different ways, pleasure, achievement, relationships, causes, intellect, emotions, even in

pain. Those who find Redemption: find truth writ personal, find purpose.

George Herbert, the 15th Century Anglican cleric and poet, writes of a man who seeks Jesus. He has been paying rent and not doing well, not “thriving.” He wishes to change his lease, to take out a new one in which he his life can “thrive.” So, to make the change, he seeks out the “rich lord” on whose land all men live. He sought Him in heaven, but was told that He had left to take possession of the earth He had dearly bought back. On earth, the poet looked for Jesus in great and rich places, but couldn’t find him. Finally, amid thieves and murderers, he finds Jesus, who grants his wish in the very moment of His death.

So it is with us, with all the seekers of Jesus. In His death, we live and find both reason and redemption.

## Redemption

Having been tenant long to a rich lord,  
Not thriving, I resolved to be bold,  
And make a suit unto him, to afford  
A new small-rented lease, and cancel the old.  
In heaven at his manor I him sought;  
They told me there that he was lately gone  
About some land, which he had dearly bought  
Long since on earth, to take possession.  
I straight returned, and knowing his great birth,  
Sought him accordingly in great resorts;  
In cities, theaters, gardens, parks, and courts;  
At length I heard a ragged noise and mirth  
Of thieves and murderers; there I him espied,  
Who straight, *Your suit is granted*, said, and died.

George Herbert (1593-1633)

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