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ALPHA AND OMEGA

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,
the First and the Last."*

—Revelation 22:13

He [Paul] approached the Gentiles, not by exalting the law at first, but by exalting Christ, and then showing the binding claims of the law. He showed them plainly how the light from the cross of Calvary gave significance and glory to the whole Jewish economy. Thus he varied his manner of labor, always shaping his message to the circumstances under which he was placed; and though after patient labor he was successful to a large degree, many would not be convinced. There are some who will not be convinced by any presentation of the truth. The laborer for God should, nevertheless, study carefully the best method, in order that he may not arouse prejudice or stir up combativeness in his hearers.

Christ said to His disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." As the result of their early education, their ideas upon many points were incorrect, and they were not then prepared to understand and receive some things which He would otherwise have taught them. His instructions would have confused their minds, and raised questioning and unbelief that would have been difficult to remove.

Christ drew the hearts of His hearers to Him by the manifestation of His love, and then, little by little, as they were able to bear it, He unfolded to them the great truths of the kingdom. We also must learn to adapt our labors to the condition of the people—to meet humans where they are. While the claims of the law of God are to be presented to the world, we should never forget that love, the love of Christ, is the only power that can soften the heart, and lead to obedience. All the great truths of the Scriptures center in Christ; and rightly understood, all lead to Him. Let Christ be presented as the **Alpha and Omega**, the beginning and the end of the great plan of redemption. Present to the people such subjects as will strengthen their confidence in God and in His word, and lead them to investigate its teachings for themselves. And as they go forward, step by step, in the study of the Bible, they will be better prepared to appreciate the beauty and harmony of its precious truths.—*Review and Herald*, November 25, 1890.

Further Reflection: *In what ways has Jesus drawn my heart to Him by clear demonstrations of His love for me?*

BURDEN BEARER

*"For I, the LORD your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you,
'Fear not, I will help you.' "*

—Isaiah 41:13

In these words Christ is speaking to every human being. Whether they know it or not, all are weary and heavy-laden. All are weighed down with burdens that only Christ can remove. The heaviest burden that we bear is the burden of sin. If we were left to bear this burden, it would crush us. But the Sinless One has taken our place. "The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) He has borne the burden of our guilt. He will take the load from our weary shoulders. He will give us rest. The burden of care and sorrow also He will bear. He invites us to cast all our care upon Him; for He carries us upon His heart.

The Elder Brother of our race is by the eternal throne. He looks upon every soul who is turning his face toward Him as the Saviour. He knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations; for He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. He is watching over you, trembling child of God. Are you tempted? He will deliver. Are you weak? He will strengthen. Are you ignorant? He will enlighten. Are you wounded? He will heal. The Lord "tellethe the number of the stars;" and yet "He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds." (Psalm 147:4, 3) "Come unto Me," is His invitation. Whatever your anxieties and trials, spread out your case before the Lord. Your spirit will be braced for endurance. The way will be opened for you to disentangle yourself from embarrassment and difficulty. The weaker and more helpless you know yourself to be, the stronger will you become in His strength. The heavier your burdens, the more blessed the rest in casting them upon the **Burden Bearer**. The rest that Christ offers depends upon conditions, but these conditions are plainly specified. They are those with which all can comply. He tells us just how His rest is to be found.

"Take My yoke upon you," Jesus says. The yoke is an instrument of service. Cattle are yoked for labor, and the yoke is essential that they may labor effectually. By this illustration Christ teaches us that we are called to service as long as life shall last.—*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 328, 329.

Further Reflection: *What burden am I carrying that Jesus is waiting to take from me?*

LIVING VINE

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

—John 15:5

I have frequently seen that the children of the Lord neglect prayer, especially secret prayer, altogether too much; that many do not exercise that faith which it is their privilege and duty to exercise, often waiting for that feeling which faith alone can bring. Feeling is not faith; the two are distinct. Faith is ours to exercise, but joyful feeling and the blessing are God's to give. The grace of God comes to the soul through the channel of living faith, and that faith it is in our power to exercise.

True faith lays hold of and claims the promised blessing before it is realized and felt. We must send up our petitions in faith within the second veil, and let our faith take hold of the promised blessing, and claim it as ours. We are then to believe that we receive the blessing, because our faith has hold of it, and according to the word it is ours. "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." (Mark 11:24) Here is faith, naked faith, to believe that we receive the blessing, even before we realize it. When the promised blessing is realized and enjoyed, faith is swallowed up. But many suppose they have much faith when sharing largely of the Holy Spirit, and that they cannot have faith unless they feel the power of the Spirit. Such confound faith with the blessing that comes through faith.

The very time to exercise faith is when we feel destitute of the Spirit. When thick clouds of darkness seem to hover over the mind, then is the time to let living faith pierce the darkness and scatter the clouds.

True faith rests on the promises contained in the word of God, and those only who obey that word can claim its glorious promises. . . .

We should be much in secret prayer. Christ is the vine, we are the branches. And if we would grow and flourish, we must continually draw sap and nourishment from the **Living Vine**; for separated from the Vine, we have no strength.—*Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, pp. 126, 127.

Further Reflection: *If faith is the channel through which feelings of assurance come, how can I reorient my life to make decisions based not on feeling but on faith in God's promises?*

TRIED STONE

"Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation; whoever believes will not act hastily."

—Isaiah 28:16

Our Redeemer is a "Tried Stone." The experiment has been made, the great test has been applied, and with perfect success. In Him is fulfilled all the purpose of God for the saving of a lost world. Never was a foundation subject to so severe a trial and test as this "Tried Stone." The Lord Jehovah knew what this foundation stone could sustain. The sins of the whole world could be piled upon it. The Lord's chosen were to be revealed, heaven's gates to be thrown open to all who would believe; its untold glories were to be given to the overcomers.

"A Tried Stone" is Christ, tried by the perversity of human beings. Thou, O our Saviour, hast taken the burden; Thou hast given peace and rest; Thou hast been tried, proved by believers who have taken their trials to Thy sympathy, their sorrows to Thy love, their wounds to Thy healing, their weakness to Thy strength, their emptiness to Thy fullness; and never, never has one soul been disappointed. Jesus, my **Tried Stone**, to Thee will I come, moment by moment. In Thy presence I am lifted above pain. "When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the Rock that is higher than I." (Psalm 61:2)

It is our privilege to enjoy sweet communion with God. Precious to the believer is His atoning blood, precious is His justifying righteousness. "Unto you therefore which believe He is precious." (1 Peter 2:7)

When I meditate upon this fountain of living power from which we may draw, I mourn that so many are losing the delight they might have had in considering His goodness. We are to be sons and daughters of God, growing into a holy temple in the Lord. "No more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. . . . Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone." (Ephesians 2:19, 20) This is our privilege. How is Heaven amazed at the present condition of the church that could be so much to the world were every stone, in its proper place, a living stone to emit light.—*Review and Herald*, March 19, 1895.

Further Reflection: *Is Jesus a proven Tried Stone to you, One on whom I can depend? Do I trust Jesus with my most painful trials?*

JUDGE OF ALL

"For many are called, but few are chosen."

—Matthew 22:14

When the householder went to the market and found men unhired, he said, "Why stand ye here all the day idle?" And the reply was, "Because no man hath hired us." None of those called later in the day were there in the morning. They had not refused the call. Those who refuse and afterward repent, do well to repent; but it is not safe to trifle with the first call of mercy. . . .

The Lord requires that sacred fire be used in His service. We are to bear the message of the divine householder to our fellow human beings. This will impress hearts. In whatever part of the Lord's vineyard men and women are working, they need closely to examine their own hearts.

If they are inclined to exalt themselves and disparage others, their hearts need to be changed, till they shall no longer place their own estimate upon their own work and the work of others.

We need a spirit of love and of true dependence upon God. When we have implicit faith in Him who is Truth, we shall realize that worry and anxiety are unnecessary.

Whatever work we do, we are to do it for Christ. There are many kinds of temporal work to be done for God. An unbeliever would do this work mechanically, for the wages they receive. They do not know the joy of co-operation with the Master Worker. There is no spirituality in the work of them who serve themselves. Common motives, common aspirations, common inspirations, a desire to be thought clever by people, rule in their life. Such a one may receive praise from people, but not from God. Those who are truly united with Christ do not work for the wages they receive. Laborers together with God, they do not strive to exalt self.

In the last great day decisions will be made that will be a surprise to many. Human judgment will have no place in the decisions then made. Christ can and will judge every case; for all judgment has been committed to Him by the Father. He will estimate service by that which is invisible to humans. The most secret things lie open to His all-seeing eye. When the **Judge of all** human beings shall make His investigation, many of those whom human estimation has placed first will be placed last, and those who have been put in the lowest place by men and women will be taken out of the ranks and made first.—*Review and Herald*, July 31, 1900.

Further Reflection: *When was the last time that I heard the applause of heaven for some selfless act of service?*

GREAT MASTER ARTIST

“Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.”

—Matthew 6:29

Christ taught His disciples that the measure of divine attention bestowed on any of God’s work is proportionate to the rank which that object occupies in the scale of creation. The little brown sparrow, apparently the most inferior of birds, is watched over by Providence. Not one falls to the ground without the notice of our heavenly Father. The flowers of the field, the grass which clothes the earth with verdure—all share the notice and care of our heavenly Father.

“Behold the fowls of the air,” Christ said, “for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.” (Matthew 6:26–29) If the lilies of the field are objects upon which the **great Master Artist** has bestowed care, making them so beautiful that they out-rival the glory of Solomon, the greatest king that ever wielded a scepter; if the grass of the field is made into a beautiful carpet for the earth, can we form any idea of the regard which God bestows upon humanity, who was formed in His image?

God has given human beings intellect in order that they may comprehend greater things than these beautiful objects in nature. He carries the human agent into a higher department of truth, leading the mind higher and still higher, and opening to them the divine mind. And in the book of God’s providence, the volume of life, each one is given a page. That page contains every particular of his history. Even the hairs of his head are numbered. God’s children are never absent from His mind.

And though sin existed for ages, seeking to counteract the merciful tide of love flowing from God to the human race, yet the love and care that God bestows upon the beings He has created in His own image has not ceased to increase in richness and abundance. . . . He crowned His benevolence by the inestimable gift of Jesus.—*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 17, pp. 182, 183.

Further Reflection: *If God cares so much for me, why do I allow the cares of the world to worry me?*

AUTHOR OF OUR BEING

"For in Him we live and move and have our being."

—Acts 17:28

In tilling the soil, in disciplining and subduing the land, lessons may constantly be learned. No one would think of settling upon a raw piece of land, expecting it at once to yield a harvest. Earnestness, diligence, and persevering labor are to be put forth in treating the soil preparatory to sowing the seed. So it is in the spiritual work in the human heart. Those who would be benefited by the tilling of the soil must go forth with the word of God in their hearts. They will then find the fallow ground of the heart broken by the softening, subduing influence of the Holy Spirit. Unless hard work is bestowed on the soil, it will not yield a harvest. So with the soil of the heart: the Spirit of God must work upon it to refine and discipline it before it can bring forth fruit to the glory of God.

The soil will not produce its riches when worked by impulse. It needs thoughtful, daily attention. It must be plowed often and deep, with a view to keeping out the weeds that take nourishment from the good seed planted. Thus those who plow and sow prepare for the harvest. None need stand in the field amid the sad wreck of their hopes.

The blessing of the Lord will rest upon those who thus work the land, learning spiritual lessons from nature. In cultivating the soil the worker knows little what treasures will open up before him. While he is not to despise the instruction he may gather from minds that have had an experience, and from the information that intelligent persons may impart, he should gather lessons for himself. . . . The cultivation of the soil will prove an education to the soul.

He who causes the seed to spring up, who tends it day and night, who gives it power to develop, is the **Author of our being**, the King of heaven, and He exercises still greater care and interest in behalf of His children. While the human sower is planting the seed to sustain our earthly life, the Divine Sower will plant in the soul the seed that will bring forth fruit unto life everlasting.—*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 88, 89.

Further Reflection: *Is the soil of my heart ready for the seed that the Divine Sower wishes to plant in me today?*

DELIVERER

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord
and in the power of His might.*

—Ephesians 6:10

The Christian must be upright while dwelling with the corrupt and with traitors. With a heart true to God, and imbued with His Spirit, he will see much to grieve over while surrounded by commandment-breakers—those who are on the side of the great rebel, having thrown off their allegiance to the God of Heaven. The fact that iniquity abounds is a strong reason why he should be watchful, and diligent, and faithful in his Master's service, that he may rightly represent the religion of Jesus Christ.

On all sides the Christian soldier will hear treasonable plottings and rebellious utterances from those who make void the law of God. This should increase his zeal to act as a faithful sentinel for God, and to use every effort to bring souls to enlist beneath the blood-stained banner of Prince Immanuel. The more dense the moral darkness, the more earnest should be the endeavor to walk with God, that light and power from Him may be reflected upon those in darkness. The love of genuine Christians will not grow cold because iniquity abounds. As society grows more and more corrupt, as in the days of Noah and of Lot, there will be yearning of soul over deceived, deluded, perishing sinners, who are preparing themselves for a fate similar to that of the transgressors who perished in the waters of the flood and in the fires of Sodom. . . .

We have only a little while to urge the warfare; then Christ will come, and this scene of rebellion will close. . . . As never before, resistance must be made against sin—against the powers of darkness. The time demands energetic and determined activity on the part of those who believe present truth. They should teach the truth by both precept and example. If the time seems long to wait for our **Deliverer** to come, if, bowed by affliction and worn with toil, we feel impatient for our commission to close, and to receive an honorable release from the warfare, let us remember—and let the remembrance check every murmur—that God leaves us on earth to encounter storms and conflicts, to perfect Christian character, to become better acquainted with God our Father and Christ our elder Brother, and to do work for the Master in winning many souls to Christ.—*Review and Herald*, October 25, 1881.

Further Reflection: *Does the antagonism of those who hate Christianity increase my zeal to share the gospel, that even the scoffer might have an opportunity to be saved?*

AUTHOR OF THE RESURRECTION

*Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.
He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."*

—John 11:25

Jesus encouraged her faith, saying, "Thy brother shall rise again." His answer was not intended to inspire hope of an immediate change. He carried Martha's thoughts beyond the present restoration of her brother, and fixed them upon the resurrection of the just. This He did that she might see in the resurrection of Lazarus a pledge of the resurrection of all the righteous dead, and an assurance that it would be accomplished by the Saviour's power.

Martha answered, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Still seeking to give a true direction to her faith, Jesus declared, "I am the resurrection, and the life." In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived. "He that hath the Son hath life." (1 John 5:12) The divinity of Christ is the believer's assurance of eternal life. "He that believeth in Me," said Jesus, "though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?" Christ here looks forward to the time of His Second Coming. Then the righteous dead shall be raised incorruptible, and the living righteous shall be translated to heaven without seeing death. The miracle which Christ was about to perform, in raising Lazarus from the dead, would represent the resurrection of all the righteous dead. By His word and His works He declared Himself the **Author of the resurrection**. He who Himself was soon to die upon the cross stood with the keys of death, a conqueror of the grave, and asserted His right and power to give eternal life.

To the Saviour's words, "Believest thou?" Martha responded, "Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." She did not comprehend in all their significance the words spoken by Christ, but she confessed her faith in His divinity, and her confidence that He was able to perform whatever it pleased Him to do.—*The Desire of Ages*, p. 530.

Further Reflection: *Martha's heart was breaking when Jesus spoke words she had never heard before, let alone fully understood. How much of my belief in Jesus is dependent on that which I can understand? Does what I don't know about Jesus affect what I do know about Him?*

BELOVED

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

—Galatians 6:14

The consecrated messengers who in the early days of Christianity carried to a perishing world the glad tidings of salvation, allowed no thought of self-exaltation to mar their presentation of Christ and Him crucified. They coveted neither authority nor pre-eminence. Hiding self in the Saviour, they exalted the great plan of salvation, and the life of Christ, the Author and Finisher of this plan. Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, was the burden of their teaching.

If those who today are teaching the word of God, would uplift the cross of Christ higher and still higher, their ministry would be far more successful. If sinners can be led to give one earnest look at the cross, if they can obtain a full view of the crucified Saviour, they will realize the depth of God's compassion and the sinfulness of sin.

Christ's death proves God's great love for human beings. It is our pledge of salvation. To remove the cross from the Christian would be like blotting the sun from the sky. The cross brings us near to God, reconciling us to Him. With the relenting compassion of a father's love, Jehovah looks upon the suffering that His Son endured in order to save the race from eternal death, and accepts us in the **Beloved**.

Without the cross, humanity could have no union with the Father. On it depends our every hope. From it shines the light of the Saviour's love, and when at the foot of the cross the sinner looks up to the One who died to save him, he may rejoice with fullness of joy, for his sins are pardoned. Kneeling in faith at the cross, he has reached the highest place to which human beings can attain.

Through the cross we learn that the heavenly Father loves us with a love that is infinite. Can we wonder that Paul exclaimed, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ"? (Galatians 6:14)—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 209, 210.

Further Reflection: *If my every hope depends on what Jesus accomplished at the cross, how often should I thank God for the amazing sacrifice of His Beloved? How often do I kneel at the pinnacle of my existence — the foot of Jesus' cross?*