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My Escape From Death Row

An in-depth study of the Spirit of Prophecy writings on the gospel of salvation - with extensive Biblical support

The following is a dialogue between a murderer on death row and his pastor. It's hard to imagine a bigger problem than your own execution, yet this convicted murderer found hope and courage in spite of his problem. May this oft-repeated scenario give you hope and courage.

How can there be hope for me, I killed a man, and I have been party to evil for decades. How can God possibly forgive me?

Please do not be discouraged, for our Redeemer has opened the way so that ***the most sinful, the most needy, the most oppressed and despised,*** may find access to the Father. Thanks to His gracious intervention, ***no sin*** can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary. Please rest assured that there is forgiveness for the least sin, forgiveness for the greatest sin. (DA113.2; 6BC1071.6; 7BC933.2)

Psalm 32:1-2; Psalm 86:5; Psalm 86:15; Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:18; Matthew 9:6; Mark 2:5; Mark 2:10; Colossians 2:13-14; 1 Timothy 4:10; Hebrews 9:22; 1 John 2:12;

That really does sound encouraging, but I still cannot see how someone like me can ever come up to the standard of God's holy law?

Since we are sinful, unholy, we cannot perfectly obey the holy law. We have no righteousness of our own with which to meet the claims of the law of God. This is why the best efforts that man in his own strength can make, are **valueless** to meet the holy and just law that he has transgressed. (SC62.2; 1SM363.3)

Matthew 18:11; Matthew 18:14; Romans 3:20-24; Romans 7:18-25;

Yet we may take heart for we have a wonderful Saviour and, thanks to Him, **every soul** may say, **by His perfect obedience He has satisfied the claims of the law**, and **my only hope** is found in looking to Him as my substitute and surety, **who obeyed the law perfectly for me. By faith in His merits I am free from the condemnation of the law. He clothes me with His righteousness, which answers all the demands of the law.** I am complete in Him who brings in everlasting righteousness. He presents me to God in the spotless garment of which **no thread** was woven by any human agent.' (1SM396.1)

Romans 1:16-17; Hebrews 7:25; Hebrews 10:10-17; 2 Peter 3:9;

So you mean to tell me that Jesus kept the law on my behalf, and that God the Father now considers His obedience as though it is my obedience? Surely the good news cannot be that good?

It is indeed. You see, if you give yourself to Him as your Saviour, then, **sinful as your life may have been**, for His sake (1) you are accounted righteous, (2) Jesus' character stands in place of your character, and (3) **you are accepted before God as if you had not sinned**. (SC62.2)

Psalm 32:1-2; Isaiah 44:22; John 10:9-11; Romans 3:21-24; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Revelation 22:17;

Are you saying that if I accept Jesus as my Saviour, the Father will see Jesus' life as though it is my life, and that He will see Jesus' character as though it is my character? To be quite honest, this does sound a little far fetched.

Yes, but it is altogether true, for the **moment** the sinner believes in Jesus, he stands in the sight of God **uncondemned**; for the righteousness of Jesus is His: Jesus' perfect obedience is imputed to him. (FE429.3)

Acts 16:30-31; Romans 4:2-8; Romans 4:16; Ephesians 1:3-14; Ephesians 2:4-10; Hebrews 9:26;

Then, from that moment, the Father beholds not your faulty character, but He sees you as clothed in Jesus' perfection. (DA357.1)

Proverbs 25:2; Romans 4:17; Romans 6:3-7; Colossians 2:10; Colossians 3:3, Hebrews 9:26;

You mean, this all takes place from the moment that my faith flickers to life; from the moment that I believe in God and accept Jesus as my Saviour?

Precisely! The **moment** true faith in the merits of the costly atoning sacrifice is exercised, claiming Jesus as a personal Saviour, that **moment** the sinner is justified before God, because he is pardoned. (3SM195.2)

Psalm 86:13; Romans 3:28; James 5:11; 1 John 5:11-12;

In that moment eternal life actually begins.

John 5:24; John 11:25-26;

That is truly amazing - and very encouraging - but what exactly do you mean by the term "justified."

When God justifies us, he grants us (1) a full and complete pardon for sin - **regardless of our past**, (2) He declares before the universe that he considers us to be perfectly righteous, and (3) He announces to all of creation that, as far as He is concerned, every believer may be considered to have always been perfectly righteous. (6BC1071.8; 1SM392.2; 367.1; SC62.2)

2 Corinthians 5:14; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Colossians 1:22-28; Hebrews 9:11-12; 1 John 1:7-9; Revelation 1:4-5;

That is remarkable indeed, but again I find myself asking, Can the good news be so very good? Can God really treat a sinner as though He is righteous?

He surely can. In fact, this awe-inspiring truth lay at the very heart of the Protestant reformation. It was Martin Luther himself who coined the phrase "simul justus et peccator," which is translated "simultaneously righteous and yet a sinner." You will appreciate, therefore, that the reformation was founded on the fact that in ourselves we are sinners; but in Jesus we are righteous. Having made us righteous through the **imputed** righteousness of Jesus, God pronounces us just, and treats us as just, [and] He looks upon us as His dear children. (1SM394.1)

Philippians 3:7-11;

What awesome kindness! What absolutely amazing grace! But just what is meant by the term, "the imputed righteousness of Jesus?"

In order to appreciate the full meaning of this term, let us recap a little: **Through faith**, the believer passes from the position of a rebel, a child of sin and Satan, to the position of a loyal subject of Christ Jesus, **not because of an inherent goodness, but because Jesus receives him as His child by adoption**. The sinner receives the forgiveness of his sins, because these sins are borne by Jesus. He speaks to His heavenly Father saying, "This is My child, I reprieve him from the condemnation of death, giving him my life-insurance policy - eternal life - because I have taken his place and have suffered for his sins. He is even my beloved son." **Thus man**, pardoned, and clothed with the beautiful garments of Jesus' righteousness, **stands faultless before God**. The sinner may err, but he is not cast off without mercy. His only hope however is in repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Christ Jesus. It is the Father's prerogative [privilege] to forgive our transgressions and sins, because Jesus has taken upon Himself our guilt and reprieved us, imputing to us [putting to our account] His own righteousness. (6BC1070.7)

Deuteronomy 9:6; Daniel 9:18; Romans 5:18-19;

It was in this context that the author of the book of Hebrews once wrote: "For by one offering He has **perfected forever** those who are being sanctified." (Hebrews 10:14 NKJV)

Does that mean that once I have accepted Jesus I cannot be lost?

No, not at all. While it is true that salvation is a gift, God is not a God of force, and He will always allow us the freedom to reject the gift.

Are you saying, therefore, that the sinner's only hope of attaining righteousness is through faith – that is, through trusting and believing in Jesus, and trusting and believing that God will consider that His righteousness is my righteousness?

Precisely! The **only** way in which man can attain to righteousness is through faith. By faith he can **bring to God the merits of Jesus**, and (1) the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner's account. (2) Jesus' righteousness is accepted in place of man's failure, and (3) God receives, (4) pardons, (5) justifies the repentant, believing soul, (6) **treats him as though he were righteous**, and (7) **loves him as he loves His Son**. This is how faith is accounted righteousness. (1SM367.1)

Mark 2:17; Romans 1:16-17; Romans 3:28; Romans 9:30-33; Romans 10:9; Galatians 3:11; Galatians 3:24-25; 1 John 5:11-12;

But surely my good deeds must play at least some part in this saving transaction?

Not in the least. In fact, if you would gather together everything that is good and holy and noble and lovely in man and then present the subject to the angels of God as acting a part in the salvation of the human soul or in merit, the proposition would be rejected as treason. **Any works that man can render to God will be far less than nothingness**. [Our] requests are made acceptable only because they are laid upon Jesus' righteousness. **The idea of doing anything to merit the grace of pardon is fallacy from beginning to end**. (FW24.1-2)

Romans 3:20-21; Romans 11:6; Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 4:10; Hebrews 10:10-17;

This is why faith claims nothing for its possessor because of his righteousness, but claims everything because of the righteousness of Jesus. (ST11-24-90.7)

That is absolutely amazing! Now I can better relate to the words of the hymn, "Lord, in my hand no price I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling." Yet some people seem to be so holy? Surely these "holy" people have at least some righteousness that is acceptable to God?

None whatsoever! You see, many are deceived concerning the condition of their hearts. They do not realize that the natural heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. They wrap themselves about with their own righteousness and are satisfied in reaching their own human standard of character. **But man has nothing of his own but what is tainted and corrupted, polluted with sin, utterly repulsive to a pure and holy God**. Apart from Jesus, we have **no merit, no righteousness**. Our sinfulness, our weakness, our human imperfection make it impossible that we should appear before God. (1SM320.1, 342.4, 333.2)

Job 9:30-31; Psalm 143:2; Proverbs 20:9; Romans 5:1; Romans 7:18-25;

Yet this matter is so dimly comprehended that thousands upon thousands claiming to be sons of God are sincerely deceived, because they will depend upon their own works. (6BC1071.5)

You see, the absolute truth assures us that we are **not** received by God on the strength of our own righteousness. On the contrary, **a man is received by God just as soon as he realizes that he has nothing in himself that will gain salvation**. When he loses all confidence in anything he has done or can do to save himself, when he gives himself up to be saved by Jesus, he shows that he appreciates the sacrifice made in his behalf, that he has confidence to commit the keeping of his soul to God. (1SAT218.1)

Romans 10:3;

The price of heaven is Jesus. The way to heaven is through faith in the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (DA385.2)

John 1:29;

Our great need, therefore, is to realize the worthlessness of our works and to acknowledge our guilt, for those who have not humbled their souls before God in acknowledging their guilt have not yet fulfilled the **first condition of acceptance**. (SC37.4)

These are humbling thoughts indeed, and yet I am greatly encouraged by the fact that we are saved by Jesus' righteousness alone.

Yes, we all have to come to this realization, and this is why the Lord would have His people sound in the faith. They are not to look forward, thinking that at some future time a great work is to be done for them; **for the work is now complete**. (1SM394.3)

Titus 3:7;

I beg your pardon? Did you say that the work for our salvation is complete? How can that possibly be?

The sad truth is that there are many who claim to be children of God who are resting their hopes upon other dependencies, rather than **on the blood of Jesus alone**. When urged to rest their faith wholly upon Jesus **as a complete Saviour**, many reveal the fact that they have faith in something that they think they can do. They say, `I have a great deal to do before I can be fit to come to Jesus.' Another says, `When I have done to the uttermost all that I can do, then the Lord Jesus will come to my help.' They imagine that they have a great deal to do themselves to save their own souls, and that Jesus will come in and piece out that part which is lacking, and give the finishing stroke to their salvation. These poor souls will not be strong in God until they accept Jesus **as a complete Saviour**. **They can add nothing to their salvation**. (SD227.3)

Psalm 74:2; Colossians 2:10; Hebrews 2:9;

Let's consider the thief who was crucified with Jesus as an extreme example. When He accepted Jesus as His Saviour, his hands and feet were securely nailed to the cross and, as such, he could not have performed any good works. Yet Jesus promised him a place in the kingdom?

Hebrews 7:25;

We have to realise, therefore, that God attaches no saving merit whatsoever to position, to possessions, or to human achievement. Kneeling in faith at the cross, [we have] reached the highest place to which man can attain. We can rise no higher. (SD222.4)

But if this is the case, then how will we ever make it through the judgment?

The good news assures us that the believer may contemplate the judgment with utmost confidence, for Jesus will not only serve as our Judge, **and** as our Advocate, but He will even stand in our place in the box of the accused.

Luke 9:56; John 3:16-18; Colossians 1:19-23; 1 Timothy 2:3-6; 1 John 2:1-2;

He is our friend at court, and the reason we can have total confidence in Him is because **He pleads His own merits in our behalf**. This is why He will never lose a case that has been committed to Him, for by virtue of His atoning blood, the sins of all the truly penitent will be **blotted from the books of heaven**. (5MR13.2; RH, Aug. 15, 1893.7; PP357.6)

Hence the promise of Jesus: He who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, **HAS eternal life**, and **does not come into judgment**, but **HAS passed** out of death into life. (John 5:24 NASB)

Romans 8:1-2;

Are you saying, therefore, that for believers eternal life has already begun? Are you saying that in the judgment Jesus will stand in our place and present His merits as though they are our merits? No wonder they call this "the good news." In the light of His gracious dealings with us, I fail to understand why so many find it so hard to accept Jesus as their Friend and Saviour?

The real difficulty often lies in the fact that before we can appreciate Jesus and His righteousness, we have to understand and accept that we have no righteousness of our own, and that it is His righteousness **alone** that saves us.

Luke 5:31-32; Romans 10:3;

This, in fact, is where many stumble. Yet all who will give up their hope of paying for their salvation, or earning it, and will come to Jesus **just as they are**, unworthy, sinful, and **fall upon His merits**, holding in their plea the pledged word of God to pardon the transgressor of His law, confessing their sins and **seeking** pardon, will find **full and free salvation**. (Romans 9:31-32; 7ABC468.3)

Psalm 68:19-21; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 4:14-16;

Does this mean, therefore, that our works are of no importance whatsoever, and that our characters can stay as they are?

No, not at all! The fact of the matter is that our sanctification is the very purpose of our justification. You see, God surely knows that we cannot change ourselves, and that we can only be changed by the Holy Spirit when we enter into loving relationship with Him. This is why He has showered His love and His grace upon us - that we will be attracted to Him, that we will be drawn closer to Him, and that we will be inspired to search for a deeper knowledge of Him.

Deuteronomy 11:8; Deuteronomy 11:13-15; Deuteronomy 11:26-28; Jeremiah 31:33; Proverbs 6:23; Luke 10:27; Romans 2:4; Romans 2:12-13; 2 Corinthians 5:9; Ephesians 2:10; Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 8:10; Hebrews 9:11-14; Hebrews 12:28; Hebrews 13:20-21; James 2:14; James 2:20-26; 1 John 2:3; 1 John 2:6; 1 John 2:29; 1 John 3:24; 1 John 5:17-18; 2 John 1:6; Revelation 12:17;

Then, in looking to Jesus, we shall see that His love is without a parallel, that He has taken the place of the guilty sinner, and has imputed unto him His spotless righteousness. When the sinner sees his Saviour dying upon the cross under the curse of sin in his stead, **beholding His pardoning love, love awakes in the heart**. The sinner loves Jesus, because Jesus has first loved Him, and **love is the fulfilling of the law**. (1SM374.2)

Proverbs 7:1-2; Romans 2:4; Romans 13:10; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Galatians 5:14; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 1:2-4; 1 John 5:2-5;

In other words, the law is the perfect word picture of love and, as such, we cannot fulfil the law by outward compliance with its requirements. We can only fulfil the law when that compliance is the response of a heart that is filled with love for God and for His children. That is true obedience. In short, therefore, true obedience is not a matter of what we do, but a matter of what we are – a matter of character.

Galatians 5:22-23; 1 John 4:14-21;

Thus we are changed, not by focusing our energies on changing our characters – for all such efforts would fail to bear fruit - but by doing everything we can to improve both our **relationship** with God and our **knowledge** of Him.

1 John 3:6; 1 John 3:9;

You will appreciate, therefore, that the Christian warfare is not so much a battle against sin, as it is a battle against everything in our lives that keeps us from getting to know God and from falling in love with Him. (HM, July 1, 1897 par. 22)

Ephesians 1:15-20;

Are you saying, therefore, that we do not change in order to be saved, but because we are saved?

Precisely! This is why Paul tells us that God (1) "has saved us" and (2) "called us to a holy life." First comes the saving transaction, then comes the sanctification; first comes the justification, then comes the changing of our characters. (2 Timothy 1:8-9 NIV, also see Isaiah 44:22)

Titus 3:4-8; Titus 3:14;

Yes, I guess it would have to be in that order, failing which there would not be any hope for the thief on the cross. Yet many people do not seem to realise this.

That is true, and this is why many are losing the right way, in consequence of thinking that they must climb to heaven, that they must do something to merit the favor of God. They seek to make themselves better by their own unaided efforts. **This they can never accomplish**. Jesus has made the way by dying our sacrifice, by living our example, by becoming our great high priest. He declares, `I am the way, the truth, and the life.' (John 14:6). If by any effort of our own we could advance one step toward the ladder, the words of Jesus would not be true. But **when we accept Jesus, good works will appear as fruitful evidence that we are in the way of life**, that Jesus is our way, and that we are treading the true path that leads to heaven. (FW102.1)

Hebrews 10:10; Hebrews 10:14;

Please bear in mind, however, that our works are only the fruit of our faith – they do not and cannot save us, but they do reveal that we have the faith that saves us.

This all sounds so incredibly easy, and it is all so very inspiring, but what can I do about all of my weaknesses and failings?

The fact of the matter is that we shall not gain a particle of strength by dwelling on the discouragements. By beholding we become changed. As we look in faith to Jesus, His image is engraven on the heart. We are transformed in character. (1NL142.4)

Psalm 36:5-6; Philippians 4:8;

That is why our primary focus must be on Him, and not on our failings, for it is by beholding His love, by dwelling upon it, by drinking it in, that we are to become partakers of the divine nature. What food is to the body, Jesus must be to the soul. Food cannot benefit us unless we eat it, unless it becomes a part of our being. So Jesus is of no value to us if we do not know Him as a personal Saviour. A theoretical knowledge will do us no good. We must feed upon Him, receive Him into the heart, so that His life becomes our life. His love, His grace, must be assimilated. (DA389.3)

Psalm 37:3-6

As a flower turns to the sun, that the bright rays may touch it with tints of beauty, so will the seeking soul turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven's light may beautify the character with the graces of the character of Christ. (DA468.2)

As faith contemplates our Lord's great sacrifice, the soul assimilates the spiritual life of Christ. Looking upon the crucified Redeemer, we more fully comprehend the magnitude and meaning of the sacrifice made by the Majesty of heaven. The plan of salvation is glorified before us, and the thought of Calvary awakens living and sacred emotions in our hearts. Praise to God and the Lamb will be in our hearts and on our lips; for pride and self-worship cannot flourish in the soul that keeps fresh in memory the scenes of Calvary. He who beholds the Saviour's matchless love will be elevated in thought, purified in heart, transformed in character. He will go forth to be a light to the world, to reflect in some degree this mysterious love. (DA660.4; 661.2-3)

A life in Jesus is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Jesus. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might. So you are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Jesus. Let the mind dwell upon His love, upon the beauty, the perfection, of His character. Jesus in His self-denial, Jesus in His humiliation, Jesus in His purity and holiness, Jesus in His matchless love - this is the subject for the soul's contemplation. It is by loving Him, copying Him, depending wholly upon Him, that you are to be transformed into His likeness. (RC259.5)

Let us, then, take our minds off the perplexities and the difficulties of this life, and fix them on Him, that by beholding we may be changed into His likeness. (7BC970.9)

Philippians 3:13;

Yes, that all makes so much sense but, may I ask, what exactly is involved in "beholding" Him.

It really is quite simple. You see, our infinitely kind heavenly Father is inviting us to engage in an unbroken dialogue with Him – that we may keep getting to know Him better. **He speaks to us** in his word, **we speak to Him** and open our hearts to Him through prayer, **we converse** with Him whenever we meditate upon sacred themes, and **we "visit"** with Him whenever we visit the less fortunate of our planet. (AG96.4; CE56.2; GW 257.1; MH 287.4)

Psalm 41:1-3; Psalm 119:11; Psalm 119:107; Psalm 119:116; Proverbs 13:13; Proverbs 16:20; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Psalm 19:7-11; Matthew 11:28-30; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 12:1-2; James 1:27;

Just as our physical life is sustained by food, so our spiritual life is sustained by the word of God. And every soul is to receive life from God's word for himself. As we must eat for ourselves in order to receive nourishment, so we must receive the word for ourselves. Thus the word of God, received into the soul, moulds the thoughts, and enters into the development of character. (DA390.4-5)

Psalm 119:50; Ephesians 3:14-19; Ephesians 4:20-24; Philippians 3:7-11; 2 Timothy 2:20-21; 2 Peter 1:2-3;

That really is quite simple. Thank you so much for sharing this with me. What a God we serve! What you have told me has filled me with a deep sense of joy and peace and hope.

Yes, our **joy** grows out of the fact that "God accepts humanity in the person of His Son;" our **peace** is rooted in the knowledge that the believer is not called upon to make his peace with God; he never has nor ever can do this. He is to accept Jesus as his peace, for with Jesus is God and peace, and our **hope** comes from knowing that "the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him." (DA111.6; AG352.3; 1SM394.3; Isaiah 53:5 NIV)

Joy; Deuteronomy 16:11; Deuteronomy 16:15; Psalm 16:11; Psalm 32:11; Psalm 87:7; John 15:11; **Peace**; Romans 5:1-11; Ephesians 2:14-22; Philippians 4:6-7; Colossians 1:19-22; Colossians 3:15; **Hope**; Hebrews 6:19-20; Hebrews 10:23; 1 Peter 1:13; Psalm 31:24; Matthew 6:25-34; Romans 14:17; Romans 15:13;

My prayer, therefore, is that "the God of hope [will] fill you with all **joy** and **peace** in believing, so that you will abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13 NASB)

I must say that Jesus sounds like a really wonderful Friend. How can I not love One who would sooner die than live without me? How can I refuse all of these incredible gifts when all that is expected of me is to ask for the Gift, to accept Him as my Friend and Saviour, and to bask in His love?

Matthew 7:7-11;

Yes, what love, what matchless love, that, sinners and aliens as we are, we may be brought back to God and be adopted into His family! (5T739.3)

2 Peter 3:9;

And now we may rejoice in the sense of sins forgiven, in the love of a pardoning heavenly Father who has encircled sinful, repentant human beings in the arms of His love, bound up our wounds, cleansed us from sin, and clothed us with the garments of salvation. (PK668.3)

Psalm 23:1-6; Psalm 37:23-24;

Through His sacrifice, human beings may reach the high ideal set before them, and hear at last the words, `Ye are complete in Him,' not having your own righteousness, but the righteousness that He wrought out for you. **Your imperfection is no longer seen**; for you are clothed with the robe of Jesus' perfection. (7BC907.7)

1 Corinthians 1:30;

O Precious, loving, long-suffering, long-forbearing Jesus, how my soul adores thee! That a poor, unworthy, sin-polluted soul can stand before the Holy God, complete in the righteousness of our Substitute and Surety! (UL377.3)

Deuteronomy 32:3-4; Deuteronomy 33:26-27; Psalm 30:11-12; Psalm 40:5; Psalm 57:5; Psalm 72:18-19; Psalm 86:15; Psalm 113:2-4; Psalm 145:1-9; Lamentations 3:22-23; Romans 8:28; Romans 8:35-39; Romans 11:33; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; 2 Corinthians 9:15; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 John 3:1; Revelation 5:12-13; Revelation 15:3;

What an amazing God we serve!

Psalm 95:6-7; Ephesians 3:20-21; Hebrews 4:16; Jude 1:24-25;

Index To Reference Codes

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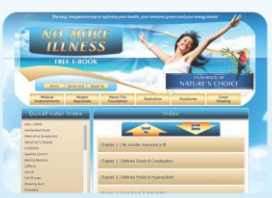
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