

“WHAT HAS GOD DONE FOR YOU LATELY?”

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Heart Quest Series (1 of 12) | Hayward SDA Church | October 11, 2013

“What has he done for me lately?” is a common question that women ask their partners prior to breaking up.

We live in what some describe as a disposable culture where we feel little loyalty to anyone or anything.

People change churches, switch insurance companies, lay-off long time employees, and fire coaches at the slightest hint of dissatisfaction or the hope of a better deal or something bigger and better. If we want a change, we make it. We live in a culture where we dispose of one person and acquire the services of another based on what is in it for “me.”

What if we were to pose that same question to God? What has God done for me lately? Nothing? Not nearly enough? Are you ready to give God the boot? Are you poised to sack God? Has God disappointed you to the point that for the good of all concerned, you are going to can God? Are you planning to put a pink-slip in God’s mailbox this year?

Before you do, I would like for you to look at what God has done and is doing for you.

You and I have sold ourselves out to whoever and whatever serves our pleasure, needs and ends. We evaluate God from that perspective too. If God doesn’t give me what I want, then what good is He. If God doesn’t contribute to my happiness, my well-being, my security, then I’ll go shopping somewhere else.

God is the great big Santa Claus in the sky. What else is He good for but to dole out goodies? He’s the ultimate “sugar daddy.”

But, maybe, just maybe, you’ve become tired of all this narcissism in your life. Maybe the pursuit of everything you want has become unfulfilling. You are searching for something that you can’t quite put your finger on. But you’re hungering for something that will satisfy the deepest yearnings of your heart.

Welcome to “Heart Quest.” It’s time for God’s people to take a fresh look at who God is for the 21st century. Mankind’s understanding of God has not kept pace with his technological advancement. The character of God has been maligned and misrepresented for centuries. In many respects we have an outdated and outmoded 19th century concept of God. It’s time to put fresh eyes on the Bible and see what it has to say about God.

For example, we have an intensely personal contact with Jesus in the story of the Samaritan woman in John 4. “He needed to go through Samaria.” Why? Maybe the shortest route; probably He wanted to win some Samaritans.

It was hot weather, twelve noon, He was walking, "wearied from His journey." You'd be tired, too, and hungry. Jesus, the Son of God, Commander of the heavenly host, has humbled Himself to be one of us! He sits down by the town well, thirsty, hot, tired.

A five-time-loser in marriage, a lady comes to draw some water, flippant in her disdain for a strange man with whom she doesn't want to make eye contact (the man is a Jew). Get the water and get away.

"The Savior of the world" notices her, cares for her soul. But how to make contact? Heavenly psychology: ask for a favor—even the heathen can't refuse a drink of water. (But He is doomed to stay thirsty, for in the end she forgets to give it to Him.)

He is "meek and lowly in heart," but promises her the sky—"living water," something the legendary "Messiah" alone will be able to give. But He lets her know He is Somebody. He has caught her with his "hook," she bites.

Then He appears untactful, ungracious, even persnickety—opens a can of worms about her marital status. Why not first win her to Christianity and leave her to work out her morals? Why pain her at the beginning? Answer: the Holy Spirit's first job is to "convict of sin," and cohabiting without marriage is. Thus He proves that He is the divine Son of God.

She has sought to fulfill her need for happiness and love and it's all proven a failure. Her soul's hunger has gone unrequited.

The disciples have left Him while they buy "take out" groceries in town; coming back, they haven't a clue what's going on. The Samaritans are in process of making an amazing discovery about God.

The Samaritans discover who the disciples' "Master" is, whom they hadn't realized—He is * "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). It took Paul years later to explain what that means in his Galatians and Romans. We are still trying to realize who He is—is He "the Savior of the world," or has He merely made an offer to be?

It is built in to every human being to want to be accepted. We want to be a part. But when we do bad things it separates us from others and from God. When people get into trouble, it used to be they could go West, or to some far off island, or Alaska and start a new life. They could get lost and start all over again. But there's no place on the globe, now, where you can go and not find people. It's become increasingly difficult to get lost.

But the inner need of every soul is to want to be part of a family. There's a need to be accepted, loved, and forgiven. Who wants to live alone and die alone to no purpose.

When Joe Simpson climbed the south face of Siula Grande in the Peruvian Andes with his partner Simon, on the return trip down, Joe fell through a cornice breaking his leg so that he was no longer capable of climbing. As Simon was lowering him down the face by rope in a blinding

snow-storm, Joe went was dropped down an overhang from which there was no return. As Simon was holding onto him for dear life while himself being pulled from his belay position, he made the fateful decision to take a knife and cut the rope, thus effectively dooming his partner who fell into a crevasse.

However, Joe survived the fall and miraculously found a route out of the crevasse onto the glacier below, but with a broken leg unable to walk out. He scratched and clawed his way for miles all alone in his attempt to reach base camp. He went into delirium with the thought of utter abandonment. His prime reason to reach camp was because he didn't want to die alone. No one wants that. They want to die in someone's arms.

Since childhood we have all heard of the Good Shepherd who leaves His "ninety and nine" on that wild stormy night and seeks His one lost sheep "until He find it" (Luke 15:4-6). It illustrates that salvation depends entirely on the initiative of the Good Shepherd. The lost animal knows it's lost, but it can't find its way home. It cannot "arise and go" on its own to find salvation. So, the Lord Jesus Christ "seeks" us. The lost sheep is you and me. We are rescued by the Good Shepherd who is motivated by Divine love.

And we remember the lost coin, how the lady turns her house upside down until she finds that precious piece of silver. The coin is different from the sheep; it doesn't know it's lost. It represents you and me who were * "dead in trespasses and sins [who] walked according to the course of this world. . . . fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind. . . . children of wrath" (Eph. 2:1-3). But Someone found us, buried in the dust and trash of this dark world, unconscious of our condition.

But how does this common theme of God seeking and finding us work out in practical day-by-day living? Does the idea encourage us to be spiritually lazy, doing nothing?

The Prodigal Son story seems on the superficial surface to contradict God's love seeking us, rather than vice versa. The lost son seems to take the initiative in his own salvation. * "I will arise and go," he says to himself, and gets up out of the pigsty and goes—on his own (Luke 15:18). Like modern cars, he has a self-starter. The Father does *not* come seeking him, to "find" him. Forever after the boy can congratulate himself: "Yes, I was lost; but I found my way back! I'm saved because I 'sought' and 'found' salvation. I exerted the effort. I forced myself to take step after step. I did it. I'm saved by grace, but I'm also saved by my own obedience."

But wait a moment, Mr. Prodigal Son, not so fast. This parable illustrates how the Holy Spirit seeks and saves us lost ones. It was He who gave the boy sitting with the pigs the conviction that his Father loved him. The Holy Spirit inspired him with the motivation, because as the Comforter whom Jesus promised to send us, He, not self, convicted the boy of * "sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. . . . because the prince of this world is condemned" (John 16:7-11).

Yes, we're "home," but only because the Good Shepherd sought and found us, and His Holy Spirit did not abandon us. By grace we are saved through faith, and that not of ourselves; it is the gift of God. And it's specifically and emphatically * "not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

God is the Good Shepherd who seeks the heathen "sheep" who worship other gods. He used Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Old Testament to bring the good news of salvation to Babylon and its King Nebuchadnezzar.

Daniel first came to the attention of the King because of his healthy diet and care for his body as the temple of God. Daniel was selected by the King because he was smart, a good organizer, and a leader. Nebuchadnezzar could use such a young man not only to bring the captive people Israel into loyalty, but as part of the leadership team of his government.

So Daniel must eat the same food that supplied the king's table. The royal diet was loaded with flesh food, high in cholesterol and fancy delicacies that dulled the brain and weakened the heart and muscles. Daniel was used to eating a much simpler diet of fruits, grains, nuts and vegetables. So he refused to eat the king's food.

This got him into trouble with the king's staff, but he stuck to his plan. After a trial period, Daniel was discovered by the king and his court to be so much more physically healthy and vigorous of mind. He passed the entrance examination into the government education program with flying colors.

But God wasn't finished trying to reach Nebuchadnezzar. He gave Nebuchadnezzar a very wonderful dream sketching the history of the world. God revealed some very good news about the ultimate outcome of world history.

However, Nebuchadnezzar didn't understand and so in his confusion he was left with fear and foreboding about the future.

This is when circumstances brought Daniel to the king's attention. Daniel would proclaim the good news to the king by interpreting the dream.

Nebuchadnezzar was under the false impression that he was building a kingdom that would last forever. He was a dictator. His government was very cruel, violent, and oppressive; especially to the nations he conquered.

What God showed him in the dream as interpreted by Daniel is that such evil kingdoms were short-lived. They naturally implode and give way to even more oppressive and evil regimes. God is behind the rise and fall of the kingdoms of this world. God sets kings up and He removes them. God gives them power, but over the course of time, when they prove unworthy of exercising power, He permits others to take their place.

Nebuchadnezzar was shown that his beloved Babylon would briefly be a world power, but very soon after his passing, it would fall to the more aggressive powers of the combined Medes and Persians. After its cycle as a superpower, the Medes would be conquered by Alexander the Great of Greece. And then would follow mighty superpower. Rome would project its military, cultural, financial and religious influence throughout the world. Each successive kingdom would gobble up its prey.

Finally, a Christianized Romanism would be the epitome of all the former heathen kingdoms. Rome would encapsulate the self-exalting dominance that its victims had sought to project during their previous dominance.

In this dream of Daniel 2, all these empires were represented as a human colossus. The head of gold was Babylon. The chest and arms of silver were the Medes and Persians. The torso of brass was Greece. The legs and feet of iron was the Roman Empire.

But God had one more surprise for Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. So far the king had learned that the kingdoms of this world do not last. They come and they go. But in the end, God will have the last word. His kingdom is represented by a meteorite stone from outer space. It smashes all the kingdoms of this world grinding them to powder. * "The stone that smote the image [the colossus] became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth" (Dan. 2:34, 35).

Nebuchadnezzar's heart was so humbled that he fell on his face (vs. 46). He said to Daniel: * "Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret" (Dan. 2:47). God loved the king. Why? God's truth changed his heart. Why would God do that for a heathen pagan tyrant?

If you are a hemophiliac, thank God for modern medicine, which can help you. But if you are one of the vast majority of us whose blood coagulates after a wound, thank God for the built-in gift of healing. You cut your finger accidentally, maybe in the kitchen or the garage, and lo, your whole blood supply doesn't drain out of your body! Have you ever knelt and thanked God for that?

More particularly, have you realized that this gift is what the Son of God secured for you?

You catch a cold, lose a day or two from the office; break a leg playing ball; get busted up in a car wreck; yes, you have pain, but you become healed.

And that's true whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, faithful or unfaithful (like the rain falling on the just and the unjust). How come?

Isaiah 53 has the answer: * "Surely He [the Son of God] hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows . . . Wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, . . . and with His stripes we are healed" (vss. 4, 5).

Don't try to re-write Holy Scripture. It does *not* say, "with His stripes we *maybe* can be healed *if*" we take the initiative in believing and obeying. His body was "wounded," His blood flowed, in the Calvary event, so that the body and blood of every human being in the world can be healed * "freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23, 24).

The healing, even the blood-coagulation, is a universal blessing that no one deserves, a part of the benefits of the cross that are universal. The food you have eaten today, whether or not you believe in Christ, was "purchased" for you by His sacrifice. Whether or not you have realized it, you have been eating "the Lord's supper" all your life; every meal you have ever sat down to has been a "sacrament," even while you have been unwittingly ignorant of the truth. * "The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives *life* to the *world*" (John 6:33).

And beyond it all, "the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all," before we believed.

There is a strange expression in Ps 90:7: "We have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified." If God is "angry" with us, and His "wrath" hangs over us, we are indeed terrified and can't help being so. It can be a deep, slow anxiety based on terror.

We long for love, for good will, for someone important to us to be pleased with us. You long for some person you love to smile upon you, to know he/she truly loves you. Such love is the "sweet mystery of life."

Disappointment in love is painful, sometimes lifelong, an entire life shadowed; deep dark secrets of pain are cherished. David knew that the most wonderful woman in the world could never bring him the happiness that a glimpse of the smiling face of God could give him: * "There are many who say, 'Who will show us any good?' Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us. You have put gladness in my heart" (Ps. 4:6, 7).

A false or distorted gospel clouds that otherwise smiling face of God. For example, a successful evangelist writes that he believes a cloud of condemnation hangs over the head of every person in the world who has not chosen to "accept Christ." Yes, millions believe this; and no wonder they live sad lives. But the Bible teaches that the "condemnation" that came upon "all men" "in Adam" was reversed by the second Adam for the same "all men" (Rom. 5:15-18).

Galatians 3:13* tells us that the "curse" (same as the "condemnation"!) that was due to come upon us came upon Christ instead, for He "was made to be a curse for us." That "curse" or "condemnation" was the sentence of death, not mere "sleep," but the real thing. If you feel that God is holding that over your head, you can't help but feel miserable! But Hebrews 2:9 says that Christ died that "death" for "every man." 2 Corinthians 5:19 says quite clearly that * "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them" (2 Cor. 5:19). Your job is to believe the simple word of God; He is not imputing your trespasses to you! He imputed them to Christ instead; He bore them, He has already set you free from them. That's why He can send His rain on both the just and the unjust!

Yes, the truth is that you and I are by nature sinners; *but* because of the sacrifice of Christ He treats us as though we were innocent! This is not effervescent emotion; it is solid truth.

Ever since the Fall of our first parents in Eden, humans have been driven by this of God and death. Paul writes: that Christ delivered “them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15).

The gospel opens up the heart to the truth that “God is love” (1 John 4:9). The Christian life is no longer motivated by self-serving fear that if I do not do well in life, then I will go to hell; and if I do well, then I can claim a reward in heaven. Rather, to see that God is revealing Himself as “the God of all comfort” in that He is love, transforms the life. “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear” (1 John 4:18).

Most folks, including Christians, are afraid of God. They think He is out to pay them back for being bad. The greatest message in all the world which is to lighten it with His glory is the revelation of His love. God’s people are involved in the restoration of that long-lost message of His love.

Since Adam fell in the Garden of Eden, every one of us has committed ourselves to the service of sin and the wages of sin is death—the real thing. This death is “goodbye to life forever.” From the first Adam we inherit nothing but sin, condemnation, and death.

Christ was sent by the Father to this earth with the mission of being “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42). Jesus came as the good Shepherd to seek and to save that which was lost. He came to save the ungodly. As the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45) He took all humanity into Himself. God “made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). Therefore, when He died, we all died. Just as the Apostle writes: “If one died for all, then were all dead.” (2 Cor. 5:14). In other words, if He did not die for all, then all would be dead. However, all live because He died. Everyone on this earth owes their life, their daily provision, their freedom, their nurture and support, to the love of God in Christ.

Let us see something in the cross of Jesus. We must see something there that we have not seen before. Jesus bore our sin in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). He felt the agony that every sinner will feel, when he realizes the magnitude of sin in the final judgment. Christ felt the judgment of our sin on the cross so that we may never have to go through that experience ourselves.

Jesus died the equivalent of the second death—the real thing—goodbye to life forever. The price that He paid was to surrender His divine nature to forever inactivity, cut off His eternal relation with the Father, with no hope of a resurrection. He did not just go to sleep for the weekend and get a good rest. What most people consider death is not what He experienced. One can never appreciate Jesus’ death if he thinks death is the door to eternal life. Death is the enemy (1 Cor. 15:26), not a friend. Death is cessation of life. If Jesus’ didn’t really, truly die on Calvary, then

the whole thing is a monstrous fraud acted out by God, but Jesus has nothing to do with hypocrisy.

Jesus died the equivalent of the second death in agony for every sin committed upon earth. So He knows the burdens that you carry. He knows your doubts. He knows your fears. He knows your tragic mistakes. He knows your heartache. He bore it all to Calvary. His love for you was such that He did not think about Himself, but only of you. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This is God's gift to you.

Jesus is God's gift to every man. Jesus is "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:9). Jesus condemned no man while on earth and neither does His Holy Spirit sent since His departure to conduct His business on the earth. "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). God has universally declared all to be forgiven of their sins because Christ's death was sufficient to pardon everyone. There are no conditions, which one must meet, in order to come to Christ. God has already declared the peace by giving the pardon to all. Now God's appeal goes out to all. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them" (2 Cor. 5:19).

You can appreciate this gift. What did your mother teach you when someone gives you something? You say, "Thank you!" Well, if you can see what it cost the dear Son of God to die for your sin, you can tell Him, "Thank you"? Faith is a heart appreciation for what it cost the Son of God to die for your sins. Therefore, God's love gives you faith so you can thank Him. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19).

Does it matter what we believe about the cross of Christ? One idea as good as another? If we limit the "breadth and length and depth and height of the love (*agape*) of Christ" which we see at the cross, the result is lukewarmness for the Christian (Rev. 3:14-21).

If Christ's sacrifice is only an offer of salvation and not the actual gift given, and the sinner rejects it, then he can claim that he is paying for his sins by his own second death. And all along, that's what he's been claiming—he is paying his own way. As he stands before the Great White Throne in the final judgment, he can shake his fist at Christ and say, "You actually did nothing for me! You merely offered me salvation and I refused the offer. As I go into the Lake of Fire, I am myself paying for my sins!"

But wait a moment. In that final judgment, the Lord will reveal to him the truth. The sinner will see that Christ did actually pay for them! He will see that his own second death is entirely unnecessary—Christ has already died his second death (Heb. 2:9). His name will be Esau; Christ *gave* him the birthright. Just like Esau who did not have to do anything to earn it for it was already his, Christ has given "all men" the *gift* of salvation. Like Esau, the lost have "despised" and "sold" it.

Does it make any difference what we believe about what Christ accomplished at the cross? Has “the Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people” in these last days that honors and glorifies Christ in His sacrifice? Is He indeed “the Saviour of the world” (John 4:42) or does He merely offer to be? Are all men actually infinitely and eternally in debt to Him for even their next breath? Why can the Father send His rain and sunshine on “all men,” “the just and the unjust,” unless Christ has actually accomplished something for them all and has *given* them the *gift*? How amazing is Christ’s grace? Dare we limit or restrict it?

If a rich man gives you a check for \$1000 and you do not cash it, what has he lost? It seems the Bible is clear: “Christ gave Himself for our sins” (Gal. 1:4); an unbeliever’s refusal does not cancel the reality of the gift. Failure to grasp this truth weakens our devotion to Him.

There was a boy who didn’t know how to swim. But he wanted to paddle around in the lake not far from the house. His brother was six years older, and he knew how, and he wanted to try to teach his younger brother how.

They didn’t know it, but the city had done some dredging in that lake. You couldn’t see the deep dredge holes, of course. Suddenly he fell into one of them. It seemed to him like stepping off a cliff. He just went right down like a stone. Everything got dark.

He was so glad that his big brother saw him disappear beneath the water, and rescued him. Because he did that for his brother, he became his “savior” from drowning. So he really owed his life to his brother!

Now, what has Jesus done for you? The Bible tells us that He is “the Savior of the world.” It sounds nice to say that, but what does it mean?

We are all a part of the world, so what the Bible really says is that He has saved us. But what has He saved us from? What can you thank Jesus for?

No person in the world today has actually seen Jesus, but He is a real man, and He is also God. But for sure He is one of us and He belongs to us. The reason why we can’t see Him like we see any other person is that He is much greater than any other person. Billions of people would want to see Him (and they will see Him some day soon), but it wouldn’t be fair for Him to show Himself only to you or me. So everybody looks forward to seeing Him in person when He comes the second time. But when we do see Him we will thank Him, because He has already saved us from death. But that’s not the ordinary kind of death that He has saved us from. It’s not the death that has happened when there’s a funeral.

Jesus tells us that a funeral isn’t about the real thing. When a person dies now, he simply goes to sleep until God’s resurrection day, when He will come up again. Jesus said that God * “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The death that people die now is not what that

word “perish” means. When people die now it’s just like when at night you say, “Good night, see you in the morning.”

There is another kind of death—that’s what the Bible says is * “the second death” (Rev. 2:11; 20:14). And that is what it means to “perish.” At the end of the great “thousand years” that are yet to come, the wicked people will be judged, and they will “perish” in the lake of fire. No resurrection from that—ever. They will just be gone forever. That’s what “hell” will be.

It’s not because God will be extra angry with them; He does not hate them. He still pities them. But they themselves have made their choice to “perish.” God won’t force them to change their minds. They don’t want to live forever in God’s kingdom. They actually want to be separate from Him and separate from His kingdom. And so, God must give them what they really want. It sounds crazy, and it is, but Jesus says that * “anyone who hates Me loves death” (Prov. 8:36). Can you imagine that?

That is what Jesus has actually saved you and me from. Take a deep breath; that is proof that Jesus has saved you from that second death because if He had not saved us from it, we would all be dead right now in it. So don’t ever think that Jesus has done nothing for you!

All this means that God intends that the life you and I have today shall be the beginning of everlasting life. And it will be so, if we “walk with Jesus.” He is not “I-want-to-be-your-Savior.” He is your Savior! Now don’t push Him away.

People can catch hold of big ideas! When we think of what Jesus has saved us from, we want to say the biggest “Thank You” we can think of, because He could never have saved us this way unless He had already died our second death for us. And that’s just what He did when He died on His cross. The death He died was hell itself, the real thing.

Many people don’t see this, and that’s why they don’t give themselves to Jesus to live for Him. But now you do see it, don’t you?

He can thank his brother for saving him from going to “sleep” when he was a child, in the first death. But now he can thank Jesus because He saved him from the second death, and he can tell Him that he is glad to obey Him and give Him his whole life. Won’t you choose to do the same?