
CHAPTER 1

BEGINNINGS

A YOUNG ADULT'S ENCOUNTER WITH ELLEN WHITE

. . . ON SALVATION

Ellen White makes the topics of salvation and the love of Christ, who died for me, both simple and personal. When I open The Desire of Ages, He's right there. He's so real, so able to save.

When I read what Ellen White says about the topic of salvation, it's like no other author. What she writes has to do with me personally. It's my life she's talking about—my feelings and experiences. I recognize them. This is a salvation of experience, one I can touch, because it's about Jesus. I know she knew Jesus personally. Whatever any other writer knew, it doesn't compare with this.

Other writers may have something important to say, they may try to share the right ideas, but in the pages of The Desire of Ages Ellen White is trying to share salvation through Jesus. And the best thing is she makes me want it! I want it with all my heart.

In her writings she talks about salvation in the real world—my world. It's not about only ideas. It's not a beehive of rhetoric. The intellectual part has its place, but when I get up in the morning to face my day spiritually, what I want needs to be clear, vivid, and personal. I find that in her writings. My strength to save myself is like "ropes of sand," as she puts it. I know she's right because I've felt those ropes crumble in my hands. What she describes I can touch, for it's a theology of flesh and blood. It's about Jesus! Ellen

White paints a picture of a Christ as someone who is real, who is able to save me from myself.

Most of all, I know she has written because she wanted me to be saved and not because she wanted me to believe her ideas. And I do want to be saved, with all my heart. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

—Laura, age 24

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. . . ON SALVATION

“Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of price. In men and women, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possibilities of redemption.”¹

As a child I always fancied pearls. I loved their gentle curves and soft off-white luster.

I thought they were prettier than any diamond or ruby could ever be. So it didn't surprise me that Ellen White compared our beloved Savior to my favorite jewel. What I didn't expect was that she wrote that Christ saw in lost humanity “the pearl of price.” How could He find something so beautiful in me? But when I read her eloquent illustrations further I understood what, for me, is the true essence of salvation. Christ doesn't seek me because I am lost. He doesn't long to save me because He feels obliged to. He gives me salvation because He loves me.

Mrs. White thoughtfully wrote of Christ, our heavenly merchantman. Reading what she writes makes me rejoice daily for humanity because He finds the precious pearls He is seeking in our old, marred earth—because He sees the pearl in me.

—Jennifer, age 22

BEGINNINGS

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife, but had no marital relations with her until she had borne a son; and he named him Jesus (Matthew 1:18-25).

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what

had been told them about this child: and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them (Luke 2:8-20).

The promise that Jesus would come as our Savior had been made in the Garden of Eden. When Adam and Eve first heard it, they expected a quick fulfillment. So when they held their firstborn son in their arms, they both hoped he would be the Redeemer. But that was not to be. Thousands of years later, as God's appointed time came, Jesus left heaven to be born in Bethlehem.²

In becoming human, Jesus demonstrated ultimate humility. On earth His physical surroundings were primitive. He hid His glory from those who saw Him and shunned all outward display. The angels marveled at such a plan of redemption and watched to see how the people of God would receive His Son.³

The Roman decree to register everyone in the vast empire extended to the humble people living in the hills of Galilee. Angels watched over Joseph and Mary as they journeyed from their home in Nazareth south to Bethlehem. When the two arrived in Bethlehem, weary and homeless, they walked the length of the main street, from the gate of the city to the eastern end of the town, seeking a place to spend the night. But there was no room for them anywhere! Finally, in a crude animal shelter, they found a place to lie down, and Mary gave birth to her son, the Redeemer of the world.⁴

Above the hills of Bethlehem an immense throng of angels had gathered for this moment, and at His birth they began to sing this great news to the world. Unfortunately, the religious leadership in Israel, ignoring their destiny, did not share in the celebration.⁵

In the same fields where David once cared for his father's flocks, shepherds guarded their sheep through the night. They had been talking of the promised Savior and praying for His coming. Then suddenly an angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:10, 11, NIV). The whole area was lighted up with the brightness of the angels.⁶

When the angels disappeared, the light faded away, and darkness returned to the hills around Bethlehem. But the brightest picture ever seen by human eyes remained in the memory of the shepherds. When they regained their composure, they said, "'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger" (Luke 2:15, 16, NIV).⁷

Heaven and earth are no wider apart today than when shepherds heard the angels' song. And each of us now, as the shepherds then, is the object of God's most intense love and interest.⁸

The story of Bethlehem is a fantastic theme. We should marvel that Jesus exchanged the throne of heaven and the worship of angels for a manger bed and the company of sheep and goats. Yet this was only the beginning of the evidence of His great love. It would have been the ultimate humiliation for Jesus to take Adam's nature, even when he stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by millennia of sin. Like every other human baby, He accepted the results of the laws of heredity so He would be able to share and understand our disappointments and temptations, and to give us the example of what it means to live a perfect life.⁹

CHAPTER 2

JESUS AS A CHILD AND YOUNG ADULT

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety." He said to them, "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor (Luke 2:40-52).

From their earliest years, Jewish children were surrounded by rabbis and their rigid rules for everything down

to the smallest detail. But Jesus didn't show any interest in those ways. From childhood He acted independently from such restrictions. He constantly studied the Old Testament and gradually became aware of the spiritual condition of the people in His village. He observed that the standards of society and the standards of God were in constant conflict. People would forget God's words and observe their own traditions that had no value.¹⁰

In His gentle way Jesus tried to please those around Him. The scribes misunderstood this gentleness and assumed He would be easily influenced by their teachings. But when they questioned Him, He asked for their authority from the Bible. He seemed to know the Scriptures from beginning to end. The rabbis were ashamed of being instructed by a child and indignant at His opposition. They soon realized that Jesus' spiritual understanding was far beyond theirs.¹¹

At a very early age Jesus began to act for Himself in the formation of character, and not even respect and love for His parents could turn Him from obedience to God. The words of Scripture became the reason for everything He did that was different from the family's customs. His brothers, Joseph's sons, sided with the rabbis, insisting that traditions had to be followed the same as the laws of God. They called Jesus' strict obedience to the laws of God "stubbornness." They were astounded at His knowledge and wisdom when answering the rabbis and recognized that His education had to come from a higher source than theirs.¹²

There were some who wanted to be friends with Jesus because they felt at peace with Him; but more of His peers avoided Him because they felt condemned by such a pure life. He was bright and cheerful; His friends enjoyed His company and welcomed His suggestions. But they were impatient with His scruples and called Him narrow and straitlaced.¹³

Jesus' choices were a continuous mystery to His parents

from the time they found Him in the temple at age 12. For example, His happiest hours were spent alone with nature and with God. Early in the morning He would go to a quiet place to meditate, read the Bible, and pray. Then He would return home to do the family chores. He loved to help suffering persons, and even suffering animals.¹⁴

Jesus found value in every person. He went out of His way to speak kind words of encouragement to sick, oppressed, and discouraged persons. Sometimes He even gave hungry people His own lunch. He tried to bring the hope of spiritual victory and the assurance of being part of God's family to everyone, including the rough and unpromising. Jesus never contended for His own rights, even though He was harassed and was often treated unfairly.¹⁵

At times His mother Mary wavered between Jesus and His brothers, who didn't believe Jesus had been sent from God. But they could hardly deny His divine character or the fact that His presence brought a pure atmosphere into their home.¹⁶