

EVANGEL

The Good News of Jesus Christ



Cocaine

The title of this article may have caught you by surprise. Cocaine and Christ? What does coke have to do with the Lord Jesus Christ? One is a drug – maybe you’ve had some experience with it. The other is the Saviour with whom you might not be familiar. One could ruin your life. The other can save your life. The difference between the two is extreme. Nevertheless, there is a similarity between cocaine and Christ. Can you think of what it might be? Matthew 6:24 gives you a clue: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or love the one and hate the other.” Here the Lord Jesus says that no one can have two masters. You either serve Him or you serve another master, another lord. When you’re a coke user, you have a master. You have a lord, a pretty demanding one at that. The same could be said if you’re into any other kind of dope, or even alcohol. Your master isn’t Jesus Christ. Your master is the stuff you snort, the crack you smoke, or whatever else you do for a fix. Your lord is cocaine. That’s where the similarity is. You can spend the rest of

your life serving coke as lord, or serving Christ Jesus as Lord.

Maybe you’re thinking this article doesn’t apply to you. You’re a clean, middle-class person. You don’t do drugs or overindulge in alcohol. But you should think again. If you don’t serve Christ as Lord, who or what are you serving? Are you mindlessly pursuing material wealth? Is money your lord? Maybe you “just imagine” winning it big at Lotto 6/49. Are you imprisoned by sexual lust? Maybe you can’t keep away from porn on the Internet. Is your stomach your lord? Perhaps you worship a god other than the One who has revealed Himself in the Bible. At any rate, if you’re not a Christian, you don’t serve Christ as Lord. You serve something or someone else as your master and whether that be cocaine, alcohol, Allah, pornography or money is really beside the point.

Christ is Lord – What does THAT mean?

But Christians say, with the Bible, that Christ is Lord (see John 20:28). But what exactly does that mean? As I’ve already hinted, when the Bible uses the word “Lord” it refers to the idea of a “master” or an “owner.” We have some difficulty relating to this since we don’t see it around us anymore, but in Bible times people often owned other people as slaves. The slave would call his master his “lord.” A slave could only belong to one master, he couldn’t moonlight and be enslaved to two different masters. We see this reflected in Christ’s statement in Matthew 6:24 which I mentioned a moment ago: “No one can serve two masters. . . .” The word used in the

original language for “master” is the same word used elsewhere in the Bible for “Lord.” In this passage, Christ is pointing to the fact that you can’t be neutral with respect to God – He is either your Lord and your Master or He isn’t. There is no middle position to take. No grey areas, but only black and white. You are either a child of God, bought with the blood of Jesus Christ, or a child of Satan in the chains of sin (see James 4:4).

If you read the letters of Paul in the New Testament, you may be surprised how often Paul calls himself a slave (or servant) of Jesus Christ (see, for example, Romans 1:1). Paul is owned by Christ his master. Christ has bought him with His blood and suffering. Before he became a Christian, Paul was a slave of sin and death. Through His suffering, especially on the cross, the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price to buy Paul. It’s not only that way with Paul, but with all Christians. They now belong to Jesus Christ. He paid the price to buy them (see 1 Corinthians 6:20). And so when Christians say that Jesus is their Lord, we mean that He owns us as His own. He has ransomed us from Satan and death. He is now our Ruler, our Master, our Lord.

Say it, Mean it, Live it

It’s really a wonderful thing to be able to say that Christ is Lord. But we should also be careful in saying it too quickly without meaning it. In Matthew 7:21, Christ gives a very important warning for us: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” Here the Lord Jesus says, yes, many do say that I am Lord, but not all live according to that statement. Many say it without

and Christ

really meaning it. Some say, yes, Christ is Lord, but they still live with coke as their real master. Some say, yes, Christ is Lord, but they live with booze as their real master. So the sad fact is that many who say, "Jesus is Lord," may not make it into heaven. They also have to "practice what they preach" by doing the will of God. It's pretty obvious that Christ is speaking about people who are hypocrites, they say one thing and they do another. We could also call such people practical atheists. As you may know, atheists are people who don't believe in God. But practical atheists say they believe in God, but in practice they act as if He isn't there or if He is, He doesn't matter. They may as well be atheists. Believing in the existence of God or even that the Bible is true isn't enough. The Bible tells us that even the demons, the evil spirits, know that Christ is Lord, but they still live in denial of that fact (see Luke 4:41 and James 2:19).

So how about you? Do you believe that Christ is Lord? And if you say that Christ is Lord, do you mean it truthfully and live it faithfully every day? We have to realize that the confession of Christ as Lord refers to more than the salvation of our souls for eternity. It also has an impact on how we live our lives today. It matters for your whole life. Your whole life must be possessed by Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 10:5, we must take every thought captive to the Lord Jesus Christ. That means that we have to turn our backs on our rebellion against God. Yes, rebellion against God – also known as sin. That's what we're all guilty of. From the first man Adam until today, all of us have gone against what God wants (see Romans 3:10-18). Everyday we make ourselves more and more guilty and there's no



stopping the river of sin in this life. God demands that a price be paid for this disobedience and that's where Christ comes into the picture. He can save you from God's anger against sin, He can pay the price for you which you can't pay. All that is required is obedience to God's command: repent and believe.

Repentance and Faith

We have to repent of our sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Christ tells us in Luke 13:5 that unless we repent we shall perish. What does it mean to repent? It's not a word that you hear everyday. It literally means "a change of mind." When the Bible speaks of "mind" it's not just talking about our brains – it's pointing to our whole being, everything that makes us up. So when we repent of our sins, we have a change of heart about them. We no longer love our sins, but we hate them. We turn away from them, and we turn to God with a sorry heart. We have a 180 degree change of direction in our lives. Instead of being enslaved to the devil and sin, we now submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. We also trust in Him that His suffering was enough to

pay for our sins. We believe that God will forgive us because of what He did. That's what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus for your salvation. When we do this by the grace of God, then Christ rules in our hearts as Lord and Master.

I hope and pray that if you haven't already, you too will repent and believe. Being enslaved to sin may seem cool and easy right now, but in the long run the consequences are horrible. The Bible warns us that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23) – not just dying at the end of your life, but eternal agony. Proverbs 13:15 says that the way of the unrepentant sinner is hard. The chains of sin are hot and heavy, friend. They will only get heavier and hotter until it is unbearable (see Luke 16:19-23). On the other hand, listen to the beautiful words of the Lord Jesus Christ: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30). Which master are you going to serve?

Wes Bredenhof

Comfort for Living

He was born when his parents were very old. They named him Isaac meaning he laughs because God had brought joy and laughter to their family. When he was about 28 years old, his mother died. This caused Isaac much grief, since he was an only child and not yet married. His father sent one of his servants to find a wife for him. When the servant returned with a woman named Rebekah, Isaac married her and loved her and was comforted after his mother's death (Genesis 24:67).

This event tells us what comfort is about. Comfort is placing a certain good over against something bad. The bad in Isaac's life was the loss of his mother. The good God placed over against this bad was the gift of a wife. Having received a wife, Isaac was able to effectively deal with the grief of his mother's death and continue to move on without the burden of his grief.

This event in the life of Isaac is a little window into a larger reality. This larger reality is that we live our lives between Paradise Lost and Paradise Restored. This means we live our lives in a broken world in which we all need comfort. Some need to be comforted because they are sick; others because they are depressed. Some need to be comforted because they are lonely; others because they are overworked. Some need to be comforted because they are divorced; others need to be comforted because they are unhappily married. I'm sure you need comfort, too. You may not need it at this moment, but I'm sure you can remember times when you did. Undoubtedly, you will also need comfort in the future again.

The Bible tells us that Jesus Christ is our only comfort (e.g., Luke 4:18, 19). Ultimately He is the only good we can place over against all the bad we experience in this life. All other comforts fade and fail; Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). The comfort He gives lasts forever.

A loving comforter

This is because Jesus Christ is a loving comforter. He sees our misery, hears our cries, is concerned about our suffering and came down from heaven to do something about them. While He was on earth, you see Him giving sight back to the blind, hearing back to the deaf, speech back to the dumb, the use of one's legs back to the lame and life back to the dead. Yet, the greatest expression of his love was when He allowed Himself to be nailed to a wooden cross and bear the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. You see, you can be able to walk, hear, see and speak and yet be separated from God. You can also be reconciled to God and still be unable to see, speak, walk or talk. The former is a comfort that fades and fails; the latter is a comfort that lasts.

A powerful comforter

Jesus Christ, however, is not only a loving comforter; He is also a powerful comforter. While Jesus was on earth, He demonstrated his power over nature, sickness, human life, human behaviour and the forces of evil. Yet, the greatest expression of his power was defeating the power of sin with his death of Calvary's cross and the power of death with his resurrection from the dead. You see, a storm can subside, an illness can be cured, human behaviour can change, but if you are still in the power of sin and death, what kind of

comfort do you really have? Yet, if you have been freed from the power of sin and death, you can experience comfort even when you are sick or in the midst of a storm, for you have been freed from things that kept you in bondage and were ruining your life.

A providential comforter

Jesus is a loving comforter and a powerful comforter. He is also a providential comforter. Everything in this world got started in Jesus Christ and everything finds its purpose in Him. He was there before any of it came into existence and He holds it all together right up to this moment (Colossians 1:16, 17). Thus, all the bad things that happen to us in this broken world do not happen to us by chance. On the contrary, the Lord Jesus Christ controls and guides all these events. When Jesus is your only comfort you know that God is working in these bad things, somehow bringing good out of them for you and other people. For instance, when bad things happen, you can realize that your life is more dependent upon God than you formerly realized or believed. Just remember what happened after 9-11. It's amazing, isn't it how God can bring good out of bad when you lift your eyes upwards to Him and commit your heart to Him. That's because Jesus is a providential comforter. He rules and controls. He upholds and sustains. He leads and guides all things in this world and in your life.

An assuring comforter

Jesus is our only comfort! This is also true because He is an assuring comforter. Because we live our lives between Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, there is a lot of confusion in this world. Some people are not sure whether God exists; others are. Some people are not sure

in a Broken World

whether Jesus really was who He claimed He was; others are. Some people are not sure whether the presence of evil and suffering in this world is compatible with the presence of an all-powerful and all-loving God; others are. Some are not sure whether there is life after death; others are. The good news of the gospel is that because Jesus is an assuring comforter, He assures us of all these things. He does not do this by enabling us to rationally prove all these things and more, but through dwelling in our hearts with his Holy Spirit. Just like you know for sure that you exist or what you had for breakfast this morning without any logical, rational proof, in much the same way you know for sure that Jesus was who He claimed He was and that there is life after death because Jesus assures you of this through his Holy Spirit. He does not prove this, but simply assures you that these things are true. Deep down in your heart, you know they are true without any rational, logical proof. In fact, the Holy Spirit assures you there is eternal life not only after death, but also right in the present. You see, eternal life does not begin when you die, but when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then the life of eternity is pulled forward into the present and you experience the beginning of eternal life right in the midst of your temporal life.

An enabling comforter

Remember Isaac? He was an only, unmarried son deeply grieved when his mother died, but comforted by God with the gift of a wife. Isaac was enabled to go on and continue with his life because God enabled him to do so. Jesus Christ does the same because He is an enabling comforter. While He was on earth, Jesus enabled many people to

continue their lives because He healed them of their diseases. He also enabled them to continue their lives because He forgave them their sins and released them from their captivity to sin. It is the latter enabling that makes Jesus Christ the source of our ultimate comfort. You see, you can be healed of an illness and still not be able to live the way God wants you to live. But once your sins have been forgiven and you have been freed from the power of sin and death in your life, you are able to live the way God designed you to live. You make loving God and loving others the main concern of your life.

Three obstacles

Many people do not see that Jesus Christ is the source of their only comfort. Consequently they continue to seek their comfort in all sorts of other people or places. Perhaps, also you are not sure whether Jesus really is the source of your only comfort? If you are not, I would like you to consider three obstacles that sometimes get in the way of recognizing Jesus for who He is.

Sometimes, our sins get in the way. Instead of believing that the ultimate goal of our life is to love God and love other people, we think the ultimate goal of our life is to live for ourselves. We don't belong to God, but we belong to ourselves! This basic sin of thinking we are our own boss, in turn, leads to all sorts of other sins, such as anger, bitterness, impurity, dishonesty, lying and coveting. All these sins and more, blind our eyes to the beauty and majesty of Jesus so that we do not see Him as the source of our only comfort.

Other times, our wounds and our problems get in the way. Someone has treated us unfairly in the past and we have never gotten over it. Someone has abused us in

the past and every day we are reminded of this violation of ourselves. We continue to live with unfulfilled desires and chronic illnesses. All these wounds and problems keep the focus of our attention on ourselves and away from Jesus as the source of our only comfort. They blind us to the lasting difference He can make in our lives when we surrender our lives to Him and follow Him where He calls us to go.

Sometimes our bondage gets in the way. We are in the grip of an anxiety that goes deep to the core of our being. Consequently, we are always afraid of what other people will think. We are compulsively obsessed with perfectionistic thinking or behaviour. We continually try to control people and circumstances.

The good news of the gospel is that if you are in bondage to anxiety manifesting itself in any of the ways I mentioned or perhaps some other ways, Jesus Christ wants to comfort you by freeing you from this bondage. He can do this because He is a powerful comforter. If your wounds or problems are blinding you to the beauty of your only comforter, Jesus Christ wants to heal you of these wounds and give you comfort. Remember, He is a providential comforter, an assuring comforter and an enabling comforter. If your sins form an obstacle to seeking your only comfort in Jesus Christ, then Jesus wants to forgive you your sins. He loves you so much that He died for sinners like you and me.

If Jesus is not the source of your only comfort, why don't you surrender your life to Him today? Everything in this world really did get started in Him and everything really does find its purpose in Him. He really does hold all of life together. Also your life!

Dick Moes

The Garden of Eden

Bible Story based on Genesis 2:4-24

The Lord looks well after his people.

After He created the heavens and the earth, He made man. He had exactly in mind what man would look like. Man was to be the mirror image of the Lord. In stature and wisdom man must reflect the Creator Himself.

According to that holy pattern man was formed by the invisible hand of the Lord. With divine love the Lord carefully gathered some soil. Out of the soil He shaped a majestic figure: the form of man. Man's forehead spoke of knowledge and insight. His face expressed love and understanding. His shoulders portrayed strength and nobility. His hands showed skill and dedication. His legs embodied the dominion of man over all creation. Man was made to be the ruler of all creatures. Obedient to the Lord in heaven, man was God's governor over the earth.

The shape of man was beautiful and perfect. But it was not ready. It was not a living man yet.

Man became a living being when the Lord blew into the nostrils of the perfectly shaped figure. At that moment God's life-giving Spirit filled Adam with breath and with a God-fearing soul. Now man was ready. With his soul he was able to talk with the Creator. With his body he was able to work for the Lord in the created world. Indeed, man was the crown of creation.

For such a special creature the Lord made a special place. He planted a beautiful garden for man in Eden. The Garden of Eden was the perfect home for man. Its fruit trees provided food in abundance. Its rivers were a place where man and animal could drink and bathe. The plants and trees stayed lush and healthy, because they were watered daily with a gentle mist. Often the Lord came to talk with man. The Garden of Eden

was perfectly suited to be the place where God meets with man.

In the middle of the Garden of Eden the Lord had placed two special trees. God explained their meaning to man. With these trees the Lord would test if man was willing to obey Him.

The one tree was called the tree of life. It was there to keep man's trust in the Lord strong. The tree of life was a sign for man that God would be faithful to his creation. By eating its fruits Adam was assured that the Lord would always provide for him and give him life.

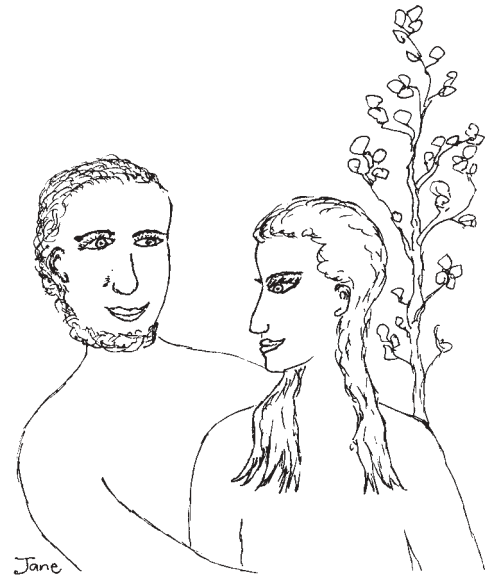
The other tree was called the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was the forbidden tree. Man was not allowed to eat from it. If he would disobey God by eating one of its fruits, he would deserve death.

In this way God tested man. If man would not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he would be able to enjoy the blessing of the tree of life. On the other hand, if man would eat from the forbidden tree, he would have to die. In that case he would no longer be allowed to eat from the tree of life.

The Garden of Eden was a perfect place for man. It had all man needed to live. Yet, man must work in the Garden. He was to look after the plants and animals. But this work was a joy to man. And every seventh day was a day of rest.

One of man's first tasks was naming the animals. The Lord brought all the animals to man. As they presented themselves, man looked them over. Immediately he understood their nature. He gave them their name accordingly.

But man had seen more than the



character of each animal. He had also noticed that they came in pairs. Each man-animal had a woman-animal with him. Yet, man had no wife. He had the Lord to talk with, which was very good indeed. But there was no one at his side. There was no one to help him. There was no one to make him complete.

The Lord understood man's longing. He made him fall into a deep sleep. While man was asleep, the Lord took a rib from his side. Lovingly He closed up the empty place with flesh. From the rib He formed a well-shaped woman and brought her to man.

Man was overjoyed. With thankful heart he accepted the wife the Lord had prepared for him. He took her in his arms, and was thrilled. "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh! She is woman, because she was taken out of man!"

Together man and woman were one. They completely belonged to each other. They did not have to wear clothes, because their bodies and minds were not spoiled with sin. In openness and perfect love they served their Lord and Maker. Together they took on the task of looking after creation and raising a godly family. God is good and his gifts are perfect.

By Jane

Activity Page

The Tree of Life

After the Lord created the heavens and the earth, He planted a beautiful garden in Eden. This garden became known as paradise. It was the perfect home for man and his wife.

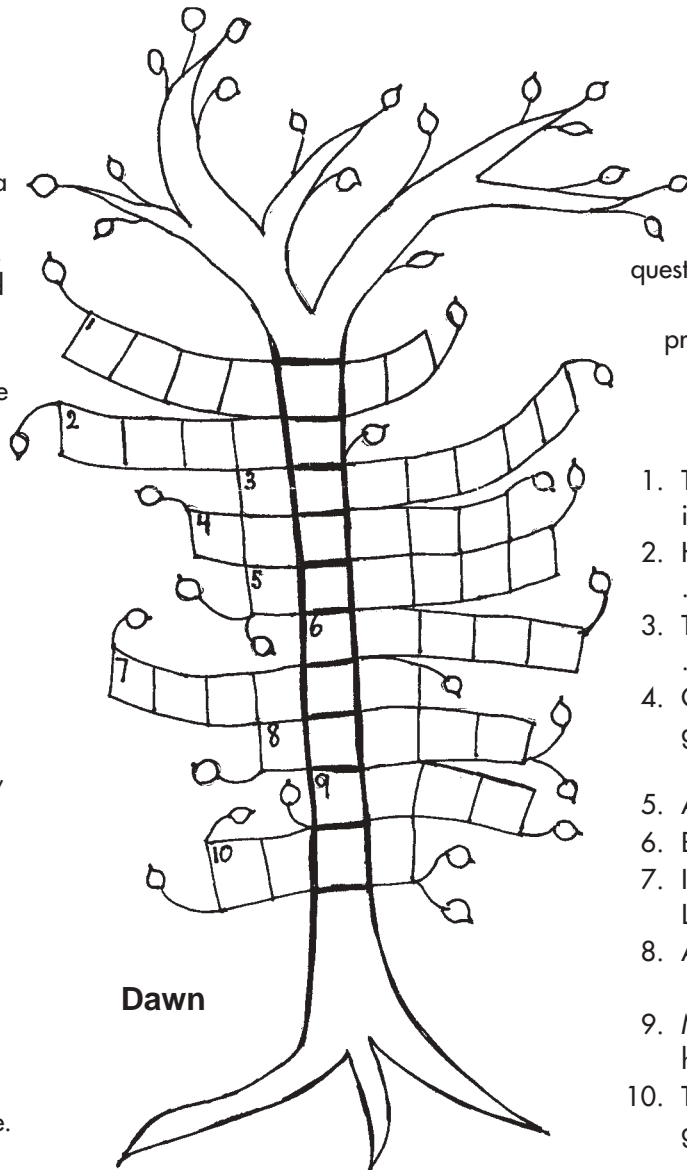
In the middle of the garden God planted the tree of life. This tree was a sign and seal of God's faithfulness. Man was allowed to eat freely from this tree. By tasting its fruit man was made sure that God will look after him as his faithful Lord.

There was another tree in the middle of the Garden of Eden. That tree had a long name. It was called: the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If man would eat from that tree, he would not only know good, but also evil. God forbade man to eat from that tree.

Yet, man and his wife did eat from that tree. They listened to the voice of evil. God came down from heaven and told them that they could not longer eat from the tree of life. God would no longer look after them and give them life. They now must die.

But the Lord had mercy. He promised a Saviour, who would pay the price for the disobedience of man and his wife. This Saviour is our Lord Jesus. Jesus not only saved us. He also taught us how to do the will of the Father in heaven.

People still die, also the believers in the Lord. But the believers will have access to the tree of life again on the new earth. Those who know Jesus as their Saviour and who obey the Lord's will, can eat freely from the tree of life in the new paradise of God.



Tree Words

The answers to the questions in this puzzle are found in the Bible Texts which are printed on this page. Fill in the answers on the branches. On the trunk you will find the name of the perfect tree.

1. Then the Lord . . . a garden in Eden.
2. He is like a tree planted by
3. The leaves were used for the . . . of the people.
4. On each side of the river grew a tree of life with its . . . kinds of fruit.
5. A gentl . . . is a tree of life.
6. Bearing . . . every month.
7. In the . . . of the garden the Lord planted the tree of life.
8. A tree of life with its twelve . . . of fruit.
9. My . . . is to do the will of him who sent me.
10. Then the Lord planted a garden in

Bible Texts about the Tree of Life

Many texts in the Bible speak about the tree of life.

"Then the Lord planted a garden in Eden. In the middle of the garden the Lord placed the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil."
(Genesis 2:8, 9)

"A gentle tongue is a tree of life." (Proverbs 15:4)

"Blessed is the man who trusts God. He is like a tree planted by water, which does not stop to bear fruit." (Jeremiah 17:7, 8)

"Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me.'" (John 4:34)

"Everyone who is victorious will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God."
(Revelation 2:7)

"On each side of the river grew a tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, bearing fruit every month. The leaves were used for the healing of the people."
(Revelation 22:2)

Who Wants to be First?

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and who humbles himself will be exalted.

Luke 14:11

Jesus had been invited for dinner by an important Pharisee in the village he was visiting. He came early and watched as other guests arrived. They would enter the door, observe the formalities and then, because it was a dinner party, they would look for a spot at the table. In every case, each guest took a place as near to the head of the table as they could.

The Lord Jesus was disappointed. For so many people, it was “Me first!”; they thought, “If I don’t take it, someone else will.”

He had seen that attitude many times before. In fact, He had to deal with this more than once with his own disciples! Once, Zebedee’s wife was bursting with ambition for her sons James and John (two of Jesus’ leading disciples) and she asked Jesus to give her sons the highest authority and honour when He at last became King. That was bad. When the other disciples learned what James and John’s mom had done, they demanded this honour for themselves! That was worse!

But it happened again. While they were travelling (it seemed they were always travelling!) the disciples began to argue about who was the most important of them all. When Jesus asked what they were talking about on the road, they were so ashamed that nobody dared to say anything to Him. Too bad they didn’t feel ashamed when those selfish feelings came upon them on the road!

Those attitudes are so natural to us. Every mainstream magazine has at least one article about self-esteem, self-help, self-improvements or self-image; or it advises that you reward yourself first and how to make yourself a success. It isn’t just the way we naturally think, but it is the way we’re formed by the major media.

It’s natural. It’s everywhere. But it’s wrong.

God’s eternal Son came into the world in order to show us that this was wrong, and to prove it. It was that important! He took the opposite attitude. His motto was: “Other’s first before me!” His attitude at the dinner party was: “If I leave that place of honour open, then someone else can have it.” That was his attitude even before He became a man, while He was still dwelling in glory at his Father’s side. The Apostle Paul said that He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped but He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant. He did that because He saw how desperate we had become when we sinned. We were damned, and we all would have gone to hell forever if He had not come to rescue us by dying on the cross for us. He

made us first. He took the place of shame on the cross so that there might be a place of honour in heaven for us.

In other words, though He was happy, glorious, and powerful, for our sake He became a man of sorrows, poor and weak.

And do you know what the result of this attitude was? He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven as king over all creation. Because He made himself last, God the Father made Him first. He is now so glorious that his good friend, the Apostle John fell down as though dead when he saw the exalted Christ in a vision. And one day soon, every person who ever lived, will bow down before his throne and confess that He is Lord.

So, do you want to get ahead in your life? Here’s how: Forget about it! Give it up! Try instead to get other people ahead. Become their servant. Make yourself least and last. And give yourself into the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just wait and see what God will do for you. You will not be disappointed: Not now, and certainly not in the end!

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