

Yet for Your Sake, He Became Poor

By Natalie Warner

“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

(James 4:8a NASB)

What a thought to delight in! That a Holy God, the Creator of the universe, the only One True God, would tenderly reach for those who are rebellious, selfish, and belligerent against the name of Him Who created them. That the Lord Jehovah, the omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent I AM, would willingly sacrifice His own life for sinful humanity - it is a truth most humbling and the greatest cause for thanksgiving.

The Lord's mercy to mankind is seen so clearly in the First Testament, where He chastised in love, delivered, taught, and drew nigh to His chosen people the Israelites, despite their fickle faith and continual acts of sin. And though He knew their rebellion and saw every corrupt thought, word, and deed, He was and is righteous and steadfast in love. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses sang in the presence of Israel, *“The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He. They have acted corruptly toward Him, they are not His children, because of their defect; but are a perverse and crooked generation.”* Moses continued, asking the people, *“Do you thus repay the LORD, O foolish and unwise people? Is not He your Father who has bought you? He has made you and established you”* (Deuteronomy 32:4-6).

And O how He cares for us as He did also for His chosen! Moses cried, *“He found him [Jacob, vs. 9] in a desert land, and in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions”* (Deuteronomy 32:10-11). And when they provoked the Lord to anger by their wickedness, as verses 16 and 21 tell, He mercifully did not forget them but punished them severely in love, for they *“neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth”* (Deuteronomy 32:18). And while He is a just God and a jealous God, He is also wise, constant, and compassionate. In mercy He protects and in mercy He punishes. Every action of God has a just and perfect purpose, and in each one of these is mercy, for He holds back what we truly deserve: eternal damnation for our sins without a chance for forgiveness.

The Lord mercifully punishes and restores us. He does not abandon His people, nor cease to desire all men to come to Him. The First Testament documents the constant holiness and mercy of God toward His people, and it is a foreshadow of the mercy He again illustrated later in sending His Son Jesus Christ to earth to be born of a virgin and die for the sins of humanity, Jews and Gentiles both. The gift He sent to die on the cross, the Lamb of God, is mercy in the truest of definitions. The Heavenly Father who seeks to *“restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers”* (Malachi 4:6a) also seeks to restore all humankind to the heart of their Creator.

A hymn titled “Here I Am, Lord” by Daniel Schutte (1981) beautifully depicts the mercy of our God toward His people and the tender care with which He both chastises and shields us, in spite of our oft rebellious and wandering hearts.

*I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry,*

All who dwell in dark and sin My hand will save.

*I Who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My Light to them?
Whom shall I send?*

*I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne My people's pain.
I have wept for love of them. They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them.
Whom shall I send?*

*I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them. My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them.
Whom shall I send?*

The humility and unceasing love of the Son who came and suffered humiliation in perfect love should never cease to create in us reverent thanksgiving. It's difficult to comprehend: God created man to glorify Him; yet, man sinned and so death entered the world and is in all men; and for rebellious, strong-willed, blasphemous, thankless, and flippant men, the Savior came in meekness and humility. *"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:9).

And before the men who despised Him, He was silent. *"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth"* (Isaiah 53:7).

What is our response to the mercy poured out by the Savior? In the Church, it is often met with casualness— sometimes with blatant disregard. It's easy to snuggle up in a comfortable chair, hug a cup of steaming peppermint tea, marvel at the Creator's sacrifice, and bid others to follow in it. But do we really try to comprehend the sacrifice and the mercy He has for us? Do we examine ourselves in light of it? Hardly! As the hymnist wrote, the response to Christ's sacrifice should be ours! *Whom shall I send? Here I am, Lord!*

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I fail much of the time when it comes to showing God's mercy to others. And what's the greatest way we can do this? By sharing His Gospel, His Light - by boasting about our Savior

and the sacrifice He bore for us! We should carry love for the lost in our hearts day by day, and we should be practicing sharing the Gospel with those we meet. I have missed so many opportunities I see now as I look back and remember feeling the Spirit's prompting but disobeying it. Let's purpose to "hold His people in our hearts," just as He held you and me in His heart as He went to the cross.

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

(2 Corinthians 2:14-17)