

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
1. WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?	11
2. HOW LONG WILL THIS NEW-FOUND JOY LAST?	25
3. THE BATTLE AHEAD	33
4. HOW DO I ACT LIKE A CHRISTIAN?	47
5. WHAT TO DO ABOUT THE BIBLE?	59
6. HOW CAN I PRAY?	73
7. DO I HAVE TO TESTIFY?	85
8. WHAT SHALL I DO WITH MY LIFE?	93
9. WORLDLINESS—AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT	101

1

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

A MIRACLE

You, my friend, are a direct proof of the statement that the age of miracles is not past. For you, yourself, are a miracle. God's description of a Christian indicates that fact most clearly: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Our Lord Jesus made this truth His basic approach to one of the most learned men in His day—Nicodemus.¹

"Nicodemus," He said, "you must be born again. If not, you'll never see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus raised an immediate objection.

"How can these things be?" Perplexity, the result of an unsaved heart trying to analyze salvation, was in his voice.

Our Lord answered patiently, tenderly. "Nicodemus," He said, "do not marvel that I said to you 'You must be born again.' You can't explain it—true. But you can't explain a lot of other things, either. Take the wind, for instance. Can you tell where it came from, and where it is going? No. You can feel it, hear it whispering through the leaves, but you can't explain it. Neither can you explain salvation.

"Here's the difficulty," He continued. "You were born once, with an earthly nature. You're a sinner, Nicodemus, and you have a sinful nature. That which is born of the flesh is flesh and nothing more! How do you ever expect to get past the judgment of a holy God with nothing but sinful flesh? You have to have another birth, Nicodemus, a birth from above. Let's call it a birth of the Spirit, because He's the One who is active in it. When *that* occurs, you'll have a new, holy nature, for that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

Essentially, salvation is the miracle of receiving life. There is nothing so hopelessly still as a corpse. No scientist has yet been able to breathe life into a dead body. Just as hopeless is the sinner without Christ. He is "dead in trespasses and sins."² Nor has he any prospect of doing better, for "those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8).

Our Lord Jesus emphasized this truth when

He said: "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). And "he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

Yes, a miracle happened to you when you were saved. The Lord Jesus touched your life with His nail-scarred hand and gave you new life, with a new nature—*His* life, and *His* nature!

YOU MET A WONDERFUL PERSON

Salvation is not something you do, but something Christ does when you receive Him. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Personal testimonies in the gospels and the Acts highlight this fact.

Andrew, talking to Simon Peter: "'We have found the Messiah' (which is translated, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus" (John 1:41).

Philip, to Nathanael: "We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45).

The woman of Samaria: "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29).

Paul, before Agrippa: "At midday, O king, I saw a light, and I heard a voice and I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.'"³

It is easy to see why this personal emphasis must be. *Only a person could reveal God to me:* "He who came down from heaven⁴ . . . The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."⁵ *Only a person could meet my personal need and heal sin's deadly sting:* "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). *Only a person—a divine Person—could bestow everlasting life:* "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). *And it takes a person to satisfy and keep me:* "You are complete in Him⁶ . . . For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—

all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's" (1 Corinthians 3:21-23). When I approach God, I am accepted "in the Beloved"⁷—*a Person*—and my daily goal is to "be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith" (Philippians. 3:9).

Salvation is not something—it's Somebody! When you were saved, you met a Person, you opened your life to Him, and you are now living under His control. Paul said: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day."⁸

YOU BECAME PART OF AN ETERNAL TRANSACTION

"For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, *his faith is accounted for righteousness*" (Romans 4:3-5).

Let us get the picture straight. What does God demand? Righteousness.

What can I offer? Only sin and more sin.⁹

Can I ever hope to do better under my own

power? No, because I am condemned already without Christ.¹⁰

How may I obtain the righteousness that God demands? Simply by receiving it by faith.¹¹

When I receive Christ, does that alter my standing before God? Certainly it does. God takes the righteousness of Christ and puts it to my account. Because Jesus died for me, God can both "be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

Someone says, "I still don't understand it."

Look then at this verse: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. . . . For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."¹² Who was sinned against? God.

Who alone could settle the score of sin? God.

Who was it, suffering on the cross for sin? God.

Has the debt been paid? Yes, because "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,"¹³ and He "Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

If *God* is the one sinned against and *God* has paid the debt and settled the score, does *God* have a right to give to me, freely, His righteous-

ness? Yes, hallelujah! It is free: "even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. . . . being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:22, 24).

Here, then, is the transaction that takes place at conversion: God forgives my sin,¹⁴ imputes and imparts His righteousness,¹⁵ makes me forever His child,¹⁶ and gives me an inheritance with Christ.¹⁷ *He* does it, mind you, not I. No wonder we shout, Hallelujah, what a Savior!

This is what happened to you. You experienced a miracle: you met a Person, and you became part of an eternal transaction.

Every part of this truth is initiated by, and dependent upon, Almighty God. If He started it, He certainly will finish it. All of which brings us to a discussion of the unspoken fear of every new convert: What if my Christian joy should not last? Turn to chapter 2, and see what God's Word says on the subject.

COORDINATE SCRIPTURE FOR CHAPTER 1

1. There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You

are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus said to Him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Nicodemus answered and said to Him, "How can these things be?"

Jesus answered and said to him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things? Most assuredly, I say to you, We speak what We know and testify what We have seen, and you do not receive Our witness.

"If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you heavenly things?

"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that

whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:1-16).

2. And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

3. "While thus occupied, as I journeyed to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, at midday, O king, along the road I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining around me and those who journeyed with me.

'And when we all had fallen to the ground, I heard a voice speaking to me and saying in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

"So I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.

'But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

'I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.'

"Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance" (Acts 26:12-20).

4. No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13).

5. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him (John 1:18).

6. And you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:10).

7. To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6).

8. For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day (2 Timothy 1:12).

9. As it is written: "There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way; They have together become unprofitable; There is none who does good, no, not one.

"Their throat is an open tomb; With their tongues

they have practiced deceit; The poison of asps is under their lips;

“Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.

“Their feet are swift to shed blood;

Destruction and misery are in their ways;

And the way of peace they have not known.

“There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin (Romans 3:10-20).

10. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18).

11. Even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference (Romans 3:22).

12. That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

13. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:6).

14. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses (Colossians 2:13).

15. Even the righteousness of God which is through faith in Jesus Christ to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference (Romans 3:22).

16. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name (John 1:12).

17. The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together (Romans 8:16-17).

For the first time in my life, I know joy. Happiness I have had . . . fleeting enjoyment based on things, and circumstances, and people. I have learned by experience that the pleasures of sin "are but for a season." And I have known the staleness of surfeit, the acrid taste of disappointment, the bitterness of regret, the utterly unsatisfying nature of all things earthy. Now I have joy—the pure delight of a soul that is right with God. What if . . . what if something should destroy that relation? What if I fail? What if the joy does not last?