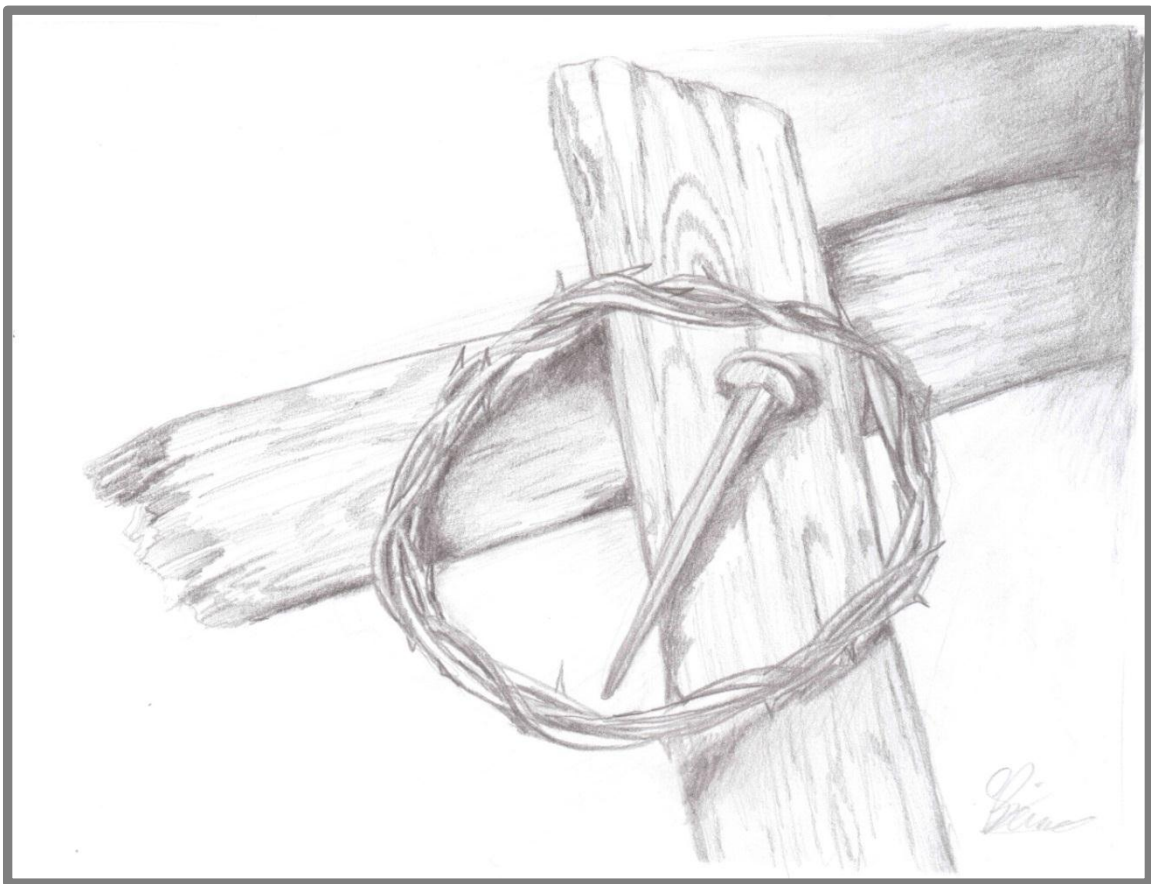


Divine Love

Francois Jordaan

**Dedicated to my sons, Christiaan and Gerhard, and to two very
special young ladies, Jackie and Stef**

Drawings: Stefni Bierman



Divine Love

Healing	3
Epilogue: Salvation	7
Addendum 1: Leprosy	12
Addendum 2: Designer Gods	15
Addendum 3: Man's Longing for God	16
Bibliography	18

Healing

It was one of those days when everything seemed to be perfect, when beauty was at its utmost – crisp, clear and vibrant, almost above what the human senses are capable of perceiving. The sky was blue with an intensity of blueness only meant to be conveyed by heavens itself. Above the Sea of Galilee interspersing clouds were drifting past, unhurried, purified in whiteness by the contrasting sky. At the shore a number of fishing boats lay basking in the sun, lulled into drowsiness by the gentle sound of waves on a pebbled beach, waiting patiently for the night's catch to commence. Closer by, a light breeze was enticing the yellow flowers and green grass to participate in nature's slow dance, mimicking the fluttering motion of a number of swallowtail butterflies.

To anybody forming part of this scene it was obvious that creation was proclaiming the glory of Yahweh, the Great I AM, in no uncertain way. It was a silent message, but it had a clarity of expression surpassing any need of verbalization. Compelling in essence, this was an invitation to enter into the rest of God, to enter the Promised Land.

A solitary man was sitting under an old olive tree in the middle of a green pasture. As if his senses had united in a grand conspiracy against creation's silent invitation to rest, this forlorn individual was totally oblivious to nature's proclamation of divine glory.



From where he was leaning against the gnarled trunk, as old as time itself, he could see the Preacher on the hill addressing a multitude of curious onlookers. Now and then a shifting breeze would carry isolated words and phrases to his ears...

*'Blessed ...are the poor in spirit, (the humble, who rate themselves insignificant), for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!'*¹

It seemed as if the Preacher was trying His very best to convey a message of great importance to the multitudes gathered on the slope of the hillside, but most of them were not paying much attention. They looked like the usual crowd of thrill-seekers, seekers after miracles and excitement in order to be relieved from the dullness of their every-day mundane existence.

*'Blessed are those that mourn for they shall be comforted.'*²

¹ Matthew 5:3 (Amplified Bible – AMP)

The man under the olive tree smiled at the irony of the words. To him it was a time of great sorrow indeed. With dishevelled hair and the tattered carb of a mourner he was compelled to wear by Jewish tradition, he was actually mourning his own death. He had become an outcast without an identity, a departed one, despair being his only true companion. Life has learned to pass him by lately – passing him at a distance, avoiding him like the plague.

Rivulets of sweat were trying to find a way downwards among the bumps and furrows on his face while a fly was trying to settle on the lump of flesh that used to be his nose. He could feel the roughness of the tree's bark pressing into his back. A great sadness took hold of him, a longing for what used to be, a remorse about lost chances, a regret about all the inappropriate things he had done and all the appropriate things he had not done. What was the meaning of his life? It seemed such a wasted effort now.

He was jolted back to reality. It was coming from the hill again. The breeze had shifted permanently and he could hear the words of the Preacher more clearly.

'Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal...³ Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?⁴ ... Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?⁵ ... But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.'⁶

Food and clothing were the least of his concerns. At that moment he had weightier things to occupy his mind.

It is said that [lepers](#) are those that deserve the wrath of God, the greatest of sinners, those that can never be forgiven. He felt dirty like the rags covering his hands and feet. He felt as if the disease from his body had spread to his soul, defiling his very innermost.

What would the day of tomorrow bring for his family, his loving wife and his beautiful daughters? They had been reduced to the ranks of the widows, orphans and foreigners, dependent on the goodwill of others. It has been a long time since the priest had pronounced that dreadful sentence, but he could still see his wife's sad eyes before he turned around to walk out the front door. It was a modest home in a small village somewhere in the hill country of Judea, but it was full of warmth, love and laughter. He had left the hill country altogether. He had to put some distance between

² Matthew 5:4 (New King James Version – NKJV)

³ Matthew 6:19-20 (NKJV)

⁴ Matthew 6:25 (NKJV)

⁵ Matthew 6:27 (NKJV)

⁶ Matthew 6:33-34 (NKJV)

emotions so that they might grow old and be forgotten. It felt if time had stood still since, as if he was already living in eternity, an eternity of hopelessness and despair. If he could only feel the touch of his wife's hand on his arm again, or the touch of any human hand for that matter!

*'Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces. Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!'*⁷

Certain rumours, which could not even be kept from the ears of a leper, had lately come to his attention. It was said that this Preacher was someone extraordinary – Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets of old brought back to life. It was even said that he might be the very Messiah these prophets had been talking about for so long, from even before Israel had become a nation, the Son of David that would liberate the nation from the oppression of Rome, giving them their freedom back and making them the ruler of all nations. He was talking about a kingdom to be established. It was also said that this Preacher was a man of miracles, that He was healing the sick, restoring the sight of the blind, even raising the dead. But it was also said that He was asking the sons of Israel to repent from their sins and to cleanse their hearts.

If only he had the opportunity to approach the Preacher to put his request before Him. How he longed to be rid of this dreadful disease that was consuming his flesh, his dignity and his very existence as a human being.

The longer he listened to the Preacher the more he became aware of the very authority and power of the message. What grace there was in every word! It was refreshing, touching his very soul, like life-giving water in an arid land.

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."⁸ ... Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."⁹

All of a sudden an unexplainable and almost irresistible longing took hold of him to hear more of what the Preacher was saying. It was as if truth itself was beckoning, tantalizing like a bubbling spring on a hot, dusty afternoon. It became almost stronger than his longing to be healed from his

⁷ Matthew 7:6-11 (NKJV)

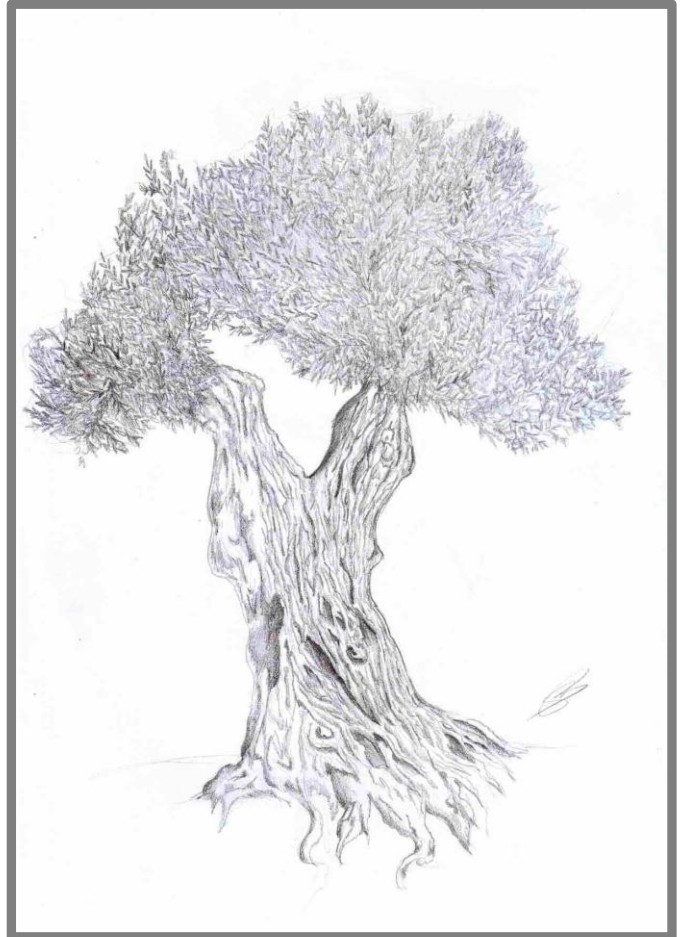
⁸ Matthew 7:24-27 (NKJV)

⁹ Matthew 7:13-14 (NKJV)

bodily condition. He wished he could be part of the crowd on the hillside. If only he could tell the Preacher about the worthlessness of his life and the regrets he was feeling about it.

But it seemed as if the Preacher had concluded his message for now. It was already late afternoon and the sun was hastening towards the horizon. The crowd was dispersing. Some of them were still lingering around as if overcome by the authority of His words, their original quest for excitement forgotten for the moment. Others were already moving towards nearby Capernaum. The sounds of town life, carried by the coolness of the air, were calling them back to families and friends and the warmth of homes. The Preacher was walking ahead of the returning crowd with a small band of followers almost like a shepherd leading his flock back to the fold.

With a despairing sense of loss the man underneath the olive tree bent down to gather his sparse belongings, consisting of a tattered bag which contained a few utensils and the remnants of a meal of bread and fish which had been presented to him from a respectable distance by a benefactor from the crowd earlier that day. With the Preacher leaving for Capernaum he felt utterly rejected and forsaken, like a sheep left behind in the wilderness. He felt as if he was losing much more than his health and dignity. He should be hastening now to find a suitable place for the night, a dense bush where the dew would not be so heavy or a sheltered spot between some rocks where he might escape the cold winds.



With disease ridden claw-hands he had been struggling to get a proper hold on his bag. When he looked up the Preacher had deviated from the main trail to Capernaum and was following a smaller track among the fields which would take Him close by the old olive tree. It took the man by total surprise. He knew that he should actually keep his distance, and warn the Preacher that he was unclean, but he could not utter the dreaded words. His condition should have become obvious to the Him by now. He was already that close.

Afterwards he could not quite explain what made him do it, but he did the unthinkable. He started running towards the Preacher as fast as his numb, deformed toes would allow him. Before he prostrated himself before the Man of miracles he became aware of His eyes. It touched the very depth of his soul. It spoke of a love and tenderness which are capable of solving all the problems of the world, all its disease and wars and pain, of loving-kindness capable of removing even sin and death itself. It spoke of Life. He felt like a son who was lost for all eternity, but who had arrived

home now. In an instant an overwhelming feeling of utter remorse and despair was replaced by a feeling of worthiness and praise. With his face on the ground now and in a hoarse voice he was uttering the words 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Words he did not know he was capable of. It was as if it had been ignited from the innermost part of his being, a desperate, spontaneous act of faith. For just a very short moment he felt like a builder, a builder on a Rock, like one poor in spirit about to enter a narrow gate.

Then he became aware of the Preacher's hand on his head. It was an act of supreme love. It was more than the human touch he was longing for.

'I am willing; be cleansed.' It was as if all time stood still and became eternity, as if nature was holding its breath in order to break forth in a new song of praise, exalting its Creator with a renewed vigour. He felt cleansed from within and without and even before he looked at himself he knew that he had been healed.

The man stood up. He was as clean as a new born baby. The Creator of heaven and earth had recreated his rotten flesh. In a single act of mercy and by a single command He had sculptured a new skin, a new nose, new toes and fingers, lips and ears. He was without blemish. The conspiracy agreed upon by his senses not so long ago under the old olive tree had been swept aside and he was rejoicing with the whole of creation now. Every fibre in his body was proclaiming the glory of the great I AM.

A miracle had happened. A wasted life had been restored again. Tomorrow he would be going to the priest to be pronounced clean. From there he would be turning south following a winding trail to a small village in the hill country of Judea, to a modest home full of love and warmth where laughter would be heard once again.

Epilogue

Salvation

The essence on which the above narrative is based may be found in Matthew 8:1-4, in Mark 1:40-45 and in Luke 5:12-14. It is so short that it can be easily missed. But it is one of the most beautiful parts of Scripture. The Lord's act of touching the leper and his short and simple answer speak of such an intensity of divine love, compassion, loving-tenderness and grace that it is almost beyond the grasp of human reason and emotion. But when one realises that this act of healing a leper actually reflects what the whole Bible is about, namely a divine chronicle about humankind falling into sin and salvation offered to fallen sinners through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, an act of heavenly grace that actually reflects the very essence of God, then the wonder of it all becomes even greater and more incomprehensible.

On the one hand this chronicle of divine love is quite simple and uncomplicated and does not require the mind of a philosopher or rocket scientist to be grasped, but on the other hand the immensity of the solution it offers to humankind's dilemma, tends to transcend all human reason so that

simplicity is actually being exalted and refined through the immensity of the solution and through the amazement which it evokes.

The chronicle starts with the universe being created to utmost perfection by a holy and loving God, a world without pain, death or disease. It tells of man created in the image of God, but who deliberately rebelled against his Creator. As a result of this act of dissention humankind contracted a leprous disease called sin which resulted in physical and spiritual death while from this moment on the human race would live in enmity with his Creator. Due to the highly contagious nature of sin all of humankind's offspring would now be born with sin and imperfection in their genes resulting in a propensity to keep on sinning through their entire human existence. From now on humankind was programmed for self-destruction and the destruction of the environment he was placed in charge of by his Creator. By rebelling against God man dragged the rest of a once perfect creation down with him, reducing it to an imperfect and corrupt state. From this point onwards nature would be ruled by tooth and claw, by suffering, death and disease.

If we look at humankind's inborn capacity for corruption, cruelty, war and oppression, of which history provides ample evidence, the wickedness and depravity of human nature becomes quite apparent. Man is the only being with a capacity to invent ingenious methods of torture to inflict as much pain as possible on fellow human beings, both physically and mentally. He is also the only being who is able to foul his own nest by polluting the environment and overexploiting natural resources due to greed and selfish interests. Since the Fall¹⁰, humankind has not made much progress in improving the depraved condition of his own soul or the debased state of the society he lives in and if we look at the state of the world today it becomes evident that he never will be able to make any headway. If we can only realise what the nature and implications of sin really is, how it offends God, how harmful and destructive it is to our fellow human beings and how serious man's sinful condition actually is.

Looking at nature it becomes clear that it abounds with cruelty and pain which clearly illustrate a fallen makeup. Just think about the manner in which a pack of African hunting dogs starts to devour their prey while it is still running or the severe pain which certain species of box jellyfish from Australia are able to inflict on its victims. After the Fall, nature turned against man. Showing its teeth, a once benevolent creation now often threatens the very existence of man through natural disasters such as floods, droughts, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. However, amidst cruelty, pain and disaster creation is still reflecting order and beauty. The complex interdependence of organisms in any ecological system speaks of divine order while the thrill of observing a breaching whale or the grace of a small fluttering butterfly in no uncertain terms proclaim the glory of a Creator who is still upholding a fallen universe¹¹ in His infinite mercy until such a time when He will reinstate it to its original order and beauty.¹²

¹⁰ The rebellion of the first human beings (Adam and Eve) against God.

¹¹ 'He [Jesus Christ] is the sole expression of the glory of God [*the Light-being, the out-raying or radiance of the divine*], and He is the perfect imprint and very image of [*God's*] nature, upholding and maintaining and guiding and propelling the universe by His mighty word of power.' (Hebrews 1:3, AMP)

¹² The Bible speaks of the recreation of the universe after the second coming of Jesus Christ. 'But we look for new heavens and a new earth according to His promise, in which righteousness (uprightness, freedom from sin, and right standing with God) is to abide.' (2 Peter 3:13 AMP)

To continue with the divine chronicle, instead of rejecting and condemning man outright God had already prepared a salvage plan – a very unique plan which would unfold throughout history, culminating in a death on a cross outside Jerusalem and a resurrection from the grave three days later.

If man was at liberty to propose a plan for his own salvation, he would in all probability have simply opted for an appeal to God's mercy. Since He is merciful, why can't God merely forgive human sinners their transgressions and all damage would be undone? However, such an option would be a denial of God's true character. As an omnipotent and holy Being, God also needs to be just and righteous. By implication, if God is not just and righteous He cannot be holy and omnipotent and would therefore not be a god worth serving and adoring. In such a case He would be a mere concept created by the human mind, a supernatural being for the fulfilment of mankind's selfish needs and notions, like a god from Greek mythology revealing human passions and whims and who is incapable of solving the issue of human depravity being depraved himself (See [Addendum 2](#): Designer Gods).

Since the justice of God requires full payment for sin, no forgiveness for human sin would be possible until such a condition has been met. Since the Fall took place through man's doing it is required that this payment be done by a human being. This leaves us with a serious dilemma. Full payment requires a pure and perfect payment, but man's inherent corruption has shown that there is actually no manner in which he can pay for his own or anybody else's pardon by doing good deeds. Trying to pay for his own sin man would rather be crushed to everlasting death by the weight of his sin since he would only be producing and accumulating more sinful deeds in the process. Since mercy and righteousness appear to be irreconcilable opposites, it may seem to the human mind as if an impasse has been reached in finding a solution to man's dilemma. If 'no mercy without justice' implies 'no forgiveness at all,' man may then just as well accept the consequences of sin and depravity and resign himself to a destiny of everlasting doom. Since no forgiveness is possible without justice nobody can blame God if He decides to condemn humankind for their rebellion and animosity against Him thereby closing His eyes and His heart to any possibility of salvaging man from his sin and its consequences. He has already shown 'sufficient' mercy to humankind before the Fall by creating them in His own image, putting them in charge of a perfect creation and showering them with love and affection, all of which was rejected by humankind through their own choice.

Fortunately for us, God's thoughts are not man's thoughts and man's ways are not God's ways,¹³ and being a God of mercy such an option was not an option to Him at all. Instead, He achieved what seems to be impossible to the human mind. He coerced mercy and righteousness in joining hands. God came up with a salvage plan which reflects the immensity of His love and grace, a love and grace which the human brain is incapable of fully grasping.¹⁴ He provided a solution to man's

¹³ 'For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways, says the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:8-9 NKJV).

¹⁴ '... And I pray that you ...may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge...' (Ephesians 3:17-19, New International Version - NIV). What the apostle Paul is actually saying here is that his sincere prayer and wish for the Christians in Ephesus is that they might get an idea of the immensity of God's love as expressed by the substitutionary death of Christ and that they may experience it, but that this love is so vast that it can be appreciated only partially since it is beyond human knowledge to grasp the full scope of it. The fullness of God's love will only be understood and experienced by believers in life hereafter.

predicament by allowing His Son to die in human form as a substitute for our sins. Being without sin Jesus Christ could provide a perfect payment for our sins. After bearing our sins on the cross he rose again since death could not hold Him. This was a clear indication that full and perfect payment for mankind's sins has been achieved. Since God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One, God in His infinite mercy actually took it upon Himself in a certain sense to provide full payment for mankind's sin by dying a horrendous death on a cross outside Jerusalem a little more than two thousand years ago. Justice being served, mercy was now free to be bestowed upon mankind.

Being a loving God, God respects each person's individuality and freedom of choice. He will therefore never force his salvage plan onto any sinner. Each and every individual has to make a personal decision whether he or she accepts or rejects God's plan of salvation. This free gift is accepted simply by believing¹⁵ that the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross is sufficient in order to be redeemed and set free. This is a basic principle of life – no gift, however big or small, can be owned by any person to whom it is offered if it is not accepted by that person. However, since the salvation of humankind was not paid for by worldly things such as silver or gold but by the blood and suffering of Jesus Christ,¹⁶ such a decision is not to be taken lightly. It must be done with the necessary sincerity, which can only originate from an authentic need and intense desire to receive this free gift, while such a need can only originate from a true remorse for one's depravity and transgressions against God and fellow human beings. Any decision whether to accept God's free gift of redemption needs serious consideration since there are costs involved for each true follower of Jesus Christ. This new life requires commitment and responsibility. However, each individual who makes the important decision to follow Jesus Christ is reborn spiritually and receives the Holy Spirit as an indwelling guest to assist him or her in this regard.

Although each individual has to make his or her own decision no person can ever boast that he or she has obtained salvation by making the right decision. Being a free gift from God salvation and righteousness are obtained by the grace of God alone through faith in the sufficiency of this gift alone. Nothing additional to the grace of God is required for the salvation of an individual – no human work, act, tradition or ritual or even any holy sacrament. Even faith should never be seen as a work whereby man obtains or contributes to his own salvation. The grace of God rules supreme.

¹⁵ 'For I am not ashamed of the Gospel (good news) of Christ, for it is God's power working unto salvation [*for deliverance from eternal death*] to everyone who believes with a personal trust and a confident surrender and firm reliance, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, For in the Gospel a righteousness which God ascribes is revealed, both springing from faith and leading to faith [*disclosed through the way of faith that arouses to more faith*]. As it is written, The man who through faith is just and upright shall live and shall live by faith.' (Romans 1:16-17 AMP)

'Look at the proud; his soul is not straight or right within him, but the [*rigidly*] just and the [*uncompromisingly*] righteous man shall live by his faith and in his faithfulness.' (Habakkuk 2:4 AMP)

'Now it is evident that no person is justified (declared righteous and brought into right standing with God) through the Law, for the Scripture says, The man in right standing with God [*the just, the righteous*] shall live by and out of faith and he who through and by faith is declared righteous and in right standing with God shall live' (Galatians 3:11 AMP).

¹⁶ 'You must know (recognize) that you were redeemed (ransomed) from the useless (fruitless) way of living inherited by tradition from [*your*] forefathers, not with corruptible things [*such as*] silver and gold, But [*you were purchased*] with the precious blood of Christ (the Messiah), like that of a [*sacrificial*] lamb without blemish or spot.' (1 Peter 1:18-19 AMP)

Even faith should be seen as part of His grace. Any addition to grace should be seen as a motion of no confidence in the sufficiency of Jesus' substitutionary death.

This wonderful gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is available to each and every individual on earth. No human deed or thought can ever be too black or depraved to exclude anybody from God's forgiveness. Since He has placed a longing in each human being's heart to search for Him and to attain everlasting life (see [Addendum 3: Man's Longing for God](#)), God's grace is within reach of all, even to the members of those communities who have not yet received the message of salvation to be obtained through the substitutionary death of Jesus. All they have to do is to give heed to the longing which has been placed in their hearts. In His love and mercy God will never forsake anybody who is yearning for truth, but will reveal His plan of salvation to everybody who is genuinely longing to find the meaning of life and who ask God to reveal Himself, from whichever culture or creed he or she might be.¹⁷

Just as Christ by an act of mercy had reached down, touched the leper and healed him, God in the same manner reached down to sinners by sending His Son to earth in the likeness of men, assuming the guise of a slave. In His human form he walked the dusty trails of Palestine. He knew hunger, pain and thirst. He was subjected to temptations, but He never sinned. In the end he was rejected by His own people, He was mocked, spitted on, beaten and crucified.¹⁸ All of this suffering He took upon Himself willingly in order to heal us from a leprous disease called sin. Just as the leper gave the last few steps by running towards Jesus it is now up to each and every individual to accept this act of divine love and go forth in joy, or reject the invitation to be healed and try to find his or her own futile cure for this leprous disease called sin while at the same time also facing everlasting condemnation.

¹⁷ 'Who so offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.' (Ps 50:23 KJV) 'He who brings an offering of praise and thanksgiving honors and glorifies Me; and he who orders his way aright [*who prepares the way that I may show him*], to him I will demonstrate the salvation of God.' (Psalm 50:23 AMP).

¹⁸ 'Let this same attitude and purpose and [*humble*] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus: [*Let Him be your example in humility:*] Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [*possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God God*], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained, But stripped Himself [*of all privileges and rightful dignity*], so as to assume the guise of a servant (slave), in that He became like men and was born a human being. And after He had appeared in human form, He abased and humbled Himself [*still further*] and carried His obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross! Therefore [*because He stooped so low*] God has highly exalted Him and has freely bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, That in (at) the name of Jesus every knee should (must) bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, And every tongue [*frankly and openly*] confess and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' (Philippians 2:5-11, AMP).

Addendum 1

Leprosy

On account of a human skeleton containing traces of Hansen's disease, which was uncovered in 2009 near Udaipur in north western India, leprosy or Hansen's disease can be dated as far back as 4 000 BC.¹⁹ Leprosy is also mentioned in an Indian document, the *Sushruta Samhita*, from about 600 BC.²⁰ The oldest written reference to Hansen's disease in all probability however, appears on an Egyptian papyrus document, known as the Ebers Papyrus, which dates from the year 1 550 BC.²¹ In this document mention is made of a disease by the name of *ukhedu*, of which the symptoms correlate to a large extent with those of Hansen's disease.²² Reference made of Hansen's disease in a Chinese bamboo book from the third century BC confirms that this disease also occurred in the Far East.²³ It seems as if leprosy had a significant prevalence in China, India²⁴ and Egypt²⁵ during Antiquity. Some sources however are of the opinion that available information does not provide sufficient evidence that leprosy did occur in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia and Persia before Alexander the Great's Indian Campaign (327-326 BC) when soldiers returning to the Eastern Mediterranean brought Hansen's disease with them.²⁶ This event is probably the main reason for Harrison's assertion that Hansen's disease also occurred without any doubt in Palestine from the fourth century BC.²⁷ However, it seems as if insufficient archaeological evidence for the occurrence of Hansen's disease in the ancient Near East does exist. A possible explanation may be that people suffering from Hansen's disease normally died in seclusion and were not properly buried in most cases.

During the Period of Antiquity and the Classical Period leprosy must have been a frightening disease, especially the more severe form which is today known as lepromatous leprosy. Unlike today no cure was available for Hansen's disease, a disease which is capable of disfiguring the face, feet and hands of the infected person severely. During these periods a dreadful stigma clung to this disease due to various reasons.

¹⁹ Wade, May 31, 2009.

²⁰ Roberts and Manchester, 2010, p.200

²¹ MedicineNet.com, online.

²² Harrison, 1986, online.

²³ Roberts and Manchester, 2010, p.200. See also Carmichael's reference (p195) to Chinese texts from Antiquity which in detail describe leprosy's destruction of the human face.

²⁴ Roberts and Manchester, 2010, p.200

²⁵ MedicineNet.com, online.

²⁶ Dols, 1979.

²⁷ Harrison, 1986, online.

The symptoms of leprosy vary in accordance to the type of leprosy under consideration, which can be linked to the resistance of the infected person to the disease. Normally the early symptoms of lepromatous leprosy consist of reddish or coppery skin lesions, such as macules, papules or nodules, which usually occur on the face, arms, legs and buttocks. Additional early signs include the thickening and nodulation of both ears and the thickening of the skin of the face. The nose becomes swollen and broadened, while the eyebrows and eyelashes become thinned. As the disease advances, thickening of the skin of the forehead causes deepening of the natural lines. Saddle-nose deformity occurs due to the destruction of nasal cartilage, which results in the nose collapsing. Painless ulceration appears on the legs while the skin on the thighs, legs and arms may become scaly and dry. Damage to the nerves results in anaesthesia (absence of sensation), which normally starts in the hands and feet. Loss of the warning sensation of pain results in repeated injuries to hands and feet with chronic plantar ulceration as a common problem. Damage to motor nerves leads to muscle weakness with the effected muscles eventually becoming wasted and paralysed with the result that hands and feet become distorted in the form of claw hands and dropped feet, which makes it difficult to use the feet or pick up any objects with the hands. After several years a shortening and distortion of fingers and toes take place due to atrophy and absorption of the bones of the fingers and toes, sometimes to such an extent that it appears as if fingers and toes have actually dropped off. This deformity is enhanced by the absence of sensation in the hands and feet which leads to successive injuries, infection and loss of tissue. Lepromatous leprosy may lead to blindness while nodules forming on the larynx give rise to a husky voice.

If we look at leprosy mentioned in the Bible some interesting facts become apparent. Firstly, it is obvious that the Hebrew word *tsâra`ath* used in the Old Testament, and which has been translated as *leprosy* in the King James Version (KJV) and as *skin disease* in the New International Version (NIV) is used as a collective or generic term since it not only refers to human disorder and disease, but also to mould and mildew on clothing and the walls of buildings.²⁸ If we look at the symptoms of the *skin diseases* mentioned in Leviticus 13 it becomes obvious that certain of these symptoms such as swellings, bright spots and raw flesh are reconcilable with the symptoms of Hansen's disease. On the other hand symptoms such as white swellings with white hair cannot be reconciled with the symptoms of Hansen disease at all. It is also apparent that certain important symptoms such as those of advanced lepromatous leprosy are not mentioned. The most logical conclusion to be made is that the symptoms in Leviticus 13 may refer to a variety of skin diseases which in all probability may also include the initial symptoms of Hansen's disease. Other well-known cases of leprosy mentioned in the Old Testament include Moses' hand which became leprous as snow²⁹ as well as Miriam's³⁰ and Gehazi's³¹ leprosy which was also white as snow. All three of these cases do not refer to Hansen's disease since leprosy never appears white. Historically spoken one may assume that real leprosy or Hansen's disease might have been known to the Jewish nation of the Old Testament during the period that followed on the exodus from Egypt. As was mentioned previously leprosy had

²⁸ Leviticus 13:47-59; Leviticus 14:33-55 (NKJV)

²⁹ Exodus 4:6 (KJV)

³⁰ Numbers 12:10 (KJV)

³¹ 2 Kings 5:27 (KJV)

a significant prevalence in Egypt during the Period of Antiquity with the first known written reference to this disease as early as 140 years before the exodus.

If we turn to the New Testament we see that even the NIV translates the Greek words *lepra* and *lepros* with leprosy and leper respectively. Nowhere in the New Testament are any symptoms mentioned for *lepra*. However, historically spoken the changes are good that the *lepra* of the New Testament may in most cases refer to Hansen's disease. It is an accepted fact that Alexander the Great's forces returning from India brought Hansen's disease with them to the Mediterranean area in 326 BC, while it furthermore seems as if this disease was already well established in the Near East and the whole eastern Mediterranean area during the second century BC.³² This fact is proved archaeologically by means of four skeletons of European origin found at the Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt which show signs of Hansen's disease and is dated 250 BC.³³ It should also be taken into consideration that Galilee was situated along a very important commercial route between Egypt and India which could have favoured the spreading of Hansen's disease even further.

We read that Jesus was 'moved with compassion' when He saw the leper referred to in this story.³⁴ This might have been due to the fact that the leper's appearance had been seriously disfigured as result of Hansen's disease. When John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question if He was the One Who was to come or if they should be expecting another one, Jesus confirmed His messiahship by indicating to them that He gives the blind their sight, makes the lame to walk again, heals lepers, restores the hearing of the deaf and raises the dead.³⁵ If one looks at the nature of the miracles mentioned here it becomes clear that in this case leprosy indicates a serious condition, something like Hansen's disease instead of a less serious skin disease. The Jesus who recreated Lazarus' decomposed flesh and tissue after he had been in the grave for four days and started smelling, is the same Jesus who could have recreated the deformed face, hands and feet of someone suffering from Hansen's disease.

³² Roberts and Manchester, 2010, p.202

³³ Roberts and Manchester, 2010, p.202

³⁴ Mark 1:41 (NKJV)

³⁵ Matthew 11:2-6

Addendum 2

Designer Gods

In today's post-modern society, where relativism often reigns supreme, the propensity to create your own deity has become an accepted practice. The tendency exists to create one's own way of 'salvation', one's own method of finding purpose in life and one's own approach to personal fulfilment, in other words creating one's own truth. Bits and pieces of various religions and philosophies are often patched together to suit individual personalities thereby creating as many deities and truths as there may be personalities. Being a mere fabrication of the human mind with all its imperfections, such 'designer gods' can only be seen as non-entities or untruths. However good one's intentions may be by creating your own deity, it may actually mean that you will have to be dependent on your own imperfect and corrupt self. Since the 'creator' are more supreme than the 'creature' you will actually be your own god since you will be greater than the designer god you created yourself according to your own imagination.

In today's fallen world stained by sin it is obvious that opposites do exist. This is a fact of life and a reality in nature – pain and well-being, gladness and sorrow, good and evil, truth and deception, life and death, heat and cold, light and darkness, sunrise and sunset. Such opposites are clearly discernable to anybody with an open mind. The opposites, truth and falseness imply that there can be only one ultimate truth, since if various ultimate truths exist, created by individuals according to their own imaginations, the door is left open for unlimited relativism with unlimited truths with the result that no room is left for falseness or untruths. As was stated previously the corruption of creation implies that untruths and imperfections should exist. It is also not possible to mix ultimate truth with other forms of truth or untruths. You cannot mix light and darkness. In trying to do this you will only succeed in creating a morbid world of semi-darkness. There can therefore be only one true God and only one authentic way of salvation. The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation that is offered for free and does not require any good deeds in order to earn one's own salvation. Any system dependent on human deeds carries with it an unbearable burden of doubt and uncertainty since one can never be sure if such sullied deeds will be sufficient to earn salvation or even the next stage of spiritual development.

Addendum 3

Man's Longing for God

God created man in His image. Although this image had been tainted and corrupted to a large extent by the Fall, that which remained is significant enough to ensure that each and every person still has a spontaneous longing for God and for things of eternal value. Saint Augustine expressed the human soul's longing for God in the following manner: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in Thee.' This spontaneous longing for God finds expression in the purpose for which man was created. The first question of the shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith put it as follow: 'Question: What is the chief end of man? Answer: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.' Life therefore only finds true meaning when God is glorified and the creature delights himself in his Creator.³⁶

According to King Solomon God has set eternity in man's heart.³⁷ The Amplified Bible describes this thought in a striking manner: 'He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. He also has planted eternity in men's hearts and minds [a divinely implanted sense of a purpose working through the ages which nothing under the sun but God alone can satisfy], yet so that men cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.'³⁸ Although God has made everything meaningful and beautiful in its own time and place, these created things cannot satisfy the awareness of and longing for the eternal which has been imbedded in the heart of man by his Creator. It cannot satisfy man's spiritual hunger for absolute goodness, perfect wisdom, ultimate truth, endless love and eternal life. However, it fulfils an important function of directing and pointing man towards God and eternity. While referring to the wrath of God's against the ungodliness of man, Romans 1 gives the following deliberation of man's awareness of the existence of God on account of His handiwork. 'For God's [*holy*] wrath and indignation are revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who in their wickedness repress and hinder the truth and make it inoperative. For that which is known about God is evident to them and made plain in their inner consciousness, because God [*Himself*] has shown it to them. For ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature and attributes, that is, His eternal power and divinity, have been made intelligible and clearly discernible in and through the things that have been made (His handiworks). So [*men*] are without excuse [*altogether without any defense or justification*]...' ³⁹ Psalm 19 confirms the fact that the majesty of God's existence is proclaimed by His creation: 'THE HEAVENS declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows and proclaims His handiwork. Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night shows forth knowledge. There is no speech nor spoken

³⁶ 'Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He will give you the desires and secret petitions of your heart.' (Psalm 37:4 AMP)

³⁷ Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NASB)

³⁸ Ecclesiastes 3:11 (AMP)

³⁹ Romans 1:18-20 (AMP)

word [*from the stars*]; their voice is not heard. Yet their voice [*in evidence*] goes out through all the earth, their sayings to the end of the world...⁴⁰

According to Alexander Maclaren, well-known British preacher during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, even the heathen instinctively knows *"I shall not all die," but deep within this transient clay house, that must crack and fall and be resolved into the elements out of which it was built up, there dwells an immortal guest, an undying personal self. In the heart, the inmost spiritual being of every man, eternity...does dwell.* We as humans *'are the only beings on this earth who can think the thought and speak the word—Eternity... in each [human] heart lies that solemn thought—for ever!'*⁴¹

The beauty of this life can only find meaning if it can be extended into eternity. Earthly beauty can therefore only be truly beautiful in Christ Jesus since salvation found in Him is the beginning of beauty eternal.

Maclaren expressed himself furthermore as follow regarding man's instinctive search for God and eternity: *'God has put eternity in your heart. Not only will you live for ever, but also in your present life you have a consciousness of that eternal and infinite and all-sufficient Being that lives above. You have need of Him, and whether you know it or not, the tendrils of your spirits, like some climbing plant not fostered by a careful hand but growing wild, are feeling out into the vacancy in order to grasp the stay which they need for their fruitage and their strength.'*⁴²

According to John 1:9 God also reveals himself to mankind through His Son Jesus Christ since He is the true Light that enlightens every person. God's plan of grace, salvation through Jesus Christ, is therefore available to each and every individual created in His image, irrespective of in whichever remote corner of the earth such an individual may find him or herself. Through Jesus Christ He will make His plan of salvation known to everybody who is looking for it in all sincerity, whether the Gospel of Christ has already been made known to such a person or not. It depends on each individual to accept this plan of salvation or not.

⁴⁰ Psalm 19:1-4 (AMP)

⁴¹ Maclaren, online, p.290-1

⁴² Maclaren, online, p.292

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