



# The Square Peg Journal

March 1991 Volume III Number 3

## If I Be Lifted up

A few days before his crucifixion, Jesus, addressing a gathering of close followers and warning of his imminent rejection, spoke powerful words about his spiritual sovereignty. He reminded them of his basic gospel and then went on to say, "I, if I be lifted up on earth and in your lives, will draw all men to myself and into fellowship with my Father." (Pp. 1190 & 1904 of The Urantia Book.)

In these words, he reminded all of us that his gospel is not a theory but a system of real, familial relationships with an amazing spiritual consequence: as we give Jesus sovereignty in our own hearts, we enter into, localize, and intensify the spiritual gravity that draws all men into relationship with our Father.

In John's gospel, (12:32), the words "if I be lifted up" are interpreted as a prophecy of the crucifixion; that is, Jesus is saying that through the cross he will draw all men to himself. But this can be only part of his meaning, for the experience of the cross was only part of Jesus' life, and it is himself, not this episode, that we are invited to lift up.

And yet, suffering is hardly a side issue in human life. It is the pervasive experience of helpless pain that makes us question our pride, our plans, and the value of our lives. Philosophically, we may come to recognize that if God is to have the worship of imperfect beings, then error, sin, and suffering must attend their early experiences. But grief needs

a deeper medicine than philosophy. So God has graciously chosen to draw near and to reveal himself to us through the life -- and the grief -- of Jesus.

In these few days of pain, Jesus entered into every form of human suffering, loneliness, and spiritual tension. His inspiring triumph every moment of the way was not achieved through stoicism, indifference, numbness, or any form of psychic escape, but simply and directly through the very gospel he had preached -- personal consecration to the Father and loving ministry to those around him. Jesus thus achieved in his incarnation the simultaneous revelation of God's incredible nearness to us and the potential fullness of our response to him.

As we reflect on the final, hours of our brother's life in the flesh, let us heighten our personal awareness of these precious gifts and become more trustful about letting Jesus touch us where our own pain is greatest. Certainly if we thus lift him up in our lives, we will soon lift him up for those around us and so will the Kingdom come on earth.



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# The Way of Consecration

p.2007

Certain pious and kindly women,  
deeply offended by the long cruelty of the cross,  
provided a narcotic wine for its victims.

Matthew 27:34  
Mark 15:23

According to custom, therefore,  
the soldiers offered this drink to Jesus.  
To their astonishment  
and in spite of his great thirst and pain,  
Jesus refused it.

He simply knew better:  
Narcotics ease pain,  
but they dull the mind  
blunting the unique potential  
of the human response to pain,  
the capacity to fellowship with God  
our Father ever with us.

Such a price of ease was too high  
for one who said,  
"Behold I come to do your Will."

Psalms 40:7  
Hebrews 10:7

p.1869

He had rejected flight to Alexandria,  
had returned from across the Jordan,  
had given Judas freedom to act,  
had forbidden Peter's sword,  
had refused to intimidate Pilate,  
had submitted to Roman soldiers.

p.1751

p.1996

Having accepted the cross in his body,  
he would not escape it in his mind.

Indeed, there are many escapes from pain  
short of raw power over the material world.  
But Jesus chose the pure and straight path  
of union with his Father's Will.

He dreamt of no glory,  
(though that would come)  
for he had rejected earthly glory  
in the wilderness, long since.

Nor did he dream and grieve  
for the untasted pleasure  
of a gentle wife and children.

(The pure of heart see God  
because their eyes do not wander.)

Matthew 5:8

p.1570

The children of his kingdom were real to Jesus  
even in those hours.

And our Father's Will remained the steady anchor  
of his human consciousness.

Most of us think,  
if we have the flu or a broken bone,  
that our appointment with Misery is consuming.

It was not so with Jesus.  
He had an appointment with Salvation  
with Presence  
with Incarnation.

He would not disappoint.

The centurion's heart was listening  
but had not yet turned.  
In a few short hours,  
he would resume his normal duties  
and have but little occasion  
to mix with the fellowship of the Kingdom.  
Jesus sought some way  
to make saving contact with him.  
The thieves too,  
Jesus' companions for the afternoon,  
might seek ministry.  
And Mary, his mother must find healing  
if not yet from sorrow,  
at least from years of separation  
and the long tension of her troubled spirit.  
Jesus was present to her.

And beyond those gathered at his feet  
were generations,  
even worlds of troubled mortals  
needing assurance of nearness.

Is God with us?  
Has he forgotten?  
Can he draw near to this place?  
No, it was no time for oblivion,  
the deceitful relief of drugged wine.

Amidst grief, rejection, and pain,  
-- more poignant than all these --  
Jesus knew and understood the confusion  
of those who seek the Eternal Spirit  
along the paths of mind alone.  
As if the Infinite might be grasped  
by mortal cleverness!  
For these lost ones,

Jesus was opening,  
-- was becoming --  
a sure way to the Father  
from within the ordinary human condition  
enlightened only by grace --  
God-with-us.

John 14:6

Cowardice, sophistry, and narcotics all are empty.  
The heart of Jesus consecrated to his Father  
and to the needs of many worlds  
is fullness of redemption.

Praise him,  
beneath whose crown of thorns  
lies the victory that brings us peace.

He is King of Kings  
even today, even with this crown!  
Death and its web of deceit are now swallowed up / Cor 15:54  
in victory beyond imagination.  
Hosanna!

# Ministry to Dismas

p. 2002  
p. 2004

Two thieves, two brigands  
two followers of Barabbas  
were crucified with Jesus.  
Full of anger and self-righteousness,  
they embraced the rebellions  
of an anti-Roman street tough,  
and mistaking the mildness of Jesus  
for the weakness of defeat,  
they joined in mockery of him.

p. 2008

"If you're really the Son of God," said one,  
"Why don't you get off the cross?"  
"Aye," joined the other,  
"And free us as well."

Matthew 27:44

Mark 15:32

Jesus made no answer.  
Where there is no spiritual hunger,  
even the Bread of Life is useless.  
There lay yet many hours of suffering before these men,  
suffering that makes the soul naked  
as the powers of body and mind  
are stripped away.  
The truth would become clear to their hearts  
if they desired truth.  
Jesus could wait...

Though the early crimes of Barabbas  
bore some relation to a system of belief,  
even to the chosen status of Israel,  
the intoxication of unruly power had set in.  
There was no love in his heart.  
If his proteges thought he would attend their execution  
they were mistaken.  
He was free; and he was busy.

All the more strange to see Jesus' followers here,  
not only women,  
but even the young fisherman from Galilee.

p. 2002

Dismas had seen him before  
when, at the fringe of a gathering,  
he had heard Jesus teach.  
Jesus had spoken of forgiveness and mercy  
service and sonship with God.  
It had seemed attractive, but too gentle  
Dismas had passed it by  
in favor of a more fiery idol.

He remembered his last adventure.  
It would have succeeded  
but he had knocked over a slave girl as he ran,  
and she had recognized him.  
He hadn't meant to hurt her...  
Barabbas said that was all part of it;  
now Dismas wondered.  
There was life in Jesus  
as Barabbas had never shown.

And what lay beyond his coming death?  
It was difficult to think...

His meditations were interrupted  
by a new chorus of scorn for the Son of Nazareth.  
Not only friends of Jesus had gathered,  
enemies too, to make their sport;  
again the other thief joined them.  
It was the easy distraction from pain,  
from the easy habit of abuse.

Suddenly Dismas felt indignation for it  
and cried out to his companion,  
"Have you no fear, even of God?  
Surely we deserve our punishment,  
but this man is innocent!"

Luke 23:39-43

p 2009

With this outcry the desires of his heart overcame him.  
Turning to Jesus, he spoke humble words,  
"Lord, remember me  
when you come into your Kingdom."

What Kingdom?  
What did he really know of Jesus?  
But the Master turned to him at once and smiled.  
"I tell you this day,  
you will sometime be with me in Paradise."

Impossible,  
undeserved,  
but those were the words.  
And he spoke with authority,  
not like Barabbas.  
A flood of warmth spread over Dismas.  
Even crucifixion could not prevent him  
from experiencing the joy of salvation.  
He was a child again,  
sweating from some fever,  
and his mother had just laid her hand on his brow.  
She was smiling.  
"Tomorrow, you will be well."

The ropes and the nails still hurt,  
but watching Jesus was a miracle.  
Though his consciousness faded in and out,  
Dismas took his lessons from the Master.  
Without complaint, he bore  
the earthly punishment of his sins,  
and became the man he had always wanted to be.  
Here was the secret hidden from Barabbas --  
that cursing is simply whining,  
while humility is a form of courage.

p. 2009

And so were the doors of the kingdom opened yet wider  
for lost souls seeking to prove themselves  
on the paths of darkness.  
For these too, Jesus has come  
and he forgives them though they mock him.  
Thy Kingdom come!

# The King of Kings

Anyone who bleeds  
    becomes thirsty.  
Anyone who works in the sun  
    becomes thirsty.  
Anyone who endures a sandstorm  
    becomes thirsty.  
Anyone who lives becomes thirsty each day.  
Jesus was thirsty  
    the day he was crucified.

Yet even then,  
    thirst did not rule his heart.  
He refused the narcotic wine  
    as they prepared him for the cross,  
    and he continued to attend to  
        the requirements of salvation.  
Yet when the soldiers began their lunch at his feet,  
    salvation and thirst made a compact.  
Jesus had long since learned  
    how much pleasure people find in being helpful  
        in the dignity of real gratitude.  
Here was a way to call upon the guards,  
    to invite them beyond the natural callousness  
        of the deathwatch.

"I thirst."

Crucifixion was boring  
    not for the crucified, to be sure,  
        nor for his friends,  
    but for the guards who must sit for hours  
        with nothing do to but gamble.  
Usually it took a few days for a man to die,  
    and only a few minutes to divide his clothing.  
The soldiers were intrigued by Jesus' meekness,  
    his patience,  
    but they were still very bored.  
How much attention can you give to a quiet man  
    who is being crucified  
        by a nation you do not understand?

Thus they began their lunch.  
But when Jesus spoke of his thirst,  
    the captain of the guard,  
        (the same who had arrested him in Gethsemane)  
    immediately moistened a sponge with his wine  
        and offered it from the tip of his lance.  
And Jesus was genuinely,  
    humanly,  
        grateful.  
He could not speak,  
    but his eyes rested gently on his child.

The silent watch continued.

p.2010

At noon, the sky darkened.  
Most watchers left, all the scoffers.  
The dry sirocco swept in,  
hard to breathe in  
even if you could find shelter  
and draw your garments over your face.  
But how if your hands were nailed?  
and your clothing stripped away?  
Crucifixion is, anyway, death by suffocation.  
What if the dust of the Sahara  
be added to the dust of death?

Jesus endured the stinging sand  
with the same quiet patience  
as every other trial of his last hours.  
A lifetime of trust lay cupped in his heart:  
trust amidst darkness  
trust during arrest  
trust during abuse  
trust in isolation  
trust as he left his unready followers  
trust for the confusion of his beloved family  
trust through the grief of his rejecting nation.

His divine consciousness,  
once subject to the short, vague tether  
of human infancy  
now submitted to the oppression of human death,  
yet divine love remained triumphant.  
When the sandstorm was over,  
he appealed once more to his Roman friend,  
who, he knew, sought a greater than Caesar  
for his worshipful heart.

"I thirst."

This time, the bond was clear and cemented.  
The centurion shared his wine with Jesus  
and they were two who share the battle of life  
in a world that does not regard such things.  
It is impossible under the circumstances  
that any drink  
could have satisfied Jesus.  
But he sought no more,  
for the thirst of his soul was indeed satisfied.  
He had won.

The new believer did not proclaim his faith,  
not yet.  
Perhaps he was not fully aware of it.  
But he was indwelt,  
a true and responsive child of the Father;  
who had found his Lord.  
Sooner than any but angels could know,  
his Roman sword would flash  
to defend  
the King of Kings.

p.2012

# Child of the Psalms

The end drew on.  
As the sandstorm abated  
and the women once more came near,  
it was clear that Jesus was dying.  
His voice had lost its strength  
he had less regard for those who stood by.  
At times, he seemed lost in his pain  
breathing still,  
but not otherwise seeming alive.

Yet his lips moved,  
and the watchers listened for his words.  
How would the son of God conduct  
the ebbing of his life?  
The converted thief listened too.  
His own death was near,  
but his strength was greater than Jesus';  
the Master would precede and teach him.

A few words drifted down,  
words all familiar to the ear of Jewry.  
Jesus was reciting the prayers of his childhood  
the memorized prayers of his people,  
from the family devotion time,  
and from the weekly synagogue.

The final recital of Jesus  
while human consciousness hovered  
between his grasp and human oblivion  
was the distilled remembrance of his religious ancestors  
the Psalms of David.

p. 2010

"May the Lord answer you in time of trouble,  
may he protect you  
May he send you help from the sanctuary...

Psalm 20:1-2

"O Lord, the king rejoices in your power,  
your saving help fills him with joy!  
You have granted him his heart's desire  
not denied him the prayer of his lips."

Psalm 21:1-2

Yet not all are words of such confidence.

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?  
I call but you do not answer..."

Psalm 22:1

The groan of the ages,  
now hovered on Jesus' lips  
but the words continued.

"Yet you, the Holy One  
who make your home in man's praise,  
in you our fathers put their trust,  
they trusted and you set them free.

Psalm 22:3-11

But I am a worm and no man  
and those who despise you say,  
'If this is the favored son,  
let the Lord deliver him!'



"I cry to you, who drew me from my mother's womb,  
hold not aloof, for trouble in upon me."  
and no one to help."  
The mighty tide of Jesus' living faith  
now transforms the ancient dialogue  
of human darkness  
and spiritual hope.

"My strength is trickling away,  
my bones are all disjointed...  
my mouth is dry as earthenware.  
I can count my bones while they gloat.  
a gang of villains closes in on me.  
They have divided my garments among them  
and for my vesture they cast lots.

*Psalm 22:14, 15, 17*

"My strength come quickly  
and I shall praise your name...  
Then will the world remember and turn to you  
all the families of nations will worship you...  
all will tell of your justice  
even to generations unborn:  
'He has fulfilled it.'"

*Psalm 22:19*

*Psalm 22:27,  
31*

The work of Jesus was complete.  
His ministry to all nearby  
his faith in every suffering,  
his forgiveness of every wound,  
even the care of his family,  
all were accomplished.

Father, is it done?  
Have I laid out in this human life  
a path to yourself  
wide enough for all who shall follow  
in the ages to come?  
The mist is deepening, Father;  
I place myself in your hands.  
I have always been yours,  
but now others will find me in you  
and you in me  
and each other in us  
in the union of our love.

*John 17:21*

Thank you, Father.  
The way is open.  
My human life  
is one with your faithfulness.  
You do all things well.

*Mark 7:37*

With such words of trust,  
Jesus breathed forth his life in the flesh.  
He had been commanded to take up his life  
and to lay it down.  
He had the power to do these things,  
and to take it up once more,  
yet he did not excuse himself  
from the human experience of trust  
in his final hour.

*John 10:18*

*p.1819*

*p.1970*

# The Long Wait

p.2007

Crucifixion may last for days.

Jesus died in 6 hours.

p.2011

The soldiers who broke the legs of the others  
to remove them from eyes of the great Sabbath;  
found Jesus already dead.  
One pierced his heart,  
just to be sure.

John 19:31-36

Why did the Master die first?

To be sure, he was grieved as well as wounded,  
but he was strong in mind as in body.

Was it he took no narcotic rest?

But gall is not a life-preserver.

Perhaps death came for the simplest of reasons:

Jesus was not afraid.

He knew his work was done

and he had the power to lay down his life;

this was the word of his Father.

John 10:18

p.1819

For all of us, the power to leave this life  
increases with our intimacy in the Spirit

We know what is to be done:

care for the troubled,

forgive all injuries

pray for sinners...

Our going is then in his hands,

is not delayed by the urgency to finish

what we have sought to put off,

is not hindered by animal fear.

p.2011

When Jesus said, "It is finished,"

it was so.

John 19:30

When he said, "Father, into your hands

I commend my spirit,"

Luke 23:46

he spoke to no stranger,

harbored no doubts.

And the nearby centurion,

a frequent observer of death's visits,

cried out in astonishment

the words that leaped in his heart,

2011

"Truly, this was the Son of God."

It was time to remove the bodies.

p.2012

Now the real brigands, the Sanhedrin,

returned to insure insult beyond injury,

to see that the body of Jesus

be thrown amidst the drainage of Gehenna,

where wild beasts might ravage it by night.

Old Nicodemus foresaw their malice.

He went with Joseph of Arimathea

to bribe Pilate for rights to the body.

They needed no gold.

Pilate was well paid from the coffers of revenge.

p.2012

Yet, when these men arrived on Calvary,  
others were of no mind to heed Pilate's writ.  
Rather tear the body from limb to limb  
than let it be buried gently  
(lest there be claims of resurrection!)  
and they outnumbered the believers.

p.2013 But they reckoned not on the freshness of the gospel.  
Swift Roman swords gleamed suddenly in the sun.  
The Sanhedrin fell back.  
Loving hands wrapped the beloved body  
and bore it to rest:  
soldiers reborn,  
a fishermen-preacher,  
and Jewish aristocracy.

Now begins the wait of the ages.  
Hearts are sifting, remembering, choosing.  
Earth is on trial between faith and doubt,  
and this trial will be conducted  
in desolation.

Nicodemus expected nothing.  
He had grown old in a more stoic service;  
his new faith sought no resurrection.  
He had served well; he waited quietly.  
Joseph opened his house to his daughters' friends  
the women believers.

p.2013 He believed.  
David Zebedee believed  
and called his runners to gather after the Sabbath,  
even daring they should announce the rising.

In Bethany, hearts were quiet.  
Her spices were spent  
her son Lazarus was fled  
her daughters in ministry to Jesus' family.  
United at last in work and worship,  
they awaited the word  
that must come this time to all:  
"I am the Resurrection and the Life."

Elsewhere, believers were in disarray.  
The apostles were mixed in expectation,  
p.2037 quarrelsome, sad, confused.  
How does one wait for news that is not expected  
that will be doubted when it comes?  
This was the most silent of Sabbaths,  
the famine not of bread, Amos 8:11  
but of the word of God.

The path of the Lord was hidden,  
the life of his messengers threatened  
their sorrow uttermost.

p.2043 Truly blessed are those who believe  
without seeing.

The Lord is very near.

Jehn 20:29

Phil 4:6

MAZEL TOU  
1991

March 3, 1991  
Third Sunday in Lent B  
John 2:13-25  
cleansing of the temple,  
promise to rebuild in 3 days  
UB p. 1888-90, 1895  
Jesus and an electrified crowd  
cleanse the temple of com-  
merce. Parables, and promise  
to "rebuild" (rise) in 3 days.

March 10, 1991  
Fourth Sunday in Lent B  
John 3:14-21  
to Nicodemus: the Son of Man  
must be lifted up; that will  
itself judge the earth.  
UB p. 1904  
Promise that if Jesus be lift-  
ed up, he will draw all to  
himself.

March 17, 1991  
Fifth Sunday of Lent B  
John 12:20-33  
The grain of wheat must die;  
the Father's witness to Jesus  
UB p. 1902-4  
Final conference with believ-  
ers, including Greeks; words  
of encouragement, witness of  
the Father.

March 24, 1991  
Passion Sunday  
Mark 14:1-15:47  
Entire narrative of passion,  
from Bethany anointing through  
Last Supper, crucifixion,  
death and burial.  
UB p. 1878-2019  
That's 141 pages. Lots of  
reflection and detail.

March 31, 1991  
Easter Sunday!  
John 10:1-9  
Mary Magdalen at the tomb  
UB p. 2025-7  
Detailed story of Mary's early  
morning experiences.  
Actually there are sev-  
eral gospels, all found in  
papers # 189-190.

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