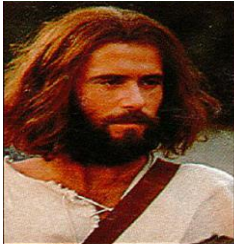


Jesus, the Homeless One

Dear Friend,

Deep in the jungle of our cities, hidden from the masses who run around pursuing their dreams in a life of stressful, self-centeredness, there resides a community of people who are outcasts. They live in the shadows, the ones most people avoid. Yet Jesus, the homeless one is there with them. He is very near. The brokenhearted, the oppressed in spirit, the ones without any visible hope, have the homeless Jesus residing with them in a special way. In Matthew 28:20 He declared, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Jesus makes sure that orphans and widows are treated fairly. He loves the homeless who live in our midst and gives them food and clothes. When a mentally ill man sits trembling in the dark under a bridge, Jesus is there understanding his confusion, feeling his pain. When a mother is forced to sleep in yet a different shelter with her children, and stays up all night weeping that her children may not have a future, He is there and His heart is torn in pain, for you see, unlike any others, His love is eternal. Jesus' love for us is unconditional. Unlike many who love only for the outcome, Jesus loves because He is the divine one overflowing with love. He listens when no one else does. Jesus persists where others give up, and His heart still loves when the response is so often cold. Like no one else, Jesus loves the homeless and hurting.



Jesus was homeless. Rejected by His family, accused of being a drunkard, and thought to be crazy ~ ~ Jesus walked from town to town, spending most of His time with people out on the streets. He was criticized for associating with poor and dirty people, and often was in trouble with the authorities; He occasionally got run out of town. He knew what it was to be hungry, thirsty, and tired.

As Jesus' life got harder, powerful people even implied he was demon-possessed and they plotted to kill Him. Finally, he was betrayed by His friend and arrested on a false charge. After being mocked, beaten, and spat upon, He was murdered.

Jesus lived a hard life. He knew real suffering. Jesus was familiar with hardship and He too had to look for a place to sleep at night.

As He said, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head" (Luke 9:58).

Paul took the liberty to ignite a bonfire in our souls by declaring, "The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Then in order to further stir up the fires of our perseverance, his words in Philippians 4:7 give us another one of those much-needed personal promises that we find throughout scripture when he writes: "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

Daily, I have to remind myself that I can stop worrying, because God has everything under control. When I feel overwhelmed by stress, I must take the antidote found in Philippians 4:8: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." But that is not all. Verse nine of Philippians 4 promises me that when I do this, I will be awakened to the fact that, "...the God of peace will be with you."

Because Jesus came and lived with us, He experienced our pain and He knows our problems. Not only does Jesus understand your life, He cares and wants to change your life.

What difference did Jesus' suffering make?

Because He himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted (Hebrews 2:18).

Does Jesus know about the trouble on the streets? He knows it, and He wants to help you overcome it.

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).



Jesus understands you. Jesus cares for you, and Jesus can give you hope.

There are times I must confess, that along with the blessings that come from helping the hurting and homeless, I often feel stress sweep over me like a runaway locomotive. It is then that I must pour out myself in prayer. As I dump this bent up toxic garbage before Christ at the foot of His cross, I experience a peace that passes all understanding.

As the economy deteriorates, family structures dissolve, and much of that we hold dear is destroyed, it is easy for us to be overwhelmed by stress. At such a time like this, we must learn to recognize that Jesus, the homeless one, is in our midst and desires to take us into the presence of God the Father, our creator. Isaiah 40:28-31 tells us, “Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Jesus Cares. Jesus wasn't always homeless. Once he had everything, but He gave it up to help you: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

What did this mean for Jesus to become poor? “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

“[Jesus] being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to death ~ even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:6-8).

Because He loves us. Jesus came to live with us, to be like us. When Jesus began His ministry among us, He announced what He was going to do:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor” (Luke 4:18, 19).

And immediately Jesus began to show His care for us:

“A man with leprosy came to Him and begged Him on his knees. ‘If you are willing, you can make me clean.’ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. ‘I am willing’, He said. ‘Be clean!’ Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured” (Mark 1:40-42).

When Jesus . . . saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things” (Mark 6:34).

The Bible tells us that God has a special interest in helping those in hardship:

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap” (Psalm 113:7).

Jesus came to show that concern, to express God's love for the oppressed. Once, when Jesus was at a dinner, the topic of who would join in the feast in the kingdom of God came up. Jesus then told a story about some people being too busy for God, but street people eagerly coming to God's great banquet:

"A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet He sent His servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses... The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant. 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full'" (Luke 14:16-23).

Jesus is like that servant, going out to the streets to invite you to God's house. Jesus will do whatever it takes to bring God's love to you. He himself explained the ultimate cost a friend would pay for those he loved:

"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

And that is what Jesus did for you. You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).



The time has come for us to let God deliver us from our self-centered existence. This means we must allow Him to renew our minds daily through His word and the wonders of His creation. As this happens, we will come into the realization that Jesus the homeless one gives us the strength to rise above our current circumstances into His glorious presence. In John 14:27 Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Let us now receive the peace, power, purpose and promises of God at work in our daily lives. In John 14:27 Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Jesus Changes Lives. Jesus came to change lives. First, He told hurting people what kind of change they could expect: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke 6:20-21).

"Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at this tax booth, 'Follow Me.' Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed Him. Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law who belonged to their sect complained to His disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" (Luke 5:27-30).

As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, He asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by." He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have Mercy on me!" Those who led the way

rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more. "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to Him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?" "Lord, I want to see," he replied.

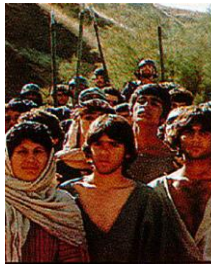


Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God" (Luke 18:35-43).

People in the most desperate situations have turned to Jesus for help, and He never turns them away: "Two other men, both criminals, were also let out with Him [Jesus] to be executed. . . . One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him. . . . But the other criminal rebuked him "Don't you fear God," He said, "sine you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.'" Jesus answered Him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:32, 39-43).

Jesus touches people. Jesus changes lives. He comes to you and offers to help you overcome the trouble in your world.

The choice not to let our hearts be troubled is one you and I have to make every moment of every day, if we do not want to continue living in the stress spoken of in Deut. 28:65-67. It is this stress that causes us to "live in constant suspense, filled with the dread both day and night, never sure of your life."



The stressed person who is set on the fact that God loves them is one who allows the homeless Jesus to give them strength and hope in the midst of hopeless situations. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."

Jesus is your hope. May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

On the streets, life is hard. But if someone comes to help, you can have joy and hope even on the streets. Jesus said: "I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. . . . Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:20, 22).

We will receive the strength of Jesus, the homeless one, in the midst of our hurts and homelessness if we allow Him to filter our thoughts daily through the eternal love of God. It is then that thoughts of thanksgiving and praise will be planted within us, as hurting memories of the past are healed. That is why Paul said, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:4-7).

Come to Jesus. Believe that He is the Son of God, that He came to help you, and even laid down His life for you, His friend. And then, just as Jesus rose from death to life, you also will be given a new life. When you become a follower of Jesus, He will change you and give you a new beginning in life.

Yours in Christ

Larry Rice